

194

# The Princeton Seminary Bulletin



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## EDITORIAL NOTES

THE one hundred and thirty-second session of the Seminary was inaugurated on September the twenty-second. A stirring opening address on "Personal Religion" was delivered by President Mackay. By special request the address is printed in this Bulletin.

Due to the settled policy of the government of deferring through its draft boards college men who are in medical, ministerial or other pre-professional essential groups, the total number of students in the Junior, Middle and Senior classes is slightly larger than a year ago. The number of Graduate Students, however, has taken a sharp decline, as is the case in practically all educational institutions in the country. From now on the government is permitting ministerial candidates to remain in college but two full calendar years. Those students, therefore, *who entered college in September 1943* will be able by accelerating to complete six semesters of work and will be admitted to the seminaries although lacking a Bachelor of Arts degree by one year. This work they will make up either by taking two summer terms in college or by taking extra courses at a nearby university in connection with their seminary schedule.

On the accelerated program students now enter the Seminary in September, January and June. In the year 1944 Commencements will be held on January 24, on May 16 and probably August 11. At the January Commencement Dr. Howard Tillman Kuist, the newly elected professor in the Biblical Department, will deliver his inaugural address.

The Summer Term of 1943 proved a distinct success. All the Faculty members of the Seminary contributed their services. Ninety-three students enrolled, most of these from our own student body. Students from other seminaries who came for only the Summer Term received credit from their own institutions for the work they completed. Plans are now being made for the Summer Term of 1944 which will extend from May 23 to June 30 and from July 3 to August 11.

Not to be confused with the Summer Term is the Princeton Institute of Theology which is now a firmly established institution. Elsewhere in this Bulletin will be found details regarding the splendid sessions held from July 12 to 22, 1943. In the near future plans will be announced for the 1944 Institute.

PERSONAL RELIGION<sup>1</sup>

JOHN A. MACKAY

COLLEAGUES of the Faculty, members of the student body, friends and guests of the Seminary:

With the service of this morning we begin another year in the life of Princeton Seminary. In the name of the Board of Trustees, I wish to extend a general and cordial welcome to all who are present.

I welcome particularly those who are here for the first time, and very specially those of you who have come to us from abroad. May you not find this country a foreign land, nor this Seminary a cold or alien institution.

I greet with unusual pleasure the group of distinguished visitors, fellow Evangelicals from Latin America, who are visiting the Churches of the United States, and who honor us this morning with their presence. I welcome also the missionaries who are our guests in Payne Hall, and the group of young people who are already under appointment to the Moslem world and will be studying in Princeton Seminary this year in preparation for their future work.

Last, but not least, I welcome in your name, colleagues of the Faculty, and in yours, members of the student body, Dr. Howard T. Kuist, who is now a full member of our Seminary family. With him we welcome Mrs. Kuist and their two boys.

There hangs, however, over our meeting at this year's beginning a very decided shadow. News has come that in far away New Guinea one of our recent graduates of the Class of 1940, Keith Munro, Chaplain of the Air-borne Engineers, was killed by a bomb on August 15. He was conducting a service in the jungle on Sunday

morning when the sky filled with fighting aircraft, Japanese and our own. A Japanese plane came crashing to the ground with a full bomb load and exploded. Keith had asked the men who were worshipping with him to get into fox holes; but he was late in getting into one himself and was killed by a bomb fragment. Those of us who had the privilege of knowing Keith Munro will remember him as a loving and loyal person. He is survived by his parents and by a young wife and a three-months old baby, Nancy May, for all of whom our prayers go up to God.

In the course of this year a memorial service will be held on the campus for Chaplain Munro and the other four Chaplains, Alumni of the Seminary, who have fallen in this war. In the mean time, the fact of their passing does two things. It provides a background for the theme upon which I wish to speak this morning; it also brings before us the grim realities of the situation in which the Christian Church in its service to Christ is engulfed at the present time.

## I.

My subject is "Personal Religion." Religion is personal when it is something more than conventional. Conventional religion is for the most part inherited religion. One is religious primarily in loyalty to parents or grandparents, or because of the social influence of the environment in which one was brought up. Religion is equally conventional in character when those who profess or represent it are religious primarily for professional reasons.

<sup>1</sup> Being the address delivered by President Mackay in Miller Chapel at the opening of the Seminary year on September 22.



A man is professionally religious when he recognizes his obligation to speak about certain religious truths, or when he orders his life and adjusts his behaviour in accordance with the principles and practices of the religious faith which he is under professional obligation to represent. Do not misunderstand me. I am not suggesting for a moment that religion that is inherited may not also become personal. Still less do I suggest that many who are professionally religious are not also personally religious. I am suggesting, however, that it is possible to be religious in a merely conventional sense, through the influence of inheritance or through a sense of professional commitment or obligation.

As distinguished from conventional religion, personal religion is religion in which the divine reality, however it may be conceived or experienced, exercises an over-mastering influence upon life. It becomes the fountain-head of emotion, the master light of thought, the source of moral energy.

If personal religion, however, were nothing more than that, the designation "personal" would be as applicable to other forms of religious experience as to Christian experience. In the sense in which I have used the term we cannot deny "personal" religion to Hindus or to Moslems. We most certainly cannot deny it to fanatical, crusading Nazis. In the life of a Ghandi, or of a fervent Moslem mystic like Algazel, as in the life of the young crusaders who militate under the banners of the new secular religions, there is a deep personal character in their faith. An over-mastering something has gripped them which is not merely inherited, not merely traditional, something much more than professional.

But, of course, what interests us here is not personal religion in general, but personal religion as the most basic expression of Christian faith and life. In the Bible, the great source-book of Christian faith,

many terms are used to describe a man whose religion is personal. He is "a man of God," one who "fears God"; more specifically one who "believes in Jesus Christ," "a disciple," "a new man," "a saint"; one who has "passed from death unto life." In Christian literature in all lands and in all ages we find a variety of vivid descriptive phrases to denote a man for whom the Christian religion is intensely personal. He is "a subject of grace," "a gracious soul," "a believing Christian," "an exercised Christian," "a twice-born man," "a converted man," "a changed man," "a true believer."

Personal religion in this Christian sense is doubly important when we are in the midst of war, and when we are concerned about true and stable world order beyond war. For in war time, more than at any time, God and the soul stand out in their stark, primitive reality. No question is quite so urgent as that of the relationship between the human spirit and its Maker. Alas for that Christian pastor today who, in a smitten home where bereavement has befallen the family because of a casualty at the battle front, is not able to bear personal testimony to the grace of God and His significance for personal and family life! Alas, alas, for that Army Chaplain who, confronted with wounded or dying men, is unable to bear personal witness to the reality of the new life in Christ and to point them to the Saviour and Lord of Life!

We are approaching a moment in history when decisions must be taken that involve nations, international relations, world order. As we face the tremendous problem of the coming peace there is no more important issue than that of the inner religious attitude of the peace-makers. The character of the peace treaty will be determined to a major extent by the personal religion, or the lack of it, of those who make the treaty. If they do not acknowledge God's sovereignty in the world

or have not experienced Him in the Christian sense, they are certain to write a peace that shall not accord with the moral character of God's universe, that shall fail to do justice to His righteousness and mercy.

## II.

What is personal religion in the Christian sense, and what does it do to life? These are the two questions we shall now consider.

First, What is personal religion? Personal religion might be defined as acquaintance with oneself and with God. There is in it self-knowledge and the knowledge of God.

Philosophers and Christians have been very largely agreed concerning the importance of a famous dictum. That dictum is: "Know thyself." Self-knowledge is the starting point for all knowledge. Even the knowledge of God cannot be a substitute for the knowledge of oneself.

Part of our trouble today is that self-knowledge as currently pursued involves no piercing scrutiny of human nature, no challenge of man as he is. Man is taken for granted and the study of the human self consists in discovering ways in which it may achieve over-mastering power or experience exquisite, concentrated pleasure. In a universe where men are but cosmic atoms, where life lacks central meaning, where the prizes are for the strongest, for those least deterred by scruples, personal power and personal pleasure are made the great goals of existence. The self is examined in order to increase the range of both. At a certain stage on this road of self-knowledge we meet a man called Dale Carnegie, who offers to teach us how to become masterful men and women. At a later stage of the road we meet the Devil who promises today as of yore, "Ye shall be as gods." Personality for purposes of conquest and domination; personality to become demi-gods, rivals of the true God.

For others a man comes to know himself most fully and to experience life most perfectly in one thrilling moment of pleasure, when he is concerned only with the everlasting Now. It matters nothing whether his acts have meaning within a larger whole or not. Let him live dangerously and voluptuously. That is the underlying philosophy in Hemingway's *For Whom The Bell Tolls*, now being shown on Broadway.

Very different is the self-knowledge, the acquaintanceship with oneself, which comes in Christian experience and makes religion intensely personal. The first glimmer of this self-knowledge dawns when the truth breaks in upon a man that God made him for Himself and that he can be truly man only when his life is centred in God and he loves God and his fellow men. For man was made in love and for love, so that "he who loves not lives not." For a man to realize, on the one hand, that he was made to serve God and, on the other, that he has been living selfishly for himself, is to experience a sense of sin. A sense of sin, which is awakened when a person becomes poignantly aware of what he is in the light of what he should be, is the first step in the process of genuine self-knowledge, the first milestone on the road to acquaintanceship with God.

I knew a theological student who went through a certain seminary in a very jaunty manner. He claimed a kind of freedom which made it legitimate for him to do what he liked, treat people as he liked, give full expression to his innate pride. There came a moment when a faithful friend succeeded in showing him what he really was. Then that student became aware that up to that time he had never known himself. Not having known himself, such knowledge of God as he had was secondhand and sterile. His religion had been purely conventional. He had become increasingly disinclined to risk the disturbing experience of honestly facing himself. Subsequently he wrote these significant

words: "There are men who go through seminary unfaced by themselves, and enter the ministry. They don't know themselves. They were in my class at seminary. I saw them graduate. Some know where they are going, and the God who leads them. Others know the key phrases, and are conditioned to thinking that they believe, when down inside they don't. I am not criticizing. I only feel sorry for those men who have not had to face themselves. Though I will never have the opportunity, yet I hope some one does have, to stand before the whole seminary and preach that one question, 'Do you know yourself? and God?'"

But the possibility of such a situation forces us to ask the question: How does a man who refuses to recognize the claims of God and his neighbor come to know himself? Sometimes he does so through an experience of frustration, sometimes through confrontation with God's pattern for human life. The Prodigal in the parable "came to himself" when he had reached the end of his tether in a "far country," hungry and among the swine. His new self-knowledge sent him back with penitent mind and resolute gait to his Father's house. King David came to know himself as a miserable sinner, the perpetrator of a dastardly deed, when the prophet, with consummate skill, made him behold his living image in the tale of the mean monster who preyed upon the little ewe lamb of his neighbor. For us who live in the Christian era the kind of self-knowledge that leads a man to seek the face of God comes when we are confronted with Jesus Christ. Nowhere so much as in the light of Christ's moral perfection, especially in the light of His Cross, do men come to know themselves as they are and turn to God as He is. Such self-knowledge is the gateway to the knowledge of God. It is through Jesus Christ, as Pascal loved to put it, that we come to know ourselves and God.

### III.

We come now to the knowledge of God. How do we become personally acquainted with God? There are three distinct levels at which we become acquainted with Him. Each level is necessary for a complete Christian experience of God.

The first of these levels is *redemptive knowledge about God*. To know God is the loftiest pursuit that has engaged, or can engage, the mind of man. Philosophers, artists, poets, men of letters, have all written about Him. Many true and beautiful things have been said about God and the Divine in the history of human culture. But much that has been said, while interesting and important, has not provided man with the knowledge of God that he most needs. It has failed to describe the things that God has done in history to solve the problem of man's sin, to transform human nature, and to draw men to Himself in love. After all, the most important thing for a human spirit to know is that God Himself undertook to save man, to make him truly what he should be. Such knowledge can be crisply expressed in that one word "Gospel," "Good News." It is truth contained in a tale. It constitutes what a leading journalist in this country has said that he himself yearned to have—a "tenable fundamentalism."

What forms a "tenable fundamentalism?" What is the sum of saving knowledge? Here it is in brief compendious form, four great affirmations:

First, *God has spoken*. The eternal silence has been broken. A Voice has sounded from Beyond. Man is not doomed to endless quest; there is Truth. The Bible is the Record of what God has said. Second, *God became man*. He who spoke to man spoke also in and through a Man, Jesus Christ, the God-man. The Word became flesh is the centre and starting point of the Christian religion. In the life and death of Christ, in His Resurrection and



glorious Ascension, God wrought salvation for sinful men. The victorious Christ is the guarantee that God did not make man in vain, and that the end of history will not be an anticlimax to its beginning. Third, *Man is saved through faith in Jesus Christ*. Faith is the human response to what God has done for men in Christ. By their assent to the witness borne to Him, and their consent to the Saviour Himself, men are saved. They become "new" men. In the reality of spiritual change new horizons open up before mankind, new forces are released. Fourth, *The Christian Church is the Body of Christ*. The new men in Christ are not spiritual atoms. They are members of a Divine Society, a Fellowship created by the Spirit. This Fellowship, which transcends the boundaries of every Christian group, is the organ of the will of Christ, the Community of destiny, the Society outside of which no Christian can grow up to full spiritual stature.

These four affirmations constitute the redemptive core of the Christian religion and should not be absent in one form or another from all Christian preaching. To apprehend with the mind what they involve is the first level of the knowledge of God.

The second level of the knowledge of God is *evangelical commitment to God*. Bear in mind two important things. It is perfectly possible to accept all the great redemptive facts about God, to hold the most orthodox beliefs about Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, and yet not be Christian, and be utterly devoid of any personal acquaintance with God. For it is one thing to give the assent of our minds to true doctrines, and quite another thing to give the consent of our wills to Him who is the Truth. It is a most unhappy fact that some who make a great boast of their Christian orthodoxy, make formulas their God. In doing so they are idolaters, manifesting in their lives that self-righteousness, bigotry and fanaticism which have

been associated with idolatry in every age. Such people accept truth about God, and passionately adhere to it; but they do not commit themselves to God Himself. It is much easier and less costly to substitute ideas about God for commitment to Him.

The second caution is this: Evangelical commitment to God is something deeper and more vital than religious experience in general. Listen to some testimonies regarding this important distinction. Jonathan Edwards, the greatest American who ever thought about God, or about anything else for that matter, tells us that in early youth he and a group of companions were so devout and ardently religious that they made little prayer booths in the recesses of the Connecticut woods. But, according to Edwards, it was several years later that God became personally real to him. The brothers John and Charles Wesley and their younger companion, George Whitefield, were the initiators of a religious movement at Oxford which was marked by religious fervor and the most painstaking discipline of life. But it was subsequent to the initiation of Methodism that the three friends entered upon the religious experience which made them the great Christian leaders they became. Thomas Chalmers, the Scottish preacher, was, according to Thomas Carlyle, the greatest Scotsman since John Knox. When Chalmers was a theological student in St. Andrew's University, the college chapel would be thronged with both students and towns-people on the day when it was known that Chalmers was to lead the devotions. They were fascinated by the beauty and lofty eloquence of the young man's prayers. But, according to himself, he had not at that time passed through the supreme experience of his life; he had not personally encountered God and committed himself to Him.

The secret of personal religion, that which opens the way into its "Holy of holies," is the personal commitment of

life to the redeeming God upon the basis of knowledge concerning Him. We give ourselves to Him in a personal encounter. Hitherto we have known about Him; now we know Him. He forgives us, cleanses us, heals us, makes us His children in a new sense, admits us to His service. It is not necessary that Christians should know the hour, nor even the year, that they first met God in this holy encounter. The important thing is that their attitude towards Him be one of personal, unreserved surrender. What gives to this encounter its evangelical character is that he who gives himself to God does so as love's response to what God has done for him.

There is, however, still another level of the knowledge of God, the level to which evangelical commitment leads. This highest level is *spiritual union with God*.

From time to time we hear the words "mysticism" or "piety" used in a very disparaging way. Let me say that I find myself in full revolt, in the name of the evangelical tradition, against certain trends in modern Christianity which are disdainful of Christian piety. There are people with whom I feel myself to be in substantial theological agreement, but who detest the term "mysticism" and abhor the time-honored word "piety." There is an intellectualism about their attitude which deeply concerns me. They are disposed to maintain that there is nothing in the Christian religion that goes beyond an intellectual apprehension of truth and an honest commitment to God and His will. They deny that union with God can be an experienced fact. They reject the idea that the new life in Christ is a thing in itself which produces experiences which are the birthright of all Christians and the goal of all Christian living. Both the word and the reality of "piety" must be resuscitated again in so-called orthodox and neo-orthodox circles.

On the other hand, there are "pious" people whose piety is the purest sentimentality.

They never seem to get beyond testifying to their first experience of Christ. Their religion is lived at an exclusively emotional and reminiscent level. They feel themselves, alas, to be beyond all law. They are not ethically sensitive, nor do they live disciplined lives. They are unresponsive to human needs. Jesus Christ has not become for them the Lord of life.

We need to return to Paul and the New Testament. For Paul the Christ to whom he had committed himself became his life and lived within him. His body became a shrine, the temple of the Holy Spirit. Christ lived within him, ruling his will, moulding his unruly nature. He learned by experience that at the heart of true Christian living there is an exquisite pain. Measureless longing after God and a life wholly surrendered to the will of God always involve an element of pain. It is the most advanced Christians, moreover, who suffer most. "Whom he loveth he chasteneth." It is they who know the meaning of the "dark night of the soul." It was beyond the Wicket Gate, beyond the Interpreter's House, beyond the vision of the Delectable Mountains, that the pilgrims went down into the valley of the shadow of death. Christian biography is full of experiences like that. The great Teresa of Castille makes the sixth mansion, the innermost but one in the mystic Castle, that in which the soul is most afflicted. Christianity at its highest and best involves pain and struggle. Paul, you will remember, said, "That I might know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings." Power to suffer, power to bear the cross that lies beyond Easter. The "old man" is loath to die, but he must be crucified. There is an evangelical mortification of the flesh, as truly as there is a Catholic. The times call for Christian ascetics, spiritual athletes who practice self-denial and crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts, in a triumphant evangelical spirit.



## IV.

But my time is almost up and I have still to answer the question, What does personal religion do? It does three things.

Personal religion *transfigures doctrine*. Two charges have been brought against Christian theology. The first is that it is irrelevant, and the second, that it is cold. As to the first, all Christian doctrine has or should have a message for every phase and sphere of human life. For it deals not only with the revelation of God, but with the whole life of man. The doctrine of God, for example, is relevant to every human quest and problem, to questions as diverse as sex, race, and wages.

Textbooks of theology, it is true, can be terribly cold. But it is not inevitable that they should be so, if only the man who writes theology does so with a burning heart as well as an enlightened mind. True Christian theology is theology that sings; and that is the theology we need. Jonathan Edwards, who was six weeks President of Princeton University before he died of smallpox, said that he could never meditate except in a singing voice. Theology with a singing voice! That is the theology Paul wrote. Its greatest pattern is his letter to the Ephesians, the crown of all his writings. That epistle, starting from the lark-like note of exultancy, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," passes through all the measures of great music, and is our first Christian liturgy. Part of our task in Princeton Seminary is to turn the great doctrines of the Christian faith into the music of exultant proclamation and subjugating appeal.

Personal religion also *transfigures life*. It creates an interest in men and not merely in ideas. This interest is not confined to concern about people's souls; it is equally concerned about their bodies and general welfare. Some people there are who are sticklers for sound theology, but they are not interested in human beings. They have

no pastoral sense, nor any sense of social responsibility. They are not zealous in good works. They just talk. They teach the Bible but they do not live it. They name the name of Christ but they do not obey Him. The religion of such is vain; for our Lord and His Apostles were tenderly interested in the bodily needs of men as well as in their souls.

Many evangelists and Bible teachers in these days would do well to remember George Whitefield, that prince of evangelistic preachers. Whitefield was the first public figure in history to become a citizen of the Old World and the New. He was equally at home in both. Wherever he was, whether among the classes or the masses, preaching in London or Boston or tossed about on the turbulent Atlantic billows, his thoughts never wandered far from the orphan home which he founded in South Carolina and to whose support he dedicated his life. Spurgeon and Moody were like Whitefield in their great human sympathy.

Personal religion transfigures life in another sense: it *gives it refinement*. One of the greatest banes of the Christian ministry today is the coarseness and bad taste which marks conversation and conduct in many ministerial circles. Ministers can be the most irreverent people in the world. It is one thing to be buoyant and joyful; it is quite another thing to be flippant. We would do well to cultivate the distinction between humor and mirth, on the one hand, and flippancy, on the other. Listen to what the author of *The Screwtape Letters* says: "If prolonged, the habit of Flippancy builds up around a man the finest armour-plating against the Enemy [Christ] that I know, and it is quite free from the dangers inherent in the other sources of laughter. It is a thousand miles away from joy: it deadens, instead of sharpening, the intellect; and it excites no affection between those who practice it."<sup>2</sup>

Finally, personal religion *transfigures human relations*. It does so by leading those who have it into the fellowship of the Christian Church. There is no place in the Church for an individualist as such. Yet it is paradoxically true that ministers and theological students are the greatest individualists in the world. They give themselves the luxury of doing what they would not recommend to their people or permit them to do.

How much the Church suffers in its transfiguring virtue from us, its leaders!

And yet what is there that transfigures social relations so much as corporate worship and collective action within the Christian fellowship! Let us learn to worship and to act together on this campus. Let us lay aside all unlovely individualism and every vestige of spiritual pride, and constitute ourselves a single family in Christ. Let the truth and beauty of personal religion be perfected in corporate relations. Knowing ourselves and God, let us strive, in the unity of the faith, to "know even as also we are known."