



The  
Princeton Seminary  
Bulletin

The Gospel and Life's Ultimates

James A. Jones

Religion on the Air

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A Messenger of Grace

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Worship and Evangelism

Donald Macleod

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Donald Macleod, Editor

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# A MESSENGER OF GRACE

CLARENCE EDWARD MACARTNEY: 1879-1957

J. CLYDE HENRY

WHEN death claims a man who has been held in high admiration and affection, one begins fondly to embroider cherished memories, so that the stark outline may be preserved in living colors. There is the temptation that the heart will give wings to rhapsodic utterance unshared by those to whom he was a stranger. But there is the danger, equally grave, that those who knew him only from afar may not know the inspiration and ideals that made the man.

William Cowper, in *The Task*, describes the character of the true minister:

I would express him simple, grave,  
sincere;  
In doctrine uncorrupt; in language  
plain,  
And plain in manner; decent, solemn,  
chaste,  
And natural in gesture; much im-  
press'd  
Himself, as conscious of his awful  
charge,  
And anxious mainly that the flock  
he feeds  
May feel it too; affectionate in look,  
And tender in address, as well  
becomes  
A messenger of grace to guilty men.

Clarence Edward Macartney could have sat for that portrait. He was such a messenger of grace.

Man is such a mystery to himself that it seems presumptuous to attempt

to explain another's character. Like some unknown island which presents to the explorer only its shoreline, now rocky and forbidding, now pleasant and inviting, while the heart-land is unrevealed, so is man. Yet, where its streams and fountains flow into the sea, there may be found, carried on its waters, evidences of an inner life easy to interpret and to understand. And the soul of every man has such inlets where the heart is revealed.

## I

One cannot begin to understand Dr. Macartney as a person until he discovers the unfailing springs of inspiration which flowed from his home. Dr. Joseph Longfellow McCartney was pastor of the First Miami Church of the Covenanters in Northwood, Ohio, and Professor of Natural Science at Geneva College, the Covenanter School located there, when his last child and fourth son was born on September 18, 1879, and given the ponderous name Clarence Edward Noble. The father received his theological preparation in the small Covenanter Seminary in Allegheny (now Pittsburgh), Pennsylvania, and his scientific training under the famous Professor Agassiz of Harvard. In his youth he had some exciting experiences on the Underground Railway, which may help to explain his son's fascination with the Civil War history and its personalities. He was a man of strong

personality and extraordinarily wide general knowledge.

The mother, however, by the unanimous testimony of the children, was the dominant personality in the home. She was born Catherine Robertson in Scotland, and came to America as a bride in 1868. She was a woman of high culture, wide learning, broad sympathies and deep spirituality. Her example in caring for the poor of the community, in organizing Sunday Schools for those remote from the churches, her singing the songs of faith and home, her narration of stories on Sabbath afternoons, made indelible impressions on her children.

Dr. Macartney described his home thus: ". . . a godly father and godly mother, working and praying for their Lord and their children, where no word of temper and no act of violence was ever heard or seen, and where the Christian life was not only taught out of Psalm Book and catechism, and Bible and commentary, but was itself drawn out in living and unforgettable characters of beauty and power which still shine as stars in heaven to comfort, guide and cheer us on our way." It was a home of devotion with family worship held twice daily, of discipline, with the "taws" hanging in their honored place behind the door, and of dignity characterized by "plain living and high thinking."

In the pulpit Dr. Macartney studiously avoided personal references of an intimate nature, with one exception: he did not hesitate to refer to his home. He wrote, "The preacher always runs some risk when he uses his own personal experiences for illustrations. . . . There is no doubt that wisely-selected illustrations from personal experience will

often be very effective. If a man has had a godly home and godly parents, references to that home and to his parents will always be acceptable and timely."

In 1880 Geneva College moved from the banks of the Miami to a location overlooking the lovely Beaver valley above the town of Beaver Falls in Western Pennsylvania. The McCartneys built the first faculty house on the new campus and named it Fern Cliffe. Guests, such as John G. Paton, brought something of the romance of travel, the dignity of Christian statesmanship, and the necessity of Christian evangelism and missions. The pranks of the college students and the exploits of athletic teams brought spice to life, whose flavor Doctor Macartney always enjoyed. In his later life, his staff learned to be suspicious of assignments on the first of April, after several had gone to comfort the sick at non-existent addresses, or to arrange weddings for non-existent couples, or to deliver packages to non-scheduled trains. His interest in athletics, particularly baseball, continued to the very end. Many a boy was amazed to hear the learned preacher cite records and averages of athletes and teams, and listened with new respect when he spoke of spiritual things.

In the home he preached his first sermons, with the family properly seated as the congregation. He recalled the first two sermons he worked on as a mere child. The text of one was "Jesus wept." The text of the other, "There shall be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth." He then commented, "After all, the two texts and the two childish sermons were true to the Scriptures and true to the Gospel, for the prophets, the apostles and Jesus him-

self strike these two notes: God's judgment and mercy, his compassion and the penalty upon sin."

The family expeditions along murmuring streams, over covered bridges, up pleasant glens, visiting neighboring farms, gave him a love for the countryside which a ministry of half a century in the heart of three cities never quenched. He delighted to go with members of his staff or other friends to spread their table on some flat rock above a quiet stream, or on some green field with the beautiful countryside and its peaceful relaxation. Here, with the responsibilities of the church laid aside, he was a boy again, playing family games such as charades, or telling stories, or wandering through the woods. At Summer Camp the boys loved to follow him on a hike over the hills, and many men and women swore that never again would they start out with him on a Sunday afternoon stroll which led them up and down steep trails and cut through tangled underbrush, took them over fences and across streams, before they returned to their starting place. His frequent allusions in sermons to nature's open volume reflected his love of the countryside.

## II

The family moved to California in the mid-'90's because of the father's health, and while there Dr. Macartney was graduated from the preparatory school of Pomona College at Claremont. He followed his next older brother, Albert, to the University of Denver, but after one year both brothers transferred to the University of Wisconsin. There he came in contact with the great liberal Robert M. LaFollette, who took personal interest in the young student's

oratorical abilities and coached him in preparation for the college contests in which he was eminently successful.

After graduation he went to Harvard University, intending to study literature, but chose instead to travel. After an overseas tour he returned to Beaver Falls, where he worked on the local newspaper as reporter. He finally made the decision to follow his three older brothers into the ministry, and the next fall he entered Yale Divinity School. Not finding the atmosphere congenial, he transferred to Princeton Seminary, where he sat under such men as Francis L. Patton, Benjamin B. Warfield, John D. Davis, William Brenton Greene, Jr., Geerhardus Vos, Robert Dick Wilson, William P. Armstrong and Frederick W. Loetscher, men of high scholarship and strong Christian faith. Concerning his scholastic training, he said, "I have always been glad, too, that although a product of an orthodox Christian home and an orthodox Christian theological seminary, the critical years of college training were spent in a great state university where the religious atmosphere and influence were not marked. The courses in history and literature and science in no way shook my faith, but finally strengthened it. Indeed, if I had a boy to send to college today I think I would much prefer that he go to one of the great secular universities where the Bible is not taught or discussed at all, rather than to some of our quasi-denominational colleges where the Bible is taught, but almost exclusively from the modernistic and rationalistic point of view. It would be much better if many of these colleges let the Bible altogether alone."

During his summers while a seminary student, he preached in the lovely

village of Prairie du Sac, Wisconsin, and upon graduation was called to the church there. But at the same time he received another call from the First Presbyterian Church of Paterson, New Jersey, in the center of an industrial city, and upon the advice of Dr. David J. Burrell, minister of the Marble Collegiate Church in New York City, and instructor in homiletics at Princeton, he went to Paterson. There he laid the foundation of his future work and methods in the ministry. From the beginning he preached without notes, in order to have that contact with the congregation for which there is no substitute. There he discovered the strong appeal which the stories of the Old Testament have, and the interest there is in biographical preaching. Through doctrinal and apologetic preaching he used to show that Christianity and common sense are not strangers one to the other, though some who ridicule "the faith once for all delivered" try to divorce the two. It was here, as the result of a moving experience, that he began to preach what he called "sermons from life," which he continued to do throughout his ministry. He entered upon his life-long study of the Apostle Paul, which he enriched by his travels in the footsteps of St. Paul until he had visited almost every place mentioned in the New Testament in connection with the great apostle. He continued his interest in historical writing by publishing a history of the Paterson Church, the first of some sixty books in the field of religion, history, biography, and travel.

Dr. Macartney was always conscious of the dignity of the pastoral office. A

picture of him during the days at Paterson shows a handsome young man with dark, wavy hair, clothed in a pulpit robe, wearing a black rabat and clerical collar—quite a contrast to the plain Covenanter dress he was accustomed to and I suppose somewhat of an innovation for those days in Presbyterian circles. He was always particular about pulpit appearance, and deplored the wearing of "wall-paper neckties," as he called them, with splashes of bright colors, in the pulpit. He enjoyed laughing with his assistants as they later recalled their early discomfiture when they were sent to purchase or exchange some article of apparel—necktie, shirt, or suit—so that they would make a more proper appearance behind the sacred desk.

### III

There was nothing strikingly unique about his pastoral ministry, unless it was the fidelity with which he performed it. In a busy ministry with five regular preaching and speaking responsibilities each week, and frequently more, he called in the homes and in the hospitals three and four afternoons and two and three evenings every week. There was probably not a home in the widespread congregation in which he had not called and offered prayer. There are some who noticed only the external reserve of the man in public appearance. But it took but little association with him to discover the warm heart and sympathetic spirit which was the true man. He was as welcome, and as much at home, in the humble dwelling of the poor as he was in the house of affluence. The strata of society, and he ministered to them all, were a matter of

indifference to him. He did not "talk down" to any; he did not seek to "live up to" any. Because he was primarily the minister of Jesus Christ, he was indifferent to the criticisms of men.

Those who were not altogether sympathetic with his stand, or who were unacquainted with the hidden springs of action, sometimes complained of this indifference to public opinion. A Pittsburgh magazine published a biographic sketch which was not enthusiastically complimentary. The writer said of Dr. Macartney, "His sermons against secularization of the Sabbath, his condemnations of current motion pictures, liquor advertising, and vice conditions in the city, have time and again made newspaper stories. He never considers the popularity of his stands. Recently when he objected to a Sunday war bond rally the newspapers were deluged with critical letters suggesting that if America had lost the war she might have lost her churches. Firm in his convictions, he paid no attention."

But he was sensitive to the pulse of the city and the nation. Both in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh he took midnight walks through the "tenderloin" section, and visited with the hapless men brought by the police in the middle of the night into the station houses. And who will ever forget the service on D-Day conducted from the Geneva pulpit above the city street, when Sixth Avenue was thronged from corner to corner, as he led the people in a spontaneous service of prayer and dedication? He was a true patriot who delighted to remind his church and country of the blood-bought heritage of America, and the debt we owe to the heroes of the nation.

#### IV

In 1914 Dr. Macartney went to the Arch Street Presbyterian Church, that beautiful temple of Corinthian architecture in the heart of Philadelphia. It was there he reached the full stature of the mature preacher. His sermons attracted wide interest, especially among the university and medical students who came to his services. It was the response of two medical students which led him to repeat each autumn his sermon on opportunity, "Come Before Winter," first delivered in 1915. He was a pioneer in radio broadcasting and the service from the church was broadcast each Sunday morning.

His preaching was always Bible centered. Two days before he died, he said to his brother Robertson, who was leaving to preach in a nearby pulpit, "Put all the Bible you can into it." Dr. Macartney simply preached what he had practiced. There is scarcely one familiar character of the Old or New Testament that was not the theme of some sermon, hardly a scene which he did not illuminate with his rare powers of description. A newspaper comment after his death mentioned, "the imagery and matchless timing of his story-telling, like the glorious hues of a master's brush stroking the picture of life." Here all the treasures of intelligence, all the fountains of emotion, were brought into play. He dreamed dreams and saw visions, he communed with the spirits of just men made perfect, but in all spoke to the hearts of men. He was frequently dramatic but never theatrical. The first impression one received from Dr. Macartney's preaching was its simplicity—a single theme stated, illustrated and applied, yet always binding

the heart of man to the heart of the gospel. He frequently used the great moral words—*influence, opportunity, conscience, affection, repentance, and so forth.* But he clothed them with living forms, marched them up the church aisles, and bade them testify for themselves.

All his preaching revolved around the "grand particularities of the faith." He insisted that without the historical foundation of revelation, the Christian gospel has lost its power as a symbolic record of experience. His doctrines were not "fashion'd to the varying hour." Standing in the Reformed tradition, he took his position without mental reservation, upon the Word of God as "the only infallible rule of faith and practice." He preached the truth of the Incarnation, not based upon metaphysical speculation, but based upon the historic fact of the Virgin Birth. He preached often on the doctrine of immortality, but based his belief not on the moral necessity of such a hope, but upon the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. And in the light of these two doctrines he lifted high the cross of Christ in all its shame and all its glory. "No one who has knelt as a penitent sinner at the foot of the cross will find anything in the 'fountain filled with blood' to offend him, but much to thrill him." Then followed those other great themes of the Christian revelation: the sovereignty of God, his providence in personal life, and the grand and awful message of the final judgment and eternal redemption.

This was a period of religious controversy, with many preaching "another gospel which is not another," using dishonest semantics to emasculate

words of historic Biblical and redemptive meaning. Dr. Macartney did not hesitate to enter the lists and to raise his standard. He was described as a leader of the fundamentalists, and whatever that vague word may mean, he proved that it was not contrary to scholarship and courtesy. Dr. Fosdick, in his autobiography, *The Living of These Days*, pays tribute to the fairness and courtesy of Dr. Macartney throughout this historic debate. This controversy was no mere academic matter to Dr. Macartney. He held that there is a moral fault running through the character of the preacher in a confessional church who cannot repeat the Apostles' Creed without lying, and that the church which tolerates such a preacher is in spiritual peril. He received his share of abuse, but without bitterness. There is an ungodly conceit which enthrones reason and which will not accept anything the reason does not approve. And there is a godly conceit which enthrones Christ and his Word which will not receive anything which is contrary to them.

As the result of his prominence in the Church, he was elected Moderator of the General Assembly, meeting in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 1924, after he was nominated by William Jennings Bryan. He was the second youngest man in the history of the church to occupy that high office.

Twice Dr. Macartney was invited to occupy chairs at Princeton Seminary, but he preferred the work of the pastorate. In 1927 he received a call to the First Presbyterian Church of Pittsburgh, and there he entered upon his last and longest pastorate. His preaching continued to attract throngs every Sunday morning and evening. He was



Superintendent of the Sunday School and active in all the phases of the church's institutional program. One of the inspiring features of his ministry was the organization of the Tuesday Noon Club for Business Men, which grew from a small beginning until the church was crowded with men each week for a twenty-five minute period consisting of a song service and a brief biblical address.

## V

Dr. Macartney's preaching was essentially evangelistic. He spoke with the shepherd's heart, and in practically every sermon he pointed to the way of salvation. One time I was asked by a missionary with a program of religious broadcasting to make a selection of Dr. Macartney's printed sermons which would be particularly useful in his program of radio evangelism. I was struck by the fact, as I reviewed the sermons, that practically all of them, except those preached on special occasions, with but little adaptation, were suitable. Homer Rodeheaver said to me after a service at which Macartney preached, "I told him once that if he would devote all his time to it, he could be the greatest evangelist of this century."

And what shall we more say? For the time would fail to tell of his books and addresses, his lectureships and preaching missions, his historical investigations, biblical explorations, his honors, and degrees. In 1953, after a pastorate of twenty-six and a half years "where cross the crowded ways of life," and after contending with an annoying and weakening illness for five years, he retired to spend his last days at Fern

Cliffe, the boyhood home which still occupies its prominent place on the campus of Geneva College. He fulfilled the dreams of Goldsmith's Wanderer:

"In all my wanderings round this world of care,  
 In all my griefs—and God has giv'n my share,  
 I still had hopes my latest hours to crown,  
 Amidst these humble bow'rs to lay me down,  
 To husband out life's taper at the close,  
 And keep the flame from wasting by repose.  
 Around my fire an ev'ning group to draw,  
 And tell of all I felt, and all I saw;  
 And, as a hare whom hounds and horns pursue,  
 Pants to the place from whence at first he flew,  
 I still had hopes, my long vexations past,  
 Here to return—and die at Home at last."

He continued preaching and writing for two and a half years until increasing illness halted his steps and at last confined him to bed. With members of the family who came to spend the last vigil with him, he revived the custom of family prayers, and once again the house was filled with the music of the Psalter. His mind remained active until the end—preparing sermons and manuscripts for publication. Knowing that death drew nigh, he planned his funeral service to be a simple testimony of praise to Jesus Christ and his triumphant grace. He chose the hymns

"Rock of Ages," "The Twenty-third Psalm," and "Amazing Grace" to be the witness to his faith. His last message to his friends was, "Tell them, my anchor still holds." Then in the evening on February 19, he closed his eyes in sleep and put on immortality.

In summing up the life of John Bunyan, Dr. Macartney wrote: "The bell which Bunyan struck three centuries ago, high up on the tower of his al-

legory, still vibrates with its ancient melody, ever haunting the imagination of mankind, its tones as deep and sweet and true as ever, for they echo the deep eternal truths of sin, atonement, redemption, regeneration, judgment to come, and life everlasting." These words are descriptive of the life and ministry of Dr. Macartney. He was a faithful minister of the Incarnate God, a messenger of redeeming grace.

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D.M.