

CHRISTIANITY TODAY



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AND FURTHERING THE GOSPEL IN THE MODERN WORLD

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Editorial Notes and Comments

THE VAN DYKEN CASE

CON JULY 20, 1936, the REV. ERNEST E. LOFT of the Presbytery of Duluth filed with the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly a complaint against the action of the Synod of Minnesota in ordering said Presbytery "to grant the request of MR. WILLIAM VAN DYKEN to drop his name from the roll of Presbytery as a candidate for the ministry." By so doing he has apparently rendered it certain that a judicial case of far-reaching importance will be before the next General Assembly.

Some knowledge of the events preceding this action by MR. LOFT is necessary to understand the nature of the issue involved. This has been set forth with some fullness in a pamphlet prepared, we judge, by MR. LOFT. We have space for only a brief outline.

MR. VAN DYKEN was received under the care of the Presbytery of Duluth as a candidate for the ministry in 1928 or thereabout. He was graduated from Carleton College in 1931. He attended Union Theological Seminary of New York City and was graduated in 1934. On June 11, 1934, he appeared before Presbytery for licensure and ordination and was examined in part, further examination being postponed until the fall meeting of Presbytery. At that meeting MR. VAN DYKEN requested, through the chairman of the Committee on Christian Education, that he be given a letter of transfer to the Presbytery of Black Hills (within the bounds of which he was working) in harmony with Section 10 of Chapter 14 of the Form of Government. That section reads as follows; "When any candidate shall have occasion, while his trials are going on, to remove from the bounds of his own presbytery into those of another, it shall be considered as regular for the latter presbytery, on his producing proper testimonials from the former, to take up his trials at the point at which they were left, and conduct them to a conclusion, in the same manner as if they had been commenced by themselves." This request was denied and MR. VAN DYKEN instructed to appear at the January (1935) meeting for the completion of his examination. At this meeting 28 voted to sustain and 24 not to sustain the examination.

Hence licensure and ordination was deferred in accordance with Section 5 of Chapter 14 of the Form of Government which provides that "if the examination in theology be unsatisfactory to one-fourth of the presbyters present they may demand a further examination in writing on questions proposed by them and by the presbytery, the questions and answers to be filed by the presbytery." The matter was before the spring and fall meetings of presbytery but final action on MR. VAN DYKEN'S examination was not taken until January (1936) when by a vote of 26 to 17 the Presbytery voted not to sustain his examination. Request was then again made by and in behalf of MR. VAN DYKEN that he be transferred from the care of Duluth Presbytery to the care of Black Hills Presbytery. This request being denied further request was made by and in behalf of MR. VAN DYKEN that he be dropped from the roll of the Presbytery's candidates for the ministry. Following the denial of this second request Presbytery voted to overture the General Assembly as to MR. VAN DYKEN'S right under the circumstances, to be either transferred or dropped from the roll. The following overture (No. 15) was sent to last Assembly:

"Whereas, the Presbytery of Duluth has refused to sustain the examination in theology of one of its candidates for the ministry; and

Whereas, the Presbytery of Duluth has refused the request of the candidate to dismiss him to the jurisdiction of another Presbytery; and

Whereas, the Presbytery of Duluth has also declined to remand him back to the care of the Session of his church, or in any other way to release him from its own care and jurisdiction;

The Presbytery of Duluth respectfully overtures the General Assembly to state whether the Presbytery is fully within its rights in pursuing the above course with regard to this particular candidate."

That no action was taken on this overture by the last Assembly finds its explanation in the fact that a complaint against the action of Presbytery in refusing the requests of MR. VAN DYKEN had been lodged with the Synod of Minnesota but not as yet acted upon inasmuch as said Synod had not yet convened. Hence it was deemed "inexpedient and highly undesirable" for the Assembly to take

Christians Awake! Your Responsibility as a Christian

By the Rev. Clarence Edward Macartney, D.D.

*"I have set thee a watchman
unto the house of Israel."*

—Ezekiel 33:7

THE duties of a watchman, or sentinel, are simple, but very important; and all armies, ancient, medieval, and modern, place great responsibility on a sentinel, and impose the severest penalties if he neglects his duty. The watchman on the wall is one of the familiar figures of the Bible. His duty was to watch for the approach of the foe, for a night attack by the invading army, for a sudden assault or surprise attack. Whenever he saw the foe, he was to sound the trumpet and thus warn the people to prepare for battle. If they paid no attention to his warning, and were taken by surprise and slain, their blood was on their own head. The watchman was clear of their blood; but, on the contrary, if he saw the sword coming, and failed to sound the trumpet of warning, then the blood of those who perished was required at his hand, for his neglect to sound the warning was responsible for their death.

In giving Ezekiel his message of repentance, righteousness and judgment, God tells him that he has set him as a watchman on the wall, where he is to speak the word of warning which God has given him. Not as a watchman on the wall in the time of siege or battle, but in the constant siege of sin and evil, he is to warn the evil doer that he may turn from his way. If the wicked man disregards the warning, then he is free of responsibility. But if he does not warn him, or changes the message that he has been given, or holds out false hopes of safety, he will be held accountable for his death. He is not responsible for what men do with his message, but he is responsible for the delivery of the message.

What is the message? It is the same from age to age. "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?" That means repentance, and life, or refusal to repent, and death. This message is an offer of great mercy and unfathomable love. Too many have centered their thought upon the negative side of the message, upon the fate of those who reject it and disobey it; and not upon those who receive it and obey it. Lest anyone should charge God with indifference to the fact that men refuse to hear His Word, and therefore perish in their sins, God declares the great purpose of His love. "As I live," said the Lord God, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways, for why will ye die?"

The same note is struck by Peter when he says, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is long suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." St. Paul also in the First Letter to Timothy declares that

God would have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. Eternal love is back of the message of the Cross and the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind. God might have left man to his fate, but God so loved the world as to give His only Son. Let none charge God with indifference to man and his lot in this world until he has loved the world and done as much for it as God did in Christ. The fabric of the universe shook with wonder and amazement when Christ died for sinners.

The message of the Gospel is a message of repentance. "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?" There is no alternative, and if watchmen on the wall today are giving another message, it is one of their own invention or discovery. It is not that of the Bible, of God, or Christ, or the Apostles. There is only one Saviour, and He is the Lord Jesus Christ. There is only one way to be saved, and that is to believe in Christ. There is only one time to be saved, and that is now; and there is only one object of repentance and salvation, and that is holiness of life.

Two important truths about responsibility in relationship to God's message which comes to us in Christ are emphasized in this prophecy of Ezekiel. First, our own individual responsibility for ourselves; and second, our responsibility for others.

Responsibility for Ourselves

First, our responsibility for ourselves. Every man stands before God for Himself. This is a great responsibility. I have a soul to save. I am accountable for my life, and therefore responsible for my destiny. Out of this sense of personal accountability to God come the noblest things that we know, righteousness of life, battle with temptation, and labor for others. It is well to remember when others deny or reject Christianity, that that does not absolve us. We have our own answer to make. No other can believe or disbelieve for you. To your own master, God, you stand or fall.

This, then, is the first thing to consider. The message of God is, "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?" What are you doing with this message? Are you living as if you never heard it, or, as if you heard it but doubted the truth of it; or, having heard it, do you only pretend to obey it and to turn? If the welfare of a single soul brought Christ to earth to die for sinners, then how great is the responsibility of every soul to itself?

*"A charge to keep I have,
A God to glorify,
A never dying soul to save,
And fit it for the sky.*

*Help me to watch and pray,
And on Thyself rely,
Assured if I my trust betray,
I shall forever die."*

Responsibility for Others

But our responsibility does not stop when we hear and believe for ourselves. By virtue of his own belief every man is appointed a watchman for others. We are not responsible for what they do with the message of life, but we are responsible for giving it to them. This is the responsibility that Christ laid upon His Church at the beginning, when he said, "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature," and again, "Ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost ends of the earth." God might have chosen other agents to preach the Gospel. He might have sent angels; He might have spoken directly to mankind with unmistakable and overwhelming miracles of divine power, but instead of that He chose to give men the tidings of Eternal Life through those who themselves had repented and believed. This explains to us the history of Christianity. It is impossible to imagine it without the great compulsion and constraint which was felt by a St. Paul, or a Carey, or a Livingstone. The love of Christ constrained them. They saw the necessity and heard the appeal of their man from Macedonia, "Come over and help us."

Chrysostom, the golden-tongued preacher of Antioch, once expressed his wonder that any preacher should be saved, so great is his responsibility. There is no doubt about that responsibility. He, in a double sense, is, like Ezekiel, a watchman on the wall, and will be held accountable for what he says, whether he tells men what they want to hear, what he imagines will be pleasing or acceptable, or gives them the message of God, "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?"

Waiting for a train once in the ancient town of Dijon, I went into the venerable cathedral. In the cathedral was a beautifully carved pulpit, and directly under the pulpit was the figure of an angel, with pen in his hand and his face uplifted towards the pulpit, waiting to record what the preacher should say. So the invisible angel is present here in front of this pulpit, and in front of every pulpit, to record what the preacher says, whether he echoes the message of God or gives one of his own. Who, when he thinks of that, would not tremble? On great St. Paul's, the famous bell in the tower of St. Paul's cathedral in London, there are cut in Latin these words from St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, "Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel."

But there is a responsibility which belongs to all Christian people, to all those who know God and the way of life. You, too, have your responsibility; and, in a sense, you also are a watchman standing upon the wall. Too many act as if there was no great matter at stake, as if it made no difference whether men heard the tidings of Eternal Life, or, if they do hear, whether they turn or not. Many Christians are like sleeping sentinels, or watchmen sleeping on the wall.

Your Influence

We are responsible not only for what we say, but for what we do. This also is a heavy burden and responsibility. If we make a profession of Christianity, but do not bring forth its fruits, we are accountable for that, not only in our own lives, but for its influence on the lives of others. The

man who lives so as to turn away others from Christ, or to make them think that relationship to Christ is of minor importance, what will he have to say when he meets in the Judgment that One Who died on the Cross for the sins of the world?

Consider earnestly, then your duty and your responsibility as a member of Christ's Church. If the work of God is to be revived in the world, it must, first of all, be revived within the Church itself. All about you there are those who are taking refuge in lies, in false religions, in hollow and formal confessions of faith. All about you are those who are drifting from God. All about you are those who are being dragged down to death by evil habits. What are you, you who know the way of life, you who know the only Saviour of men—what are you doing to warn them or to help them?

Great is this responsibility, and yet it is the source of the greatest joy. To have helped another along the slippery path of life, to have been a lamp in the window to some wandering and stormbound soul, to have pointed a sinner to Christ and to the Cross—what could compare with that? Let the redeemed of the Lord say so! Be a voice for God!

* * * *

Das Jahr geht still zu Ende

THE DYING YEAR is sleeping:
Be still, my heart, this night!
I give to God's safe keeping
Both heartache and delight
And what the year has brought me,
Things only God has known,
The sorrows that it wrought me,
The tears I wept alone.

Why is there so much sorrow,
So little gladness here?
Why must we part tomorrow
From those we hold so dear?
So many an eye now broken,
Lips now in silence lie
That late have fondly spoken—
Why, weeping heart, O why?

Here on this field of sadness
Our tears like seeds are cast;
There we shall reap in gladness,
When we come home at last.
Now seek we, heavy-hearted,
Our Father's house so fair,
Knowing that our departed
E'en now are resting there.

Help us, whate'er betide us,
Our hearts confirm and guard;
Walk Thou, O Lord, beside us
And lead us heavenward.
And when the hours oppress us,
When we're alone, afraid,
Then grant Thy peace, and bless us,
And say: Be not dismayed!

—Translated from the German.