
The EVANGELICAL STUDENT

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Editorial

THE League has laid increasing emphasis on the outgoing of the gospel in missionary service. In this issue we present two articles on foreign missions. They will contribute to the growing number of missionary recruits in the League ranks, we are sure.

In a day when Missions are derided by hosts, it would not seem right to pass judgment, no matter how light, nor how graciously given on any missionary enterprise. But because we believe that the gospel can triumph, only when it is clearly set forth by "manifestation of the truth" we are convinced that any effort which denies all that ever gave dynamic and vision and glory to historic missionary endeavor must be challenged.

With all due respect to the work done in the past by the familiar Student Volunteer Movement, we must say that its lowered emphasis on the basic and cardinal truths of Christianity is in no small way responsible for the woeful decline in volunteers, in its own ranks and throughout the student world in general.¹

The total number of sailed Volunteers claimed by the movement for last year (1930) is two hundred and thirty-three. Compare that figure with that of three years ago—six hundred and sixty-seven; and for further comparison look at the total ten years ago (1921), one thousand six hundred and twenty!

An astonishing array, indeed! And a closer scrutiny of the current figures shows that at the very least, one-fifth, or fifty recruits come from institutions where no Volunteer Band exists, or where the local group is totally out of harmony or sympathy with the trends of the official or national policies. Those actually volunteering because of the movement are thus reduced in number. Still further—at least half of the candidates came from schools whose predominant teaching is liberal. Arbitrary figures or conclusions are, of course, unfair—and we would not make them. However, viewed either way, the number of Volunteers is decreasing, and of those technically in line with the movement it is diminishing rapidly.

Of interest, too, is the fact that forty-four of the missionaries volunteered in Bible schools, forty-six in universities, one hundred and eight

¹*The Fifth General Council of the Student Volunteer Movement chose for the three major emphases for the current year: "a more realistic presentation of human needs; a more realistic study of world conditions; a campaign for more sacrificial giving." One would think that the need is evident enough, in face of present circumstances, and that a renewed emphasis should be laid on the "evangelization of the world in this generation" and how to meet that need.*

Facing the Facts Before God

J. GRESHAM MACHEN

IN the nineteenth chapter of the Second Book of Kings, we are told how Hezekiah, King of Judah, received a threatening letter from the Assyrian enemy. The letter contained unpalatable truth. It set forth the way in which the King of Assyria had conquered one nation after another—and could the feeble kingdom of Judah escape?

When Hezekiah received the letter, there were three things that he could do with it.

In the first place, he could obey its behest; he could go out and surrender his kingdom to the Assyrian enemy.

In the second place, he could refuse to read the letter; he could ignore its contents. Like another and worse king, with a far better communication than that, he could take out his king's penknife and cut it up and throw it bit by bit contemptuously into the fire.

As a matter of fact, Hezekiah did neither of these two things. He took the letter with all its unpalatable truth, and read it from beginning to end; he did not close his eyes to any of its threatening. But then he took the letter, with all the threatening that it contained, spread it open in the presence of Almighty God, and asked God to give the answer.

Now we too, believers in the Bible and in the blessed gospel that it contains, have received a threatening letter. It is not a letter signed by any one potentate, like the King of Assyria; but it is a collective letter signed by the men who are dominating the world of today and dominating to an increasing extent the visible Church. It is a letter breathing out threatenings of extinction to those who hold to the gospel of Jesus Christ as it is set forth in God's Word.

That letter is signed by the men who are dominating increasingly the political and social life of the world. That was not true fifty years ago, at least not in English-speaking countries. Then, to a considerable extent, in those countries at least, public opinion was in favor of the gospel of Christ. Today, almost all over the world, public opinion is increasingly against the gospel of Christ.

The letter of threatening against the gospel is signed also by the men who are dominating the literary and intellectual life of the world. To see that that is true, one needs only to read the popular magazines and the magazines that appeal to persons of literary and intellectual taste; or one needs only to read the books of the day or listen to what comes "over the air".

The threatening letter is also signed, alas, by the men who are in control of many of the larger branches of the Protestant Church. In the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A., for example, to which the writer of this article belongs, four out of eight ministerial members of the Permanent Judicial Commission, which is practically the supreme guardian of the doctrine of the Church, are actually signers of a formal document

commonly called the "Auburn Affirmation" which declares to be non-essential even for the ministry the virgin birth of our Lord and four other great verities of the Christian faith; and very slight indeed is the representation of any clear-cut and outspoken evangelicalism in the boards and agencies of the Church. In many other ecclesiastical bodies, the situation, from the Christian point of view, is even worse than it is in ours.

But it is in the colleges and universities and theological seminaries that the threatening letter against the gospel of Christ has been most generally signed. In the faculties of some of our great universities today, you can count almost on the fingers of your two hands the men who believe in the gospel in any definite and outspoken way, and in the student bodies individual believers often seem to themselves to be standing nearly alone.

When we receive this threatening letter, there are three things that we may do with it.

In the first place, we may obey its behest; we may relinquish our belief in the truth of the Bible; we may simply drift with the current of the times. Very many students in colleges and universities and theological seminaries have made that choice. They came from Christian homes; they are the subject of the prayers of godly parents. But the threatenings and persuasions of the unbelieving world have apparently been too strong for them. They have been unwilling to adopt the unpopular course. And so they have made shipwreck of their faith.

In the second place, we may refuse to read the threatening letter; we may close our eyes to the unpalatable truth that the letter contains. We may say, as so many are saying today, that the Protestant churches of our own country and of the other countries of the world are "fundamentally sound"; we may cry "Peace, peace; when there is no peace"; we may dig our heads like ostriches in the sand; we may refuse to attend to the real situation in the Church and in the world.

I pray God that we may never adopt this method of dealing with the letter of threatening; for if there is one thing that is preventing true prayer today, it is this foolish optimism with regard to the state of the times, this refusal of Christian people to face the true seriousness of the situation in which we stand.

But there is a third choice that we may make when we receive the threatening letter against the gospel of Christ. We may take the letter and read it from beginning to end, not closing our eyes to the threatening that it contains, and then lay the letter, with all its threatenings, open in the presence of Almighty God.

It is to that third choice that the League of Evangelical Students, by its Constitution, is irrevocably committed. The Prologue to the Constitution reads as follows:

"Inasmuch as mutually exclusive conceptions of the nature of the Christian religion exist in the world today and particularly in theological seminaries and other institutions of higher learning; and since it is the duty of those who share and cherish the evangelical faith to witness to it

and to strive for its defense and propagation; and in view of the value for this end of common counsel, united effort and Christian fellowship:

"We, the undersigned representatives of Students' Associations in Theological Seminaries and Schools for the Training of Christian Workers, do hereby form a league organized upon the following principles. . . ."

There we have a clear facing of the situation as it actually is and a brave willingness, despite that situation, to stand for the defense and propagation of the gospel of Christ.

Certain objections are sometimes raised against this method of dealing with the letter of threatening that has come to us today from a hostile world.

In the first place, we are sometimes told, it will discourage the faith of timorous souls if we tell them thus plainly that the world of today is hostile to the gospel of Christ; it will offend Christ's little ones, men say, if we bid them open their eyes to the real strength of unbelief in the modern world.

But our Lord, at least, never used this method of raising false hopes in those whom He called to be His disciples. He told those who would follow Him to count the cost before they took that step, not to be like a man who starts to build a tower before he has funds to complete it or like a man who puts his hand to the plow and then draws back. He never made it easy, in that sense, to be a disciple of Him (though in another and higher sense His yoke was easy and His burden light); and any faith in the Lord Jesus Christ which is based upon the vain hope that a man can be a disciple of Christ and still have the favor of the world is a faith that is based on shifting sand. No, it is a poor religion which makes a man willing only to walk in golden slippers in the sunshine; and such a religion is bound to fail in the time of need.

In the second place, however, men say that if we face the real condition of the times, we shall be guilty of stirring up controversy in the Church.

No doubt the fact may be admitted. If we face the real situation in the Church and in the world, and decide, despite that situation, to stand firmly for the gospel of Christ, we shall be very likely indeed to find ourselves engaged in controversy. But if we are going to avoid controversy, we might as well close our Bibles; for the New Testament is a controversial book practically from beginning to end. The New Testament writers and our Lord Himself presented truth in sharp contrast with error, and indeed that is the only way in which truth can be presented in any clear and ringing way.

I do not know all the things that will happen when the great revival sweeps over the Church, the great revival for which we long. Certainly I do not know *when* that revival will come; its coming stands in the Spirit's power. But about one thing that will happen when that blessing comes I think we can be fairly sure. When a great and true revival comes in the Church, the present miserable, feeble talk about avoidance of controversy on the part of the servants of Jesus Christ will all be swept away as with

a mighty flood. A man who is really on fire with his message never talks in that feeble and compromising way, but proclaims the gospel plainly and boldly in the presence of every high thing that is lifted up against the gospel of Christ.

If we do adopt this method of dealing with the present situation in the Church and in the world, if we spread the threatening letter of the adversaries unreservedly before God, there are certain things that God tells us for our comfort. When Hezekiah adopted that method in his day, God sent him Isaiah the son of Amoz, greatest of the prophets, with a message of cheer. But He has His ways of speaking also to us.

In the first place, he tells us for our comfort that this is not the first time of discouragement in the history of the Church. Often the gospel has seemed to superficial observers to be forever forgotten, yet it has burst forth with new power and set the world aflame. Sometimes the darkest hour has just preceded the dawn. So it may be in our time.

In the second place, He tells us that even in this time of unbelief there are far more than seven thousand that have not bowed the knee to the gods of the hour. In these days of doubt and defection and hostility, there are those who love the gospel of Jesus Christ. And how sweet and precious is our fellowship with them in the presence of a hostile world!

It is to be God's instrument in giving that comfort that the League of Evangelical Students exists. It is founded to say to students on many a campus who are tempted to think that they are standing alone in holding to the gospel of Christ: "No, brethren, you are not alone; we too hold humbly to the truth of God's Word, and we hold to it not through a mere shallow emotionalism but because to hold to it is a thoroughly reasonable thing, of which a real student need not for one moment be ashamed."

In the third place, God tells us not to be too much impressed by the unbelieving age in which we are living now. Do you think that this is a happy or a blessed age? Oh, no, my friends. Amid all the pomp and glitter and noise and tumult of the age, there are hungry hearts. The law of God has been forgotten, and stark slavery is stalking through the earth—the decay of free institutions in the State and a deeper slavery still in the depths of the soul. High poetry is silent; and machinery, it almost seems, rules all. God has taken the fire of genius from the world. But something far more than genius is being lost—the blessing of a humble and virtuous life. There was a time, twenty-five years ago, when we might have thought that Christian living could be maintained after Christian doctrine was given up. But if we ever made that mistake, we must abandon it today. Where is the sweetness of the Christian home; where is the unswerving integrity of men and women whose lives were founded upon the Word of God? Increasingly these things are being lost. Even men of the world are coming to see with increasing clearness that mankind is standing over an abyss.

I tell you, my friends, it is not altogether an argument *against* the gospel that this age has given it up; it is rather an argument *for* the gospel. If *this* be the condition of the world without Christ, then we may

well turn back, while yet there is time, to that from which we have turned away.

That does not mean that we should despise the achievements of the age; it does not mean that we should adopt the "Touch not, taste not, handle not" attitude toward the good things or the wonders of God's world which Paul condemned in his day; it does not mean that we should consecrate to God an impoverished man, narrowed in interests, narrowed in outlook upon the marvellous universe that God has made. What it does mean is that we should pray God to make these modern achievements not the instruments of human slavery, as increasingly they are threatening to become, but the instruments of that true liberty which consists in the service of God.

But the deepest comfort which God gives us is not found even in considerations such as these: it is not found in reflections upon God's dealings during the past history of the Church; it is not found in our fellowship with those who love the gospel that we love; it is not found in observation of the defects of this unbelieving age. Valuable are all these considerations, and great is the assurance that they give to our souls. But there is one consideration that is more valuable, and one assurance that is greater still. It is found in the overwhelming glory of the gospel itself.

When we attend to that glory, all the pomp and glitter of an unbelieving age seems like the blackness of night. How wonderful is the divine revelation in God's Word! How simple, yet how majestic its presentation of the being of God; how dark its picture of the guilt of man; how bright against that background its promise of divine grace! And at the centre of all in this incomparable Book there stands the figure of One in whose presence all wisdom seems to be but folly and all goodness seems to be but filthy rags. If we have His favor, little shall we care henceforth for the favor of the world, and little shall we fear the opposition of an unbelieving age.

That favor is ours, brethren, without merit, without boasting, if we trust in Him. And in that favor we find the real source of our courage in these difficult days. Our deepest comfort is found not in the signs of the times but in the great and precious promises of God.