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HENRY ALEXANDER WHITE.

By GEORGE ARMSTRONG WAUCHOPE, M. A., PH. D., LITT. D.

*Head of English Department, University of South Carolina,
Columbia, S. C.*

(Dr. Wauchope is a grandson of the late Rev. William J. Armstrong, D. D., of Richmond, Va., and a college mate of Dr. White's at Washington and Lee University.)

The Columbia Theological Seminary and the Southern Presbyterian Church have suffered a severe loss in the death of the noted scholar and divine, Henry Alexander White, Ph. D., D. D., LL. D. For several years he had been in failing health due to heart trouble, the burden of which he bore with cheerful courage and a calm and Christian patience that won the admiration of all who knew him. His last illness developed as a sore throat, which at the time caused him no special concern. The ailment, however, did not yield to treatment, and a physician was consulted. Despite skilled medical care the trouble, which had seemed so slight, grew steadily worse, and in three days had created a critical condition that caused alarm to his wife and friends. This was aggravated by the fact that he had few physical reserves. The infection grew steadily worse and there was grave danger at one time that he would die from suffocation. This he escaped, but by three-thirty o'clock on Sunday morning, October 10, the end came, and

scholarship cannot accept such exaggerations as established truth. Athanasius did valiant service in the cause of Nicene orthodoxy, but that does not authorize one to attribute to him everything of value that was accomplished in his lifetime.

It is much to be regretted that a scholar of Harnack's rank should devote his great learning and brilliant mind to the advocacy of hypotheses so little supported by fact and logic as those of this book. The passion for "originality" among German investigators has often produced results at which other scholars marvel, but perhaps none that they will less admire than this study of the Canon.

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

BY REV. J. GRESHAM MACHEN, D. D.,

Assistant Professor of New Testament Literature and Exegesis in Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, N. J.

(Rev. John Allan MacLean—at the time pastor of the Greenwood, S. C., Presbyterian Church, now pastor of the Ginter Park Presbyterian Church, Richmond, Va.—requested his Greenwood congregation to hand him in writing their answers to the question, "What is the Gospel?" On the basis of these answers Mr. MacLean wrote an article for the July number of the Review on "What is the Gospel?" Dr. Machen, at the Editor's request, takes his cue from some points raised by the answers submitted to Mr. MacLean and contributes the following discussion of this important question. Before reading his article let the reader re-read what Mr. MacLean wrote in the July issue.)

In requesting me to write an article on the theme, "What is the Gospel?" the Editor evidently desired that I should make some reference to an article by the Rev. John Allan MacLean, Jr., on the same theme in the July number of the UNION SEMINARY REVIEW. In doing so, I may say at the start that the article interested me very greatly. It is certainly interesting

to discover what the people who actually form the membership of the churches think with regard to the basic questions of the Christian faith.

Some of the results of the test which was applied to Mr. MacLean's congregation might indeed, superficially considered, cause discouragement. Although many of the answers to the question, "What is the Gospel?" were excellent, yet others—as, for example, the answer to the effect that the gospel "is the right way of living"—might at first sight seem (whether or not appearances are here deceptive may appear later) to run counter to the very center and core of Christianity as it is found in the grace of God. And in general the test does serve to reveal anew—what is evident in many other ways—that there exists widely in the Church today, even in congregations relatively well-informed, as the congregation at Greenwood certainly was, considerable confusion of mind.

One reason for such confusion of mind may perhaps be found in the fact that the congregations have not informed themselves with regard to the really great issues of the day. "Another inquiry", says Mr. MacLean, "conducted some months ago, as to the kind of sermons or preaching which the people considered most helpful and necessary revealed that only two persons were seriously interested in such things as 'modernism', or considered its discussion important". Surely that state of affairs is lamentable. Modernism is the greatest menace which the Christian Church has faced for hundreds of years: it is overwhelmingly dominant in contemporary religious literature; it is in almost complete control of many of the largest of the formerly evangelical churches; its influence is sometimes felt most strongly just in those ecclesiastical bodies that are most complacent about their freedom from controversy. Surely every intelligent Christian of the present day ought to be interested in such a theme.

Perhaps, indeed, the congregation to which the question was addressed was not quite so indifferent to the issues as it might seem to have been. The term "Modernism", at least in its wider usage, is comparatively new; and the phenomenon that

it designates is essentially the same as what was known a generation or so ago as "skepticism" or "unbelief"—only it is now tenfold more dangerous because it is inside the Church instead of outside of it. If Modernism had been designated by one of those more familiar terms, possibly the interest of the congregation might have been more keenly aroused. Moreover, the lay mind is interested in what is individual and concrete rather than in what is general and abstract; it is interested in individual manifestations of Modernism rather than in Modernism as a whole. So if instead of putting the question in general terms Mr. MacLean had asked whether the congregation was interested in such questions as "Did Christ rise from the tomb?" "Was He born of a virgin?" "Is the Bible true?"—those great questions to which Modernism gives a negative or equivocal answer—I rather think that considerable interest might have been revealed.

Nevertheless, despite such qualifications, it is undoubtedly true that in many quarters there is a most lamentable ignorance regarding the greatest issue of the day. Such ignorance, with the indifference to which it gives rise, is sometimes very disheartening to those who are contending for the faith. They have been in the trenches in the great Christian war; they have tried to defend the heritage of those who stay behind. But then when they get back home, weary and stained with the mud of trench warfare, they are greeted by the exclamation: "What dirty, disgusting fellows those soldiers are! Thank God, we have no unseemly controversy in our church at least!"

Far more serious, however, than this discouragement which indifference brings to those who are contending for the faith is the injury to the souls of the indifferent people themselves. In very many cases, people who decry controversy have already lost, or are in process of losing, their own hold upon the great verities of the faith. They may not be conscious of relinquishing a single doctrine or a single fact that the Bible records. But the trouble is that what is not consciously given up in their minds has been removed from their hearts; they live only on the periphery of the Christian religion, and the

really great things are lost from view. By such persons, whether in the pulpit or in the pew, the gospel is not indeed denied. But what is almost a worse thing than that is done—the gospel is not denied, but is simply ignored.

I do not mean that every sermon or every other sermon or every tenth sermon ought to be directly polemic; I do not mean that in the pulpit such terms as “Modernism” ought to be constantly used; I do not mean that doubts and questions ought to be needlessly placed in the minds of persons who are still free from them; I do not mean that all congregations ought to be treated alike. On the contrary, the preacher has great need of common sense and of fact. But what I do mean is that, in general and as a whole, the Church ought to be made aware of the great issue of the day. Calamity has resulted in many ecclesiastical bodies because the raising of the issue has been postponed too long. The destructive forces have been allowed, quietly and without protestations of orthodoxy, to obtain control of the ecclesiastical machinery; and now disruption, and the destruction of the historic witness of the churches in question, are immediately imminent. Surely it would have been far better to face the issue while the heart of the churches was still sound. An issue that must ultimately be faced had far better be faced bravely at once.

Moreover, controversy, though it should certainly not be fostered where it is not necessary, is by no means an unmixed evil. It is impossible to tell what a thing is without telling what it is not; and the preaching of ministers who seek always to avoid controversy is usually quite colorless and vague. The New Testament itself is very largely a controversial book: Paul’s hymn to Christian love in the thirteenth chapter of I Corinthians is part of a controversial passage; and much of the most gracious teaching of our Saviour is rendered plain by being set over against what was said by the scribes and Pharisees. And in the whole history of the Church, it is in times of conflict that great revivals come.

It is discouraging, therefore, to find, according to the former test of which Mr. MacLean speaks, that so few persons

in the congregation were interested in "Modernism". And so it is discouraging to find, in the later test, that many of the answers (though by no means all of them), were so faulty or so vague. Here also, indeed, as in that former case, our discouragement ought not to be so great as we might at first be tempted to let it be. It is an exceedingly difficult thing to formulate a definition—far more difficult than is generally supposed. Sometimes when I am asked to state in a few sentences my view of some great theme, I am tempted to say to the inquirer: "My dear Sir, if you had asked me to write a book on the subject I might perhaps have been bold enough to try to do so, but when you ask me to construct a brief definition—no, I certainly have not sufficient learning or sufficient wisdom for that." So I think that when the members of the congregation at Greenwood were asked to answer in a few sentences the question, "What is the gospel?" they were asked to do an extraordinarily difficult thing. On the whole, I am not surprised, and not too greatly discouraged, at their not doing better than they did; and many of them certainly did very well.

It is evident, moreover, that the faults of those of the answers that were faulty, were, very many of them at least, reducible to one initial fault: they were due to a confusion in the minds of those to whom the question was sent between the question—what the gospel *is*—and the question—what *effects* the gospel produces in men's lives. So, for example, when it was said that the gospel "is the right way of living", that might at first sight seem to identify the Christian message with the enunciation of ethical principles, quite in the manner of the Unitarian churches. But appearances may here well be deceptive. The person who wrote that answer may have been thinking of those who profess to believe in the gospel and yet do not exhibit any effects of the gospel in their lives, or, better, he may have been thinking of his own struggle against sin, his own difficulties in drawing out the implications of the gospel in his own life. And, so in indignation at false professions on the part of others or in sorrow at his own failures, he may

have said, "The gospel is the right way of living". As a definition of the gospel, that answer was just about as faulty as anything that could possibly be imagined, but as an expression of one thing at least (among other things) that the gospel *involves* it was a very fine Christian utterance indeed.

But how shall we obtain the true answer to the question that has actually been assigned to us; how shall we determine not what the gospel has produced in our lives but what the gospel *is*. It is possible that etymology may help us. Etymology is indeed a snare to preachers; they sometimes employ it when it is not in place. Many words have become worn down in actual usage; the thought of their origin is lost, and to return to it leads to a perversion of their present meaning. But in the case of the Greek word which is translated "gospel" in the English New Testament, such is not the case. That word has certainly retained to the full the freshness of its original meaning.

What then does the word translated "gospel" mean? The question might seem to be unnecessary (were it not apparently ignored in so many sermons and religious books); everyone knows that "gospel" means "good news". But if gospel means good news, then many common notions about the gospel disappear at once. "Good news" is never in the imperative mood; a "gospel" cannot possibly consist in directions as to a way of life or in a complex of worthy ideals. If a man comes running in and says in a tone of great eagerness, "I have news for you", and you ask him what it is, he does not say: "Here is the piece of news I have for you: Keep the commandments of God, love God and your neighbor." Such exhortations are indeed exceedingly important and valuable, but they are certainly not news. News consists always, not in exhortations or commands, but in information about facts; a "gospel" is always in the indicative mood.

But what particular facts are narrated in the Christian gospel? The answer is found, best of all perhaps, in a passage of the New Testament which summarizes for us in authentic fashion the gospel which all the apostles preached. In I Cor.

15:3ff., the Apostle Paul rehearses something that he had "received"; and it is generally agreed by historians of various shades of opinion, even by those who are opposed to Christianity, that the place from which he had received it was the primitive Jerusalem Church. What we have in these precious words—perhaps the most important words historically that were ever penned—is nothing less than an authentic summary of the things that were regarded by the earliest Christian Church as lying at the foundation of its life. About these things, about this "gospel" (verse 1), Paul says that he was in perfect agreement with those who had been the most intimate friends of Jesus when He was on earth: "Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed" (verse 11).

What then, as thus summarized, was the "gospel" of the primitive Jerusalem Church? The answer is put in very simple words: "How that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures."

These momentous clauses do not contain exhortation; they do not set forth a way of life; they do not formulate a program or hold up an ideal. On the contrary, they contain a rehearsal of historical facts; they recount, not something that ought to happen, but something that had actually happened. Here we have the sheer factual basis of Christianity. The Christian gospel consists not in an ideal, not even in eternal truth—that is, not in an account of what always was true—but in the narrating of events.

The events, moreover, were not merely what took place in the recesses of men's souls, but they were events in the external world. Christ died; He was buried; He rose again—those were all of the things that could be witnessed by the bodily eye. They are not, first of all, matters of "interpretation", but matters of fact. If Christ really died, really was buried, really rose again, then the gospel may be true; if He did not do so, then the gospel is false. In the latter case it is a gospel

still; it is a piece of good news—only the trouble is that the news is not true.

There are many today who rebel against this grounding of Christianity upon historical facts. "Let us have a religion", they say, "that shall be independent of historical science, that shall be able to continue no matter what historians may tell us about events that took place in Palestine in the first century of our era; let us think rather of what Christ does for us to-day than of what He did or is alleged to have done nineteen hundred years ago."

About such a religion we may have one opinion or another. But one thing is clear—if such is our religion we have given up the "gospel". We may have discovered useful and inspiring principles, but we have no "good news".

The Christian religion is very different; for it is based squarely upon events, it depends upon historical facts.

The facts upon which it depends are not indeed "bare facts", but they are facts that have a meaning; and the meaning is made known not by experiences of our souls (though it is gloriously confirmed by those experiences), but, as is the case with the facts themselves, by the apostolic message that the New Testament contains. It is said in the same passage in I Corinthians with which we have already been dealing not merely that "Christ died" but that "Christ died *for our sins*". That is not a bare fact, but a fact with the meaning of the fact; the gospel tells us not merely that Christ died, but why He died and what He accomplished for us when He died. And what is here put in bare summary becomes in the New Testament as a whole abundantly plain. We deserved eternal death because of sin; but the Son of God, because He loved us and because the Father loved us too, died in our stead upon the cross; and when He had died He completed His redeeming work by His glorious resurrection. That is the center and core of the gospel that the apostles proclaimed.

But at this point there is often an objection. "We admit", it is said, "that the gospel of the apostolic Church is what it has just been represented as being; we admit that the religion

of the apostolic Church was not a religion of sunny optimism, not a religion based upon confidence in human nature, but in the fullest sense a religion of redemption. But may we not now return from the apostolic Church to Jesus Himself; must not *His* religion and that alone be the standard for the Christian Church?"

The amazing thing about this objection is not that it is raised; for it represents a very widespread way of thinking among modern men. But the amazing thing about it is that the assumption upon which it is based is treated as though it were something that would be accepted as a matter of course by evangelical Christian men. That assumption is that the words of Jesus, spoken while He was on earth, are the sole norm of the Christian religion, and that accordingly our relation to Jesus is a mere continuation of the relationship in which His disciples stood to Him in Galilee. As a matter of fact, this assumption simply begs the whole question. The question is just exactly whether Jesus came primarily to say something or to do something. If He came primarily to say something, if He came simply to initiate by His words and by His example a new type of religious life; then conceivably His recorded words and the example of His deeds constitute the sole standard by which we can determine what Christianity is. But if He came primarily to do something—namely, in His death and resurrection—then the full meaning of what was done could not be explained until after the doing of it was finished. In the latter case the eighth chapter of Romans is every bit as important in the determination of what Christianity is as is the Sermon on the Mount.

For our part, in company with the whole of the historic Christian Church, we hold to the latter view; and therefore we are quite unwilling to substitute the words of Jesus when He was on earth for the Bible of which they are part, as constituting the seat of authority in religion and the authoritative account of what Christianity is. To do so, we think, would be dishonoring to the words of Jesus themselves; for, in those words, He directed men both to the Old Testament Scriptures

and to the revelation which was to be given by the Holy Spirit to the apostles.

Nevertheless, even if we take the words of Jesus alone, they are amply sufficient to show that the gospel is what the apostolic Church held it to be. Jesus did not, indeed, when He was on earth, set forth the *full* meaning of the redemption that He had come to perform; that He left to the revelation that was to be given by the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom He chose. But, although only by way of prophecy, yet plainly enough, He did point forward to the redeeming event that formed the subject-matter of the gospel. When Jesus said at the beginning of the Galilean ministry, "Repent ye, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15), what did He mean by the "gospel"? I think we shall not go far wrong if we answer this question by the former part of the same verse. "The time is fulfilled", said Jesus, "and the kingdom of God is at hand". There we have a summary of the gospel that Jesus proclaimed: "The kingdom of God is at hand".

But that summary points forward very plainly, when it is explained by the rest of the four Gospels, to the apostolic message with which we have already dealt. There have indeed been those who hold a contrary view; there have been some who have regarded "the Kingdom of God" in the teaching of Jesus as designating merely an inner experience in the souls of men. But such a view involves a widespread rejection of important elements in Jesus' teaching as it is recorded in the Gospels. Against that view, we may remark in passing, we have just now the support of the ultra-modern hypothesis of "consistent eschatology". According to that hypothesis "the Kingdom of God" in the teaching of Jesus lay altogether in the future; Jesus expected the end of the present order to come in the same year during which His teaching was being carried on; and His ethics, being quite ill-adapted to a permanent society, were intended merely for the brief interim before the expected catastrophe. That is certainly a very one-sided and very false hypothesis, and of course, like the other hypothesis of which we have just spoken, it involves a widespread skepticism with

regard to the Gospels as they stand; but at least, it does call attention to the equal error of that other hypothesis—that other hypothesis which makes the Kingdom only a present and inward experience in men's souls. As a matter of fact, the Kingdom of Jesus' teaching was both present and future, and to ignore that second feature is to misunderstand the Gospels from beginning to end. No, there can be no doubt in the mind of any historian who really faces the facts that when Jesus said that the "the kingdom of God is at hand" He was thinking of catastrophic events that were to change the face of the world.

One of those catastrophic events is still in the future today—it is the second coming of our Lord in glory. But undoubtedly Jesus also pointed to an event that was nearer at hand—namely, the redeeming event that consisted in His death and resurrection. "The Son of man", He said, for example, "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mk. 10:45). Jesus pointed forward to that event, and the apostles pointed back. But whether the event was in the future or already in the past, always the "gospel" of which the New Testament speaks does set forth an event. Jesus came not primarily to say something but to do something; and the rehearsal of what He did constitutes the center of the good news upon which Christianity depends.

That good news has of course in it elements of which we have not now time to speak; certainly, for example, it contains an element of promise as well as an account of what has already been done. And also it has certain presuppositions, and the presuppositions are absolutely necessary if the gospel is to be received. But the presuppositions are not the gospel itself. "God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth"—that is a true summary of a large part of the Bible, and it is absolutely necessary for us to know this if we are to be able to understand the gospel of Christ. But it is not the gospel itself. "All mankind, by their fall, lost communion with God, are under his wrath and curse, and so made liable to all the miseries of this life, to death itself, and to pains of hell for

ever"—that again is a necessary presupposition of the gospel and again it is a very important thing for us to know. But certainly it does not itself constitute a gospel. But "Christ died for our sins, He was buried, He rose again"—that, with all that goes with it, with the whole saving work of Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, so gloriously set forth in the Scriptures and so splendidly summarized in the Catechism of our Church from which we have just quoted, that and that alone constitutes the gospel.

The redeeming work of Christ which the gospel sets forth is applied to the individual soul by the Holy Spirit, and when it is so applied there is Christian experience. But never in the world ought we to look to Christian experience to determine what the gospel is. That we can learn from the Scriptures alone. Christian experience no doubt is needed to enable a man to understand what the Bible says; a man is ill qualified to understand the Word of God when his mind is still clouded by sin. But never ought experience to be regarded as providing authoritative information about the actual contents of the gospel. To regard it so is fatal to Christian experience itself.

We do not mean that it is not useful to interrogate one's own soul. Some even of the faulty answers in the test reported by Mr. MacLean, for example, were illuminating. They were fine expressions of what the gospel had accomplished in the lives of Christian men and women. How rich and how varied are the effects of the gospel in human lives; in what manifold ways our Saviour holds communion with those who are His! But if we cut those experiences loose from their basis in the Word of God we shall soon lose the experiences themselves. For the question—what the gospel has accomplished in my life and yours—and for one very valuable kind of confirmation of the truth of the gospel, we may look to experience; but to determine what the gospel is we must turn to the Scriptures and to the Scriptures alone.

So the creeds of the Church are not, as is so often supposed, reactions to Christian experience or intellectual expressions of

what experience contains, but (just the other way around) they are summaries of what the Bible tells us about the facts and promises upon which Christian experience is based.

What is needed at the present time is a return to those facts. The Church is suffering from a woefully exaggerated subjectivism, from a fatal substitution of experience for the Bible as the seat of authority in religion. And the curious thing is that this undue preoccupation with experience, this substitution of experience, whether individual or corporate, for the Word of God as the source of authoritative information, is producing a lamentable impoverishment of experience itself. Yet perhaps it is not such a curious thing after all. As a man cannot lift himself from the mire without a helping hand or without something solid upon which he can lay hold, so it is impossible for experience to provide a gospel. If we thought less of our experience and more of the work of Christ, our experience would be much richer than it is. And our service would be much more helpful to burdened souls. All true Christian experience is founded upon the redeeming facts, and the facts are recorded only in the Word of God. Not into our own souls but to the Bible should we look to obtain an answer to the momentous question, "What is the gospel?"

GREATER THAN THE TEMPLE.

A Tribute to Christ.

BY REV. GEORGE LAURENS PETRIE, D. D., LL. D.,
Pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Charlottesville, Va.

"But I say unto you, that in this place is one greater than the temple."—Matt. 12:6.

To pay a tribute to one whom we love, honor and revere is always a privilege and delight. We desire to pay such a tribute to Christ. His claim is supreme. Our hearts are responsive. What shall the tribute be?