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EDITORIAL

BIOGRAPHY IS RIGHTLY COUNTED ONE OF THE MOST profitable kinds of reading. Yet some biographies are discouraging. The brilliant record of a great genius fascinates, but then it brings home most depressingly to the average mind the consciousness of its own limitations. It is therefore distinctly refreshing and inspiring to take up the story of high achievement wrought by one who claimed no spectacular kind of talent, but who did possess the wholesome, substantial gifts of sound judgment and an unflagging will, devoted to conscientious, persistent, painstaking, and fruitful work. The late Dr. Schaufler was long an object of admiration on the part of his many friends and acquaintances because of his almost mysterious ability to wrestle victoriously with hard problems and great practical difficulties, to keep in touch with many and diverse human activities, and to bring things to pass. How was he able to study so much, to speak and write so much, to give so much time to others' needs, and to carry on so much work—and to do all these things so well? Dr. McKinney, his associate in the New York City Mission, reveals the secret in his character sketch of Adolph Frederick Schaufler. Every young man aspiring to the Christian ministry might profit by this simple, direct recital of the habits and

THE ESSENTIAL GOSPEL

By REV. F. P. RAMSAY, Ph.D.

THERE has always been a tendency to depart from revealed truth. Old Testament history is a history of such departures. The ministry of Jesus was largely a protest against rejection and corruption of the truth, especially by the Pharisees. And the apostles had to oppose and warn against rising heresies within the body of those who professed the Christian faith. From their day to this the history of the church in all its branches has been a history of repeated departures from the essential principles of the Christian faith and of efforts to preserve this faith from perversion and extinction.

Nor would the history of the past lead us to expect the truth to be found with the majority and the error with the minority, or the truth with those in control and the error with those of more or less questionable standing. Of course, every sort of error has been held by noisy and troublesome minorities; but quite often the great and regular majority has lost the essential truth. Whether, then, one belongs to the regular majority, the orthodox, or to a censured minority, the heterodox, let one not assume in pride that the truth is with him and despise others. Let each one in humility be willing to ask himself whether he is not himself losing the right way.

And if in our time we find much of confusion about what Christianity is, and of distrust of one another among those who all claim to accept the Gospel, we must not be surprised; nor must we attribute all this confusion and distrust to the war. The stress of the war could only

bring out what was already latent in the mind of our time. The war could not create a new gospel or a new interpretation of the Gospel, but it might hasten the definite expression of beliefs that otherwise would have remained unarticulated. To understand what has been taking place in religious thought under stress of war conditions, we must begin with religious thought as it was at the beginning of the war.

That, in one word, was a contest between the old and the new. On the one hand had been authority, the authority of the church, of the Bible, of the past; and on the other hand, insurrection against authority in order to find place for the new views. This contest had already resulted in victory for the new to this extent, that the new views had obtained standing in the regular church and also in certain subsidiary organizations, and were largely in control of the forces that produce opinion, the schools and the press, through the conversion of the rich to the support of the new views with their wealth and power. The war came when modernism was about to become traditionalism, and was rapidly displacing the old tradition from position and place and assuming its authority.

But the lines of distinction between the old and the new were not clearly drawn. Converts to the new carried over with them the life and even the beliefs they had inherited, mixed them with new impulses and beliefs that they did not fully and exactly distinguish, and oft-times were unconsciously living the old life under the new dress. Adherents of the old unawares imbibed of the new, breathed it in from all the atmosphere of current literature and education, and sometimes were unconsciously living the new life under the old dress.

Some of the points of real difference loosely distinguishing the two tendencies or schools were these: The old held to the Bible as authority, and sought still to appeal to its voice as final, but the new was afraid of authority, challenged this authority of the Bible in the name of criticism, and appealed to science and psychology; the old put emphasis upon revivals and conversion and conscious cataclysms in experience, but the new put emphasis upon education and culture, and consequently the new became generally superior in scholarship; and the old, largely, came into sympathy with views suggested by the term premillenarianism, while the new was tending to explain away the Second Coming or to deny it altogether. In one thing there was agreement, social service, in which the new engaged with enthusiasm and the old was unwilling to come behind.

Such was the situation at the beginning of the war; and now both schools are seeking vindication in the tests to which the war has subjected them. In patriotism, in social service, in every sort of ministry to want and suffering, the two wings are equal. The new wing is perhaps becoming less insistent on its repudiation of authority and less extreme in setting aside the authority of the Bible, and the old is perhaps becoming more appreciative of the resistless demands of the human soul. The new is finding more importance in sudden change of mind in religious experience, and the old, more importance in religious education. The new is feeling the want of a great hope, like the hope of the Second Coming, and the old is finding it more difficult to hold to any definite schedule of the future. Possibly the present is as favorable a time as ever can be for searching out the real essence of our religion and discovering it to both

schools, in the hope of uniting those who really hold the essence as against those who really deny the essence.

Who knows what will follow this war? Industrial and social and political and religious revolutions and wars incomparably fiercer than the military struggle may break out now that the tension of the Great War is relieved. One cannot predict. It certainly is timely to attempt some little contribution toward answering the most pressing religious question of our time, What is the essence of the Gospel?

The writer has lately been hearing and reading the extremists and the moderates of both schools and comparing their views; has been searching into his own system of beliefs, seeking to divine the essential element in his own faith; and above all has been asking anew from the Scriptures what the Gospel really is. If his statement is inaccurate or one-sided, others may point out its imperfections, all thus working together to help one another to a clearer understanding and expression of the really essential element in our common faith, the Gospel. For he is writing as one among believers to believers in the Gospel, seeking to fix heart and word upon its distinctive and essential element.

We may come at our quest psychologically. Is the essential thing in the Gospel something directed especially at our feelings and emotions, something to give us pleasure, as esthetic pleasure or religious joy? Most of those who read this article are as ready as the writer to answer this question with an emphatic negative. Yet we must not go too far; for unless the Gospel does give us pleasure of a kind, such deeper satisfaction as the words peace and joy indicate, the Gospel will be to us a failure. The essential Gospel must bring its own thrill and ecstasy at times, and its own permanent and in-

effable satisfaction and gladness. But not here need we search for its essence, for other religions can intoxicate their devotees with religious ecstasy, and delusions can fill with happiness.

Is the essential thing in the Gospel something directed especially at our desires and volitions, and through them at our actions and conduct? To this question the answer is not easy. The essential Gospel will reach the conduct through the will, creating right motive and character to be the source and guide of action. But conduct toward our fellow men may, in outward action and in inner motive of kindness and justice, apart from the Gospel, become indistinguishable from Christian kindness and justice. Even toward God men without the Gospel may show such a humility and devoutness, and such a thirst for God, or, in other words, such piety, as must challenge admiration in comparison with Christian piety. We may claim that there is a distinct and superior quality in Christian morality and piety, but how can we substantiate this claim to good people who are not Christians? And if other faiths can produce as fine and beautiful character and life as our Christian faith, then the essential thing in the Gospel is not its power to produce such character and life, but this power plus some difference between it and other faiths that are its equals in this production, its equals in so far saving men.

That difference must lie, not in the desires and volitions and consequent character and conduct produced by the Gospel, if its product is only equal to that of other faiths, but in the different beliefs which the Gospel creates and which in turn issue in character and conduct; and if really Christian character and conduct are different from the character and conduct produced by any other faith, and superior thereto, as the writer and most

of his readers are persuaded, still the difference must be sought in the difference in the beliefs. Back, then, to these beliefs we must go in our quest for the essential element of the Gospel which engenders these beliefs. Here we must not deceive ourselves with words. Desires and volitions in their quality of being right and wrong are inseparable from the beliefs. Motive has belief in it, and motive determines the quality of action. If, then, genuine and distinctive Christian life is really different from the life of other faiths, this difference is due to some difference in the beliefs as well as to some difference in the volitions. Thinking of the Gospel as addressed to our judgment especially, we must ask what is the essential belief or system of beliefs proposed to us by the Gospel.

But if we go back to the beliefs, we cannot stop with them and refuse to go back to the experiences of immediate knowing in which the beliefs arise, so far as they are not mere inferences. For a belief is either an inference or arises in immediate knowledge. Thus we shall come to the essential thing in the Gospel: That it presents to us, as the object of our conscious experience of immediate knowing, some reality such that this immediate knowing of it becomes the root of beliefs and volitions, of a life having its own peculiar quality, a quality unlike that of any other sort of life.

But what can become to us the object of immediate knowledge, of conscious experience? Some will answer, the processes of our own mind, our own activities and emotions. Prominent here would be the sense of sin, including guilt and pollution and powerlessness—the conviction of sin. But conviction of sin can be of no value unless as preparation for its remission and abandonment; and if we distinguish, the essential thing in the

Gospel is not so much what convicts of sin as what shows escape from it. Surely the Gospel must have a more important office than to show me myself; for there is something far more important than myself.

Some would answer, the Holy Spirit in His impressions and influences upon the human spirit. But apart from the question whether we can immediately know the Holy Spirit, it lies obvious on the face of the New Testament that the Gospel is not primarily and essentially a message concerning the Holy Spirit. Rather the Gospel is used by the Holy Spirit, not to glorify Himself, but to glorify Another.

Just here it is we come to the essential element in the Gospel, Jesus Christ. But can Christ become the object of our immediate knowledge? Can we experience Christ? This is precisely the distinctive office of the Holy Spirit, to present Christ to us. The Gospel is the means the Spirit uses for making this presentation. And this is the essential Gospel, the presentation of Christ to the human soul for its immediate knowledge and experience.

If any arise to deny vigorously the possibility of our immediate knowledge of Christ, and to label the claim of such conscious experience as seeing or knowing Christ with deprecatory terms like fanaticism and mysticism, we can only cite the testimonies of men of all schools of Christian belief, and rest in the fact that men do thus know Christ. We thus claim the same experience as Jesus promised and the apostles knew: "He that loveth me * * *, I will love him, and will manifest myself unto him. * * * And my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our abode with him." (John 14:21-23). Cf. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (v. 9). "This is life eternal, that they should

know thee, the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ" (John 17:3). "Till we all attain unto the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God" (Eph. 4:13). "That I may know him" (Phil. 3:13). Fruitful "unto the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:8). "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any one hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Rev. 3:20).

If men do not have this sort of experience of Christ now, then the original Christianity has died out; and if such experience of Christ is possible, then that in the Gospel which makes it possible is the essential element in the Gospel. Beliefs about Christ, but not rooted in such experience of Him, are lifeless and fruitless; but beliefs rooted in such experience grow into Christlike motives, Christlike desires and volitions, and Christlike character and conduct, and ripen into the peace and joy of Christ. Hence the essence of the Gospel is that it presents Christ to us to be thus known in experience.

Objections to this conclusion may come from two directions, from one direction that this puts too much into the essence of the Gospel, and from another that it puts too little.

It may be objected that to put immediate knowledge of Christ into the essence of what the Gospel offers is to assume His present existence, and hence His resurrection, for He could not now be immediately known if He did not now really exist. This is perfectly good logic, for only the now living Christ could now be known. But this precisely is what the Gospel asserts as central and crucial to its own validity. Take away the resurrection of Christ, and Christians are of all deluded men the most pitiable. We deal with the living Christ, and it is

of the essence of the Gospel to offer Him to our immediate apprehension.

If anyone thinks that we are saved by ideas and beliefs, independently of any reality, he holds a philosophy that contradicts Christianity and makes its Gospel a delusion. Such a philosophy professors may hold while their salaries are secure and their health is good, but in the valleys of sorrow and on the hills of agony, in the fierce strains and flames of human suffering and battle, when men are in war to the death for their very souls, their satisfying Saviour must be a known reality, and not an imaginary conception. In any case, a gospel is no gospel at all that does not bring us a living Christ.

It may be objected that to put immediate knowledge of Christ into the essence of what the Gospel offers us is to imply the Deity of Christ and to deny the name of Christian to Unitarians. Here we must be careful of our words. What precisely is the difference between Unitarians and Trinitarians? Very few of either could intelligently state the precise difference; and a real Unitarian might mistakenly classify himself as a Trinitarian, and a real Trinitarian might mistakenly classify himself as a Unitarian. But to know Christ is the essential thing. And if Christ is able to make Himself the object of immediate knowledge to millions of men of all times and places, and to be in communion with them, He is not mere man, but is God to them. If in this experience of Him they come to have that mind toward Him which men may properly have toward Deity, then they honor the Son as they honor the Father, however illy or well they define the metaphysical distinctions involved.

If, however, any intelligently deny to Christ the power of thus manifesting Himself, and mean all that this denial logically involves, they contradict the certain

teaching of the New Testament and the faith as it has been held by the Christians from the beginning, and they cannot, if language is to be used with scientific exactness, be called Christians.

And it may be objected that, to put immediate knowledge of Christ into the essence of what the Gospel offers us, is to shut out from salvation all who do not enjoy this immediate knowledge of Christ. Even if this exclusion be guarded and limited to mean that they are not in a state of salvation while thus ignorant of Christ, without meaning that they may not come into a state of salvation later by coming thus to know Him, it still is, the objector may say, narrow and bigoted for any to claim that none are among the saved except those who have their type of experience. Or the objector may urge that there are multitudes in possession of the salvation which the Gospel offers and yet are without this immediate knowledge of Christ.

Salvation may be claimed on the ground of sacramental union with Christ. But if any can be saved by such sacramental union without the vital union, then this sacramental union with Christ is the essential thing offered in the Gospel. Therefore our answer to this contention must be a simple denial of the theory that any can come into a state of salvation by baptism or other sacraments without vital faith apprehending Christ Himself, of the theory that any with the vital faith ever perish through mere lack of some ceremony, and of the theory that some ceremony is necessary as a cause or condition of this vital faith. Sacraments may aid in inaugurating or continuing the essential thing, union with Christ by faith, but they cannot be essential, and much more they cannot be sufficient to begin it or to preserve it. But there is no need to argue this with our

readers, who, for the most part, are already fixed in the conviction that no sacramental regularity can save men.

Salvation may be claimed on the ground of right belief. But to substitute right belief for vital faith is as contrary to the Gospel as to substitute sacramental regularity for vital faith. Such right belief may help to the vital faith, but cannot save without the vital faith. There may come the vital faith where the right belief is absent, for the vital faith appears in thousands who are at various degrees of distance from right belief. Some element of right belief, that is, of truth, may be necessary to this faith, logically or psychologically speaking; but, if so, it is impossible to formulate this necessary minimum of truth. The orthodox may be out of Christ, the heterodox may be in Christ. Hence neither orthodoxy nor any definable minimum of orthodoxy is the essential thing.

Or salvation may be claimed on the ground of a right life. There are multitudes of nominal Christians who honestly endeavor to live clean lives, practicing the teachings of our Lord, and attain to some degree of success in so living, but who have no conscious experience of Christ. They live a moral life of no mean excellence, and some of them are faithful also in observing the requirements of religion; they show a Christian morality and piety, the fruits of the Gospel, but have no religious experience to report. Now, says the objector, shall these multitudes of good people not be pronounced saved, not be recognized as having the essential thing which the Gospel offers?

Our answer must be an unequivocal negative. There are many such decent people where Christianity has never gone. In fact, the great majority of men and women live decent lives in all countries and religions, complying with the requirements of the religion and

morality of their time and place. They fail, it is true, of perfection even according to their accepted standards, as do Christians of the deepest experience; but they are sincerely good people rather than bad people. Seeing that such lives are produced without the Gospel, that element in the Gospel which produces them cannot be its essence.

Or, once more, it may be objected that there are many who have faith in Christ, the will's commitment of oneself to Him and not a mere belief of the judgment about Him, and in this faith love Him and obey Him, and hence live in Christ so far as their judgment and will are concerned, and yet have no immediate knowledge of Him, no conscious experience of His presence. In this unseeing faith they become like Christ in motive and character, and in inner temper and outer conduct. They show a distinctively Christlike sort of life, but are yet without any immediate knowledge of Him. They are made like Him by their ideas and conceptions, and by their beliefs and purposes concerning Him.

To this objection our answer must be, that it is here supposed that these persons accept Christ, with will as well as judgment, and so open the door of life to Him but that He does not come in. This supposition we disallow. These persons have conscious experience of Christ, immediate knowledge, without being able to name that which they thus know. As one may become warm by heat from a radiator, without noticing that the radiator is present, although he has immediate experience of its presence; so one may be the subject of immediate apprehension of Christ, without recognizing that his experience is an immediate knowing of Christ. Yet if the radiator were not really present, the experience would not come; and if Christ were not really pres-

ent, the experience would not come. In the one case the person would not become warm; in the other he would not become Christlike.

Now this immediate knowledge of Christ, which is proved by its making the subject Christlike, is the essential thing, not intelligence to explain the experience and give it the right name. This conscious experience of Him, this vital faith through which He flows into the believer and lives in him, this is the one essential of salvation in us; and the one essential in the Gospel is that it does present Christ to us to be thus immediately known in conscious experience. Leave this out, and the distinct essence of the Gospel is wanting.

From the other direction the objection may come that this conclusion puts too little into the essence of the Gospel. The objectors may say, that here is no social life and service, no brotherhood of believers, and no organized church with its discipline and worship and sacraments; that here is no standard of morality and uprightness of life; that here is no guide to right volitions and no impulsion to right desires; and that here is no security of right doctrines and beliefs. This minimum essence, they may say, does not require acceptance of the Scriptures, of the plan of salvation, or even of the Deity of our Lord.

Our reply is ready and adequate. If Christ is in His own, in immediate touch with them and known to them in their conscious experience, He unerringly guides them into the truth. In thus knowing Him they get that truth which grows immediately out of such knowledge into a harmonious system of right beliefs, or at least toward such a system; for they experience Him as what He is, and are thus directed to right beliefs about Him. So they experience salvation, and are thus directed into

apprehension of its real nature, as God's grace of justification in the crucified Christ and as God's grace of life in the living Christ. They experience the adequacy of Scripture as a means of introducing Christ, and are thus directed to insight into its inspiration. This knowledge of Christ is the source of right beliefs, growing as a system out of this root; the living Christ within is the security of orthodoxy. And if He is dwelling in us, the fountain of right beliefs, He is through them and in His own motions the fountain of right desires and right volitions, the source of right character and conduct, the ever outflowing of Christliness into all the capacities and faculties of the individual and of the brotherhood. The church can never perish with Christ alive in its members.

The limits of this article permit only a few brief reflections. The first is that we may put away anxiety for the preservation of the truth. Whatever place may belong to creed and church, to argument and testimony, or to any other means and agencies for promoting and preserving the truth against corruption and error, yea, whatever place may be given to the Bible, the one security of the truth, of revealed truth, of the truth entrusted to the church, is Christ ever making Himself known to those who accept Him in their ever renewed experience of Him. As long as Christ gives Himself to His own to be immediately known by them in their conscious experience, so long will the truth concerning Him be winning the victory in the contest with error. The indwelling Christ is the Saviour of the intellect.

Christians are now divided into organizations according to their beliefs, their formulated beliefs. Would it be possible to make mutual recognition of one another as the organs of the indwelling Christ the basis of organization?

Finally, important as it is to examine and weigh evidence, to arrive at right beliefs and to give them adequate expression, and to indoctrinate in the truth, is it not even more important to the truth itself, to Christian truth, to know in conscious experience Christ and by this knowing to become like Him?

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