

THE
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REFORMER.¹

OF the many brief descriptions of the Reformation, none is more striking than that which represents it as the return of Christendom to a book. Of course, so continental, profound and complex a movement cannot be described in a single sentence. But with a rough kind of truth it may be said, that when the hour of the great religious revolution struck, the various lines on which its historical causes had for centuries been moving converged and terminated in the Holy Bible. If we were limited to a single statement as to what the Reformation, in its inmost essence, was, and what, as it perpetuates itself in the Protestant churches, it still is; after all our study of the historical events which preceded it as coöperating agents—the papal schism, the reforming councils, the struggles between Gallicanism and Ultramontanism, the classical revival, the destructive and constructive forces which tore down the mediæval and built up the modern society, as the inventions of printing, of gunpowder and of the mariner's compass and the great voyages of discovery, the religious labors of local and national reformers like Wicliff and Huss and Savonarola—if, I say, after all this study, we were called to select a single sentence in which to embody the idea of the Reformation, we could find no better sentence for the purpose than that of Wil-

¹An address delivered in the chapel of Princeton Theological Seminary on the occasion of the celebration of the four hundredth anniversary of the birth of Philip Melanchthon. The Rev. Dr. Green, Chairman of the Faculty, presided; and the Rev. Dr. Jacobs, Dean of the Lutheran Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, took part in the services. The hymns sung were written by Melanchthon and Luther.

V. A DIVINE MANUAL FOR ALL CHRISTIAN WORKERS.

THE most useful of all the books of the New Testament to the church under this dispensation is the Acts of the Apostles. This treatise is of such supreme value to the church that she could dispense with any other book of the New Testament more easily than with this. For it is not, as many suppose, a thoughtless collection of fragments, of disjointed and disconnected incidents and events, but a thoroughly scientific and logical history. It grows naturally out of the gospel history as contained in the four evangelists, and it furnishes the historical germs and forces of all the subsequent Epistles and the Revelation, and of the entire development of the church until the bodily return of our blessed Lord.

Traditional history and internal evidences concur in the statement that this apostolic record was written by an accomplished Gentile physician named Luke, the author of the third Gospel, and one of the companions of the Apostle Paul.

In his first treatise Luke tells what Jesus began to do and to teach; in this second treatise he tells what Jesus continues to do and to teach; in the first, what Jesus did in his bodily presence; in the second, what Jesus continues to do by his Spirit, his word, and his witnesses. In both, the work is one, and Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, is the living actor.

The scope of this book, or the main object had in view by the author, is the establishment and extension of the gospel, or the Christian church, from Jerusalem outward and onward to the ends of the earth. This is the one great thought ever present to the mind and heart of the historian, and from this he never turns aside.

The first twelve chapters narrate the spread of the gospel among the Jews; the other sixteen chapters are occupied with the spread of the same gospel among the Gentiles.

Peter is the chief apostolic figure in the first part; Paul is the prominent person in the second part. The first part begins and

ends in the holy city, Jerusalem; the second begins in the Syrian Antioch, and ends in the imperial Rome, the head and heart of the Gentile world.

The period covered by this work begins with the bodily ascension into heaven of the Christ of gospel history, and ends with the bodily return of this same Jesus to the earth. The entire period of church history is between these two points—his departure, his return. How much belongs to the past we know; how much belongs to the future, who can tell? The work of the world's evangelization is ours; the times and the seasons belong to God.

In view of the magnitude and difficulty of this work, our Lord furnished his blood-bought church with this precious book of facts, precedents, principles, and examples to guide her in her difficult and dangerous pathway until the King himself shall descend in glory at the end of the age to give her the kingdom.

THE COMMISSION AND THE ENDUEMENT WITH POWER FOR THE WORK.

In this book the church finds her authoritative commission from her risen Lord: "Ye shall be my witnesses"; "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation"; "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you." The church is commanded to "*go*," not to abide; to push out into new fields, not to remain forever in the old ones. By the express terms of her constitution and commission, the church is an active, aggressive, missionary institute. When she ceases to "*go*" she will cease to live; when she refrains from preaching she has forfeited her right to exist. Witnessing to the facts and the truths of the Old and New Testaments is, according to the mind of the Master, the one supreme work of the church in this dark and ruined world.

THE ORDER OF THE MARCH.

"Beginning here, at and from Jerusalem; thence to Judea; then on to Samaria; then to the uttermost ends of the earth."

“*Begin*” in this venerable and holy city, the place of my death and resurrection. “*Begin*” here with those who knew and hated me.

The gospel rests on an impregnable foundation of facts. If the facts cannot be ascertained and established, then the church has no message from a gracious God to guilty men. Eliminate the facts from Bible history, and the gospel is reduced to a dream and a delusion.

The disciples, led by the apostles, proceeded at once to prove the facts concerning Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of God. They testified of him, and with such power that thousands were convinced, convicted of sin, and converted to the Lord.

In the city where the events took place they must be proved; in the presence of the people among whom they occurred they must be established. After this is done, not before, the witnesses must move on to Judea, then to Samaria, the bridge to the great Gentile world; and after this, to the utmost ends of the earth.

This commission was at no time or place given exclusively to the apostles, exclusively to bishops, exclusively to ministers; it was given to the whole body of believers; to each and every disciple to the end of the world. Every believer must be a witness; every disciple must testify; and the witnessing must never cease. These disciples never attempted to “bring the world to Christ”; but they did take Christ to the world; they never proclaimed the conversion of the world, but the evangelization of the world. Well would it be if the church of this generation would recall and remember these facts of apostolic history.

The general conditions of the human race will continue essentially the same until the end of the age and the return of the Lord; meanwhile the witness-bearing goes on.

The witnessing church saw the empire of pagan Rome cease her cruel persecutions and become Christian in name, but not in spirit. She saw that empire dismembered by barbarians from the north, but the witnesses went on with their testimony; and their voice has never failed to be heard in the earth.

The work of testifying for Christ goes on through all the centuries, north, south, east, west; through all countries, to the

hermit nations, to the islands of the seas. "Ye are my witnesses; I am with you to the end of the age," saith the Lord.

I. THE ACTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

God's revelation of himself to men made at sundry times and in divers manners was given as men were able to receive, and the revelation was always continuous and progressive; the "Progress of Doctrine" is now an accepted canon of Biblical interpretation.

In the Old Testament the unity and spirituality of God are revealed with the utmost clearness and power; there is one only living and true God, and he is a Spirit. In the four Gospels we have the Word made flesh, the Son of God in human form, God incarnate; and witnesses see and hear and handle the Word of Life. He is Son, beloved of the Father, Lord of the Sabbath, cleanser of his Father's house, always about his Father's business, with power on earth to forgive sin. He is the theme of gospel history, and of him the evangelists testify. But before this Son of man goes back into heaven from whence he came, he tells his followers of another divine Person who will come to them when he departs; a spirit of truth to lead them into truth; an advocate to plead his cause on earth while he pleads theirs in heaven; one who will abide with them, will baptize them, will fill them, will lead them and endue them with more than human power for their work of witnessing.

The Book of Acts differs immeasurably from the Gospels in the presentation of the personality, presence and power of the Holy Spirit, so that it would be no misnomer to call this book *The Gospel of the Holy Ghost*. Jesus still carries on his blessed work of salvation, but not in bodily presence; but (a), *By his Spirit*; (b), *By his word*; (c), *By his witnesses*.

Not until the day of Pentecost was fully come did the Spirit come in all the plenitude of his power. Then the promise of the Father was fulfilled; there was the sound as of a mighty, rushing wind; there were tongues as of fire; there was the felt power of God in Jerusalem; and the words of the prophet Joel were fulfilled. The Holy Spirit descended equally and alike upon all disciples—not upon the apostles only, but on old men and

young men; on daughters and on handmaidens. The prophecy was fulfilled but *not exhausted*, and that same spirit must "be poured out on *all flesh*." From that moment the Spirit assumed his rightful administration of all the affairs of the church: (a), *He presides in all the assemblies for worship.* (b), *He brings the words of Christ to remembrance.* (c), *He leads the disciples into all truth unto salvation.* (d), *He administers discipline.* (e), *He calls and qualifies witnesses and sends them to their fields of labor.* (f), *By his gifts and works he bears testimony to and with the human witnesses.* Henceforth he is to abide with the church and bear witness for Christ until his return in glory at the end of the age.

It is flippantly and thoughtlessly asserted that these mighty gifts and works of the Spirit ceased absolutely with the apostolic church. The New Testament will be searched in vain for one single word to confirm this reckless assertion; and the challenge is boldly made that God has nowhere in his word placed any limitation on these gifts of the Spirit as to time and place. Only unbelief relegates these powers and gifts of the Spirit to a past age. God intends them to continue to the end of the world.

Under this administration of the Spirit in the church (the pattern and model for all churches in all time), there was no elaborate human machinery, no manipulation of earthly forces, no bazaars, no festivals, no concerts, no feasts, no excursions, no boys' brigades, no athletic clubs, no junior endeavors, no civic centres, no good citizenship committees, no betterment of earthly conditions, in short, not one of the approved and popular methods of evangelization of our day and generation.

II. A BOOK OF APPLIED CHRISTIANITY.

The demand of the day is not for creed, but for life; not dogma, but practice; not faith, but works. The demand may be very silly, but, nevertheless, it exists. Very well, here is not only a book, but *the* book of applied Christianity. If the religion of Christ was ever applied in this world, then we have the record of it here in these Acts of the Apostles.

Let us get a clear idea of *what was applied*. What do men mean by the phrase "*applied Christianity*"?

In this book there are no views, opinions, theories, speculations, experiments of men on any subject whatsoever; no conventions held to inaugurate social and economic reforms; no pulpit discussion of financial systems and methods; no plans for the better city government of Athens or Antioch; no midnight visits to tenderloin precincts in Corinth or Ephesus to secure legal evidence to change the personnel of the police; no massing of the moral forces of the Christian brotherhood against particularly obnoxious classes of citizens; no combinations with unbelievers to secure political supremacy; no compromise with the world for the sake of a majority; no prodding the government to interfere in the affairs of other nations; no invitations to Felix, Festus, or Agrippa to preside at religious meetings; no parliament of comparative religions to decide who was the true God by a popular vote; no exaltation of the evils of environment above the hatefulness and ill-desert of sin in the soul.

In vain do you search this wonderful book to find any of the modern methods of the so-called Applied Christianity of our day. If these are the best methods of aggressive Christianity, how culpable was the Holy Spirit in not revealing them to the disciples of the first century. But what did these disciples *apply*? Nothing other than the *facts* of biblical and gospel history, and the truth revealed by God—and these they applied with the earnestness of profound conviction and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The witnesses told what they had seen and heard and handled and knew of the Logos life that was manifested to men full of grace and truth; the gospel message of those days was simple testimony; and these facts and truths were "applied" to the individual heart and conscience of all ranks, classes, and conditions; it was an individual rescue work; all the ills and evils that afflict men now existed then: slavery, polygamy, licentiousness, drunkenness, theft, disease, poverty, oppression; but the witnesses never turned aside from the paramount work of testifying. Salvation from sin and hell by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ was their one and only remedy for all the miseries of men. Every man renewed and redeemed by the Spirit and the word was lifted above his environments; his earthly conditions were glorified

by heavenly light, and he became a power for righteousness and healing.

“This testimony was effectual to the salvation of sinners in Jerusalem, Samaria, Paphos, Corinth, and Rome. Believers were added to the Lord: the crucifiers of Christ in the holy city, the bewitched people of Samaria, the licentious inhabitants of Cyprus, high officials from far-off Ethiopia, the barbarous people of Malta, centurions and soldiers of Rome, sellers of purple from Thyatira, prison-keepers of Philippi, and slaves of Cæsar’s household.”

The Scriptures were read and explained; the facts concerning Christ were stated and established; believers were baptized; disciples were enrolled; churches were organized; and the witnesses passed on to preach the gospel in the “regions beyond.”

III. THE CHURCH’S MANUAL OF MISSIONS.

The administration of the Spirit begins with the ascension, and ends with the advent; the bodily departure, the bodily return, of Jesus the Christ; between these points, the calling and completion of the church.

Since the departure of our Lord, more than fifty generations of the race have passed from these earthly scenes to other shores; after eighteen centuries, the church of this day finds herself still engaged in the evangelization of the world.

We call this the era of universal missions, and many questions of urgent interest and importance are pressing upon the church for solution: the sphere and functions of missionary boards; the powers of the evangelist; the relations between the home and foreign churches; the status of heathen converts and ministers; the necessity and use of creeds; the founding of schools and colleges; how to treat the great propagandist religions of the non-Christian world; questions of demonology, of polygamy, of the opium habit; the sale of spirits and of fire-arms to the natives; foot-binding; slavery; self-support of native churches—these and like matters are burning problems in all denominations; and who is sufficient for these things?

But the ascended Lord has not left his church without a book of instructions to meet these and all possible emergencies that may

arise until his second advent in power and glory. He does not send out his servants unfurnished for their work. This book is the authoritative manual of missions, placed in the hands of the church to direct her in all the exigencies of her earthly career, not classified and numbered rules, not minute details of legislation, but great principles, concrete cases, precedents, illustrations, so that the careful student of this book will always find direction amid all the difficulties of the vast missionary field.

All the elements in the problem of the world's evangelization are precisely the same to-day that they were in the apostolic period of the church; there is here no new thing under the sun.

The gospel proclaimed by these witnesses came in contact with every phase and form of life and civilization. The church of that era met the bigotry of Jerusalem, the idolatry of Athens, the luxury of Corinth, the licentiousness of Cyprus, the magic of Ephesus, the barbarism of Lystra, the brutality of Rome. The word and witnesses of our Lord came in conflict with race prejudice and hatred; with many forms of comparative religions, false, corrupt, debasing; with science, so-called, and philosophers of all degrees, Stoics, Epicureans, and agnostics; with magistrates, centurions, and kings; with slavery, polygamy, impurity, drunkenness, gambling, and godlessness; in short, with all the ills, evils, miseries, and sins of this mortal existence; and in this book we have the record of the results of the contact, and we find principles and precedents to guide in every difficult and doubtful case. Nothing will emerge in the future that has not already been in the past, and that is not provided for in this manual.

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