

**A RALLYING GROUND FOR THE FREE  
CHURCHES: THE REALITY OF GRACE**

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## A RALLYING GROUND FOR THE FREE CHURCHES.

### THE REALITY OF GRACE.

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I HAVE had much to say of late, in this Journal and elsewhere, on the reality of Grace as the be-all and end-all of Christianity. By the Editor's favour I would say something more. To rally on this one power or doctrine as the marrow of Christianity implies three things:—

A great concentration, a great simplification, and a great emancipation.

It requires a great concentration in the interest of positive Christianity, of Church unity; a great simplification in the interest of popular Christianity, of Church extension; and a great emancipation in the interest of liberal Christianity, of Church freedom.

Christianity must be positive, popular, and liberal; and the possibility of combining all three lies in the reduction of everything and the reference of everything to the authority of the Gospel of Grace. It is on the first head, of concentration, that I chiefly write.

I. Concentration is in the air. For one thing, we feel the lack of it in various ways. What is the cause of the moral and spiritual uncertainty which the more positive Churches try to make good by dogmatism? It is the irresolution of the public mind. It is a moral lack, the want of will, the lack of concentra-

tion, of the moral concentration involved in faith. The tap-root of uncertainty is generally irresolution somewhere. I wonder how many of the public, even of the Christian public, who have come to deny or ignore such doctrines as an Atonement, ever forced themselves down to the New Testament in a thorough way. People complain that the religious ground is unsure who have never compelled themselves to examine it with a tithe of the care spent on a contract; but they have taken current suggestions in a dreamy and hypnotised way. They will not attend, they will not force themselves to attend, gravely to the gravest things. They scatter their interests with indiscriminate impartiality over the wide Held of modern knowledge. They read everything in a vagrant, browsing fashion. They turn on the most, serious subjects the holiday, seaside, newspaper habit of mind. They admit the subjects are momentous, but they do not treat them so. They do not own the authority of such subjects to compel special pains towards certainty about them. If a preacher fall into this frame he may coo over the people the balmy optimisms of a natural and unconscious Christianity which makes no call upon the will for positive belief, but delights those who are only at the aesthetic stage of faith and life. Is it not the case that most doubt on religious matters is listless and not vigorous, discontented rather than negative, vague and not positive? Is that not the fashion of the whole agnosticism which has replaced the old atheism? So that one is grateful to find a vigorous, serious, and informed doubter, with whom something can be done because he begins with a serious concentration on the objects of his criticism.

It is to meet this current dispersion of interest and distraction of mind that certain of the Churches dose their ranks, harden their face, and put down their foot with new firmness on the old paths. They concentrate upon a single and selected issue which carries all the rest. The Church of Rome leaves all other doctrines for the time in the rear, and concentrates on the doctrine of the divine society, the Church—with

immense effect, of course, in a social age. To accept that, in the infallible Pope, is to accept all doctrines with an implicit faith, Anglicanism also concentrates on the acceptance of the Church, but as centred in the Episcopate; or it rallies upon the principle of an Establishment. Well, upon what shall those of us concentrate who cannot so think of the Church? An Established Church is but a tolerated anachronism at this stage of history. It is a belated survival, a *sucre* *d'estime* resting on social prestige and historic tenderness, but not on a spiritual principle. In due course it must cease. But that cohesion, that solidarity borrowed from the institutional or national principle is a great thing. Are the Free Churches in a condition to replace it by anything as effectual drawn from their own ethical and spiritual principle? Is Disestablishment possible till they are? Federation is a great idea, but it is too shallow to be the real nexus of spiritual bodies. If they rally it must be on something in the nature of an authority—not a mere centre, but a creative point sending out what Coleridge calls “organising surges.” A centre is but static, an authority is dynamic. And upon what can they rally hut. on the source of their own call as Protestant Churches in God’s formative grace?<sup>1</sup>

There is great need of this renewed central control. The Protestant Churches, like the Liberal party, are fissiparous. At least they are not centripetal. They have a woeful lack of perspective and of the sense of values in their theology. It needs refocussing. And the only authority whereby they can

<sup>1</sup> It should be said that throughout, there is meant by Grace neither God’s general favour, nor His mercy to our failure, nor His pity for our pain, but His pardon and redemption in face of our sin, under such moral conditions as are implied in atonement, however construed. The Catholic sense of grace, as a *caritas infusa*, like the finest substance, is quite out of view. If the Reformation meant anything at all, it meant the submersion of sacramental grace by evangelical. I find also that it needs saying, that by the Gospel is not meant a statement, doctrine, offer, promise, or boon. It is a revelation, even, only because it is a redemption. It is an objective power and historic act of God in Christ, decisive for humanity in time and in eternity, and altering for ever the whole relation of the soul to God as it may be rejected or believed.

concentrate with effect or adjust spiritual values is that in which they rose—that of grace and Gospel. They can rally upon doctrine only as a tentative expression of God's act of Gospel. They must gather, not to a point, but to a power. Observe the concentration in Christ's own case. He so bent Himself on His one work of grace that He is accused of leaving whole sections of life, and even doctrine, out of His world. One thing He pursued, and it was a thing He *did*; but it was the thing which has the power and the promise of all things else. There is one thing needful for all other things, and given by none of them. But He gave it. And there is at the long last no other moral power for us but the one Gospel He was straitened to accomplish. The Free Churches, alienated from a positive theology, have dispersed their spiritual energies over too many views and enterprises for their cohesive faith. The Free Church Federation is an attempt to counteract this by common organisation and work. Hut federation will not do it beyond a certain point, Nor will evangelism, peripheral and peripatetic. It needs far more even than revival. It needs a rebaptism, a regeneration of the Christian mind and conscience in the Churches themselves, a re-reading of their old Gospel, a new type of faith and manner of theology, bringing a new penitence, a new forgiveness, a new purpose of heart and endeavour after another order of obedience. It is not evangelists we need, but apostles to re-evangelise the evangelists. A revival, not of mere piety, but of faith, of the positive power, and insight of grace, would draw together the Churches of grace, the Free Churches, as nothing else could. And it cannot be denied that this means for the ministry a new dogma, a theological revival. For a church dogma is indispensable. But that would come of itself. Questions of church government, even of Atonement or Incarnation, would settle themselves in a new, free, positive creed among churches that realised anew their religion—the power and compass of their central faith, delivered from popular triviality and debasement. A great future awaits the Free Churches

when they rediscover their own treasure, and hear again, at its spring, their one call as the apostles of free and holy grace.

We do need to go back to our spring for our light and strength. Every age has its own spiritual problem. It interrogates the unseen with a new demand. It appeals to it with a new need. It taxes it for new power. Our age has a question and a need of its own. It is not the same as that of the Reformation. It is not exactly that of the first century. Jesus dealt with a Jewish civilisation, the Apostles with a Pagan, and Luther with a Catholic. Luther arose amidst a Europe long exercised about questions of sin, penance, and the means of grace. His gospel to that age was the gospel of a gracious God to a sinful experience. He spoke to people who were in a church and who knew sin. But we stand in a different Europe, a modern Europe, scientific, critical, ethical, and social. We have the same Gospel, rich to all, but it faces a different need. The sense of sin has died down for the time; and the ruling idea of God, if not holier, is purer than it was. richer, broader, humaner, more intimate to men and things. We speak to people who are not in a church, or who care little for the church they are in. Many of them will change their church and minister for a better tennis green on the other side of the town. The church and its message form no part of life's reality for them, but only of its decency at best. They do not deny, but ignore the Christian God. The time's demand, therefore, is not for a diviner idea of God; it is for power to realise, in experience, conduct, and thought, an idea already more divine than we can either take home or carry home in practical effect. It is not a more ideal God we need, but a more real God, actual in and over life. We know, or we dream, more things about God than we know how to use. trust, or obey. The question is not as to the ideality of Christ's character, for all own that; but it is as to the reality of His gospel, the authoritative reality, amid things, of a holy God whom our best ideas only desire, surmise, or depict. Especially it is a question as to



the reality of a holy God, gracious in action, not to the church alone, but to society. With all the humane and philosophic enlargement of the idea of God during the last two or three centuries, we are still left without the certainty that it corresponds to the deep eternal reality of the stirring world. It should not be forgotten that Agnosticism is the child of Idealism, and not of Empiricism or Materialism alone. Spencer held neither. In such a world as this ideals are apt to become incredible and impracticable in proportion to their greatness; and we have to ask what is to translate the idea into experience and action; what will make an effectual power of it, make of it a religion more near and real to us than life itself is with its tremendous avidity to-day? It is little that a lofty idea of God will do to fortify or rule the youth who launches out into the torrent of energy and opportunity sweeping men along in a time like this, when man, nature, the world, and a career are mightier than ever before. No mere idea of God is strong enough to cope with the passionate experience of such a world—a world with such vitality in it, such capacity, such facilities, such fascination, and such fire. It needs that the Divine idea become a hearty moral experience also, and a part of the man's moral reality, before it can be a guiding and saving authority in his immersion in such life. It must, however large, however imposing, become personal, searching, and real, before it can become effective, before it can cope with the personal reality of a man's imperious self. No Christian view of life, however ardent, no enthusiasm about Christ, will do the work of personal faith which unites a man in Christ with the central moral reality of a saving God.

And so we ask anew, from our own position—What was it that Christ came to bring? It is feeble now to say He came to bring a new thought of God. He brought tittle for the world of thought; for the moral world, *where reality lies*, He brought everything. He came with God Himself, and not with a picture or a guess about God: with God, not as a finer

vision, nor as a necessity of thought, but as a mightier power, as the Holy One, as the ultimate moral energy, as the searching, judging, saving, and final reality, active in history and life. He was not a herald, but a plenipotentiary. God did not reveal His nature to Christ. Christ was neither a thinker before a problem nor a poet before a dream, but a doer before a task. God was in Christ, reconciling. Christ had not His knowledge of God by way of revelation. His consciousness was pari of the self-consciousness of Godhead. His action was God's act. And through Christ, God was, and now is, in history—at its real spring, in its main stream. This Christ is the supreme contemporary of every age and its ruling power. The spinal cord of history is redemption. The course of total history is the evolution of Grace. Christ came with God not only in evidence but in action, in decisive, final, continuous action on the active, historic, total soul of man. I say Christ came with God. but I mean that God came in Him, came for a world career, and came to abide at the throne of things.

And such a Gospel meets the demand of to-day—not for an ideal God. but a real God. We have to secure not a new conception of God, but a new recognition of Him—a new position for Him in that sense. And that position must be in the conscience, amid the action in which we touch reality at last, amid the drama of things. The people that count are the serious people who play the game instead of watching it; and they are forced to feel that the reality of God comes home to us only in experience, in action, in the moral region. Judgment is there; and Salvation is where Judgment is. The nature of reality for living men is morality. And the real power that is demanded by our actual moral condition, our sinful condition, the only God relevant to it, is the holy historic God in His act of judgment-grace- the God in the Christ we inherit, given us and not discovered, given by Himself and not procured even by a Son, given to meet our moral perdition, and given in the Hood of life and action's storm, in the

Cross which entered a nation's politics, challenged its government, scaled its dream, broke at once its delusion and its history, and in so doing secured mankind's destiny. This indispensable power is given in the Cross as the spiritual fact and power in history, searching and judging to the last reality, gracious and saving to the uttermost eternity. If the world's history be the world's judgment, the Cross of Christ is the *nodus* of that judgment. The point may be clear. Reality is in morality; and morality lies in action, in history; and the need and the core of moral history, as we actually find things, is Redemption—the Gracious, Pardoning, Delivering God.

The new problem draws new depths and new resources out of the old answer. We want a God real, not only to our thought, our piety, our devotion, but to our life's action, private and social, industrial and national. Our first want is not a real religion but a real God as the practical moral power in life and society, whom to know is the solution of life and the consummation of the race. We do possess sincerity in our faith; it is reality we need—the absolute certainty that we are, amidst time, on the Rock Eternal, and the joyful power to place the holy God in eternal control of our experience and conduct. This is something we do not necessarily acquire by being satisfied with the historic evidence for every fact recorded in the New Testament. And when we do attain it, we feel that our experience is a function of the Gospel act in Christ, an energy of Christ living in us. We need, perhaps, more preachers who feel that their great contribution to Christian reality lies not in outward and public energies, but in the strenuous silence which goes less to make scholars than to master the Gospel word on the problems of personal and social life. The Reformers preached God as the gracious Forgiver of a world concerned about its sin. Well, we must preach the same grace of the Cross to a world less concerned about sin and more about society, a world casting about for a moral authority for the soul and the public. Each

need is met by the same Gospel and authority of redeeming grace. In the Cross grace to sin is one with judgment to wrong. In the Atonement the mercy that heals the heart is one with the final judgment that goes to the last reality of actual life. The last judgment took place in principle on the Cross. And perhaps it is the element of judgment contained in grace that the present hour needs most. It is Christ's insatiable, unsparing moral reality that this age needs to have preached to it more than His comfortable words. The note is as urgent in His death which we evade as in His teaching which we receive. And perhaps the form of message which the hour will hear is Christ's first word to men rather than His last—when He began by preaching the kingdom so severely gracious, and before He found that His great work for it was in the relation of its grace to sin. But the same word of exigent, generous holiness pervaded all—holiness, the supreme form of moral personality and action. The Redeemer is the Mediator (and the only Mediator) to us of a living, judging God, who works and weaves in all history, and saves it to eternal life through a world-tissue of moral crises centring in the Cross. Christ, in His historic and public work of judgment-grace, is the one ground of soul-certainty to us; for we have to do with a problem which is historic and social above all else, and which centres on the public issues of good and evil, sanctity and sin. It is a work reported by documents as a past actuality, but it is not therefore evidenced as present reality. The reality of life lies not in reason, but in action, experience, morality. It is ethical rather than rational. The last cognisable reality emerges in the moral world of our sin and our redemption, the world whose centre is the saving act of a God above all things holy—moral even to holiness. Is there a moral power in history? Is this identical with the last reality? Only the atoning redemption secures us in that faith. For the Cross is that power *in mice*. There God appears in history as Holy Saviour of our moral wreckage unto Eternal Life. The greatest fact of history is neither man's ruin nor his

struggle, neither the human tragedy nor the human epic, but the Gospel, the divine, composite, and continuous fact of God, sin, redemption, and eternal life—a holy God, a solitary, ruined race, a grace atoning, forgiving, redeeming, reconciling all, and an everlasting kingdom.

We must concentrate on God's act of grace rather than on Scripture as such. It is no longer enough to show that a certain position is Biblical, *i.e.* is found in the Bible. There are positions taken by Bible-writers which are not compatible with each other or with the Gospel. There are survivals, even in inspired men, of traditional and popular views which it was the business of revelation to correct and supersede. We must show that the position is not only Biblical but Christian, that it is in inner necessary connection with the grace in Christ. But even when that is done, all is not done. The revelation must be found to be not only Christian but true. The grace must be shown to correspond with the ultimate reality of human life at its most tragic and exigent. It must be in a form equal to coping with the most Hushed and demonic power of mind and will. Christ Himself is Christ for us, He is the very Son of God, because in His work of grace He is, by power of holy, loving will, moral master of the most titanic, Napoleonic wills in history, master of the superman, and one therefore with the last reality of the world. How is this to be shown? Must it be exhibited for every Christian? Certainly not for every Christian in a scientific and theological way. The humblest Christian's faith indeed rests on the final foundation of the world. It sets him on the Rock of Ages. What saved him was the world-salvation. But he may have little sense of the depth on which he rests. Yet in the message of the whole Church to the great world we must show that Christ in His saving act is identical with man's last reality of moral experience; that the judgment in the Cross is really the last, the ultimate judgment of God on human things, and that the grace there is our eternal destiny. And this must be set forth by the Church with a

view to the world, and not the individual merely—that is to say, theologically, and not religiously only.

The experience of the humble Christian cannot be transferred to become the conviction of another. Experience ought to be supplemented by demonstration of a more objective kind—our personal witness should be reinforced by some demonstration of the Spirit and of power. This may be the collective experience of the Church. Or it may be the authority of our first historic revelation in the person of Christ, with its unique effect on our last moral extremity. But there must be some means of making good the truth of our Christian faith beyond the limits of personal experience and its mere testimony. We must be in a position to go beyond “This He has done for me,” and declare “This He must be for you.” Otherwise we should be condemned, as so many disastrously are to-day, to a subjective individualism and its public inefficiency. We should be telling our experience with humility instead of preaching a Gospel with authority. Peter’s experience is to Paul but external testimony which does not carry divine authority. The Church is in trust of more than its own experience. It has an objective Gospel which called it into existence, and which found and changed both Peter and Paul; and a Holy Spirit which is not simply the sum of its experiences. The Church’s work can only be done as its origin came about—by a Gospel of grace to the conscience through a historic person and act objective to the conscience, yet welcomed and naturalised in the conscience as morally akin to conscience, nay, as being its Eternal self.

This is a theological gospel no doubt. And it must be heartily cultivated both by the pulpit and the pew. The pew must participate. And therefore such a gospel must not rest on the data of science, either physical or metaphysical. It must be based neither on the axioms of nature research nor in the recesses of reflection alone, but upon those moral foundations that underlie the practical world and the general conscience. The truth of Christianity must rest on a view of

life which starts with the primacy and finality of the moral, recognises the wreck of the moral, and presents the grand problem as the restitution of the moral. Christianity stands or falls as the religion of moral realism, and therefore (having regard to our actual state) of holy redemption. Let us not talk so much at this juncture of the divine beauty of Christ's character. Assure us of the divine reality of His Gospel. I am tired of beauty, and desperate about my own doing and undoing. "We tire of all things," says Comte, "of acting and of thinking, only not of loving." Seize me with what God's love and grace have done for me and my sin to the foundations of the moral world and the far reaches of holy eternity. It is in the conscience that we touch bottom and begin to rise. Neither Christian faith nor theology can do anything with the man who deliberately denies moral obligations and a moral universe. But, denied or admitted, these moral relations are every man's affair. In the moral world alone do we find every soul's final self. And Christianity is real as it appeals to that world, and gives it supreme effect. Christianity is more real than other religions, as it more deeply appeals to that world and its actual case. And especially as it takes note of the world's moral bankruptcy and derangement by sin; and as it effectively re-establishes upon the wreck the holiness of the moral idea—the holiness of God in Christ. The power that does that is the supreme authority and reality of the world.

"There, where one centre reconciles all things,  
The world's profound heart beats."

That is what is done in the redeeming work and Gospel of Christ. And the grace in Christ is the supreme authority to replace at last every power that has risen up, even in Christ's name, in its stead.

But how poor is the ethical training, the discipline in moral realities, supplied to those who are to be the leaders and representatives of the Church! How irrelevant to life's moral reality is much of their training! How flat, how phy-

siological, how unimaginative is much of the psychology! How devoid of human interest much of their theology! How little it is a part of their religion, how lightly dispensed with t How hard to get even them to think in moral categories, and take impregnable stand in moral finality! How often they are troubled by metaphysical, or even biological, considerations, in which they should only be interested. Among the studies preparatory to theology there is none one misses so much (apart from acquaintance with the New Testament) as a course in moral philosophy. Moral culture is not taken seriously, compared with intellectual or religious. Men do not learn to handle moral quantities. They are unfamiliar with the calculus differential to ethical ideas. They have no real schooling in moral thoughtfulness, moral categories, moral methods and processes, the moral imagination. Something is lacking, therefore, in their grasp of the Gospel, not only as a moral power, but as the focus of human conscience and the locus of human reality. And so they rush out to seek reality amid all kinds of energies and enterprises, which keep them busy and successful –and send leanness into their souls. Their ethic may be very genuine, but it only adheres to the Gospel, without being evolved from it. In some it replaces the Gospel.

I should welcome in Lhe curriculum of our theological colleges less attention to the details of textual criticism, and more given to the ideas of whole books, and the waxing import of the whole Bible. And I write with the sympathy of some whose duty lies in these detailed departments. It is quite necessary that students should learn by select passages the scientific methods of dealing with the text of Scripture. But it is more needful still that they should gain a greater familiarity than they seem to have with the whole field of Biblical ideas on the one hand, and with Moral Theology on the other. Too much of our theology is speculation instead of evangelical thought. It is thinking out *a* gospel instead of *the* Gospel, or it is pious phantasy, fruit tinned or sweetened, instead of fresh from the tree of life.



Men should learn these ideas and ethics as living things, as the fundamental powers not only of the Church, but of the historic soul of social man. They should learn them as becomes the students of the great preaching record which the Bible is. They should learn to find God's sermon, the Bible, more attractive and fertile in ideas than the volumes of sermons on which some preachers spend too much of their time at the cost of their originality.

“Only know  
That when half-gods go  
The Gods arrive.”

To be real, we must keep in touch with the last reality. To be original, we must keep in vital contact with originals. To build well, we should quarry much in the pit from which we were digged. Men should be taught in college how to do this for themselves when they are left to themselves. They should, with all their getting, get purviews of the widest, deepest Bible world, especially in relation to the chief problems of current culture and of actual life. They should study one book of Scripture thoroughly, and the whole Bible adequately. They should be discouraged from accumulating all kinds of extraneous degrees, and be made to concentrate on the degree that belongs to their work. A variety of academic distinctions in science, say, may still leave them juvenile in their religious mind, with the tactlessness of the commonplace, and a total lack of moral imagination. Half the time bestowed on Shakespere would have served them much better. No man is competent to be a teacher of the New Testament, or to handle for the people, as a minister should, the greatest matters of faith and mind, on the basis of an ordinary degree without theological training. I do not care what cases you quote. It is unjust to the Gospel to send out men to pick up theology out of casual reading and personal religion; for a young man may issue from college loaded with honours and with no Gospel at all—nothing beyond raw Christian piety. He has then to

experiment with a Church in acquiring convictions which should have been his message. He is apt to announce as discoveries things long left as debris in the route of discovery, and to parade as new what due knowledge of the past would have shown to be not only old but superannuated. It is not respectful to the Churches. It slackens their tone and their testimony. And in no other profession would it be tolerated. It would not be in business. I write, of course, of the settled pastor, not of his helper, the evangelist. Let the student, by all means, be taught in his philosophic work the great [dace science or literature occupies in the world of thought, but. only so that the whole world of thought and tragedy find its proper place in the moral world, and that again in the realm of the Gospel.

II. Besides moral concentration, we need also much simplification and popularising of faith. For popularity there must be simplification. The preacher must press a creed that every Christian can verify by his own experiences; and this creed is the faith in saving grace. The demand for simplicity is just, hut it has gone astray in many feeble directions which only dilute the Gospel in the effort to popularise it. The common idea of a simple Christianity reduces it to a natural Christianity refined and spiritualised. The elementary human emotions or sentiments are simply directed on Christ. Christ is admitted to the highest place in the circle of tender and family affections. But the simplicity which is in Christ is one thing; the simplicity in which Christ is, is another. The simplicity in Christ was for Paul sincerity of soul rather than simplicity of creed or affection. It was sincerity of soul towards a supernatural and saving Christ, rather than simplicity of belief about a natural and admirable Christ. It was a single-minded, whole-hearted personal trust in His redeeming grace, It was simple, as opposed to ritual, casuistry, and dialectic; it was not simple in the sense of being easy and natural to man. The Gospel is free, but not easy. To make life easier is not the object of the Gospel, only of the modern Church.

Grace is simple because inexplicable—as conscience is simple with its severe, inexplicable imperative. The natural man is lazy to spiritual things. For him simple means only effortless and instinctive. Love is natural and easy, so he reduces to love the supernatural and costly grace of God. Too many are offering the public a religion without moral tax—the poetry of suffering, the beauty of sacrifice, the charm of holiness, without the positivity, the cruciality of the Cross. But faith is not an instinct or a taste. The Gospel does not appeal to the instincts, in spite of the modern pulpit. Christianity is not an instinct. The instinctive man is enmity against God, against the Gospel God with His rebuke, and demand, and absolute claim. To one who comes from a simple instinctive life Christianity is an act of hard faith. It is hard to think shame of oneself. It is hard to believe in the kingdom of God as the sure issue of history with recent Russia before our eyes, or war, pestilence, famine, earthquakes, and volcanoes. And when we master these things, it is hard to live the life of the faith we have won. But yet how simple in its severity and in its goodness the Gospel is! How entire the sincerity of Christ, how profound His reality! How hard for human nature to realise! Upon such evangelical simplicity the permanent popularity of the Gospel must rest—on the simplicity of evil men converted, not of innocent little children, or of dear good men, but on the simplicity of those who have tasted grace because they have lasted sin. All the curse of the world is in sin, and all blessing is in the sinner's Gospel.

Religious experience is very well, and knowledge of the human heart and its literature and art is very well; but Christian faith is faith neither in our experience nor in our energies; and it is not preoccupation with them, but rather faith in something external and given, faith not in experience but in something experienced, faith which lives in definite Christian categories prescribed by the nature of God's historic gift, and not by our native sympathies. And if we become detached

in practice from that something given us in the Bible alone, all our Christian experience and Church life will only leave us in coterie of decadent and false sentiment. We may try to become more natural and human in our religious vocabulary, but in the process we may be making a present of the new nature to the old. and making Christianity but a refined humanity, with tasteful or tender affections. And far better for us is the broad, blunt, forceful, popular voice than the voice of an ethereal coterie. Nothing demoralises our word more than the spirit of the coterie. We lose not only Bagehot's "note of animal passion," but the note of moral reality and the seal of spiritual power. And no grace of manner, no ubiquitous energy, no æsthetic philtre can take the place of that. Not all the growth of humane and sympathetic piety can give us the moral control which flows from the Gospel alone. Christianity has indeed a native tendency on one side of it towards this Catholic tone of culture and charm, delicacy and finish, like a cathedral service. And here it has been the greatest of all contributors to the diffusion of a fine civilisation. But culture is not Christianity. The former is often but the elder brother in the parable. (I have been surprised at the number of cultivated Christian people who have frankly said that their sympathies were all with the elder brother, and not with the prodigal, where Christ's certainly were.) Why has not the moral progress of Europe kept pace with its culture, whether of science, taste, or manners? Why is ethic so far behind civilisation? I recall the saying of a great Christian thinker who declares that in the matter of social morality there has been no progress at all by comparison. To be sure we do not walk our prisoners of war through the streets of the capital in the wake of the conqueror. We do not torture our criminals, and we do not beat our wives. And many more horrible things we no longer do. But progress in civilisation is not progress in virtue. We have only to think of the atmosphere of the old Italian republics, brilliant, elegant, cruel, and vicious to

the last degree. We have but to remember how, when Rome mastered Greece, she was impressed with the rascality of Greek commerce as much as with the charm of Greek culture. I could quote, if need were, the weighty opinion of Ranke to the like effect. Progress in humanity is not necessarily progress in morality. It is progress in individual sentiment or taste more than in public ethic—as we may note in the public discussions of any great social question among ourselves to-day. It may be kindness more than rectitude, and charity more than justice; just as the Cross comes to be loving sacrifice more than holy atonement. And why, one may ask, has there been this disheartening disparity between the one development and the other? There are, of course, some reasons in human nature. *Æsthetic* culture is delightful, moral culture is painful. One tends to self-expression, the other to self-discipline. A good conscience, too, cannot be bequeathed like property or culture. But the great reason is that the whole Church in Europe has been more or less tongue-tied with its Gospel.

Institutions, which are so valuable for ethics, may also kill ethics. And in this case they have, at least, maimed them. Theologies, Churches, Biblicisms, and Pietisms, much as they may have helped, have here arrested or deflected the moral power of Christianity. In a word, Catholicism has lamed the native moral power of the Gospel. By Catholicism is meant here love detached from evangelical grace, order from personal sanctity, progress from inspiration. It called out the saving protest of the Reformation at one decisive point, and it must continue to call it out for the sake of society. More is meant, of course, by Catholicism than simply the Roman Church. I mean the supremacy of the institutional or the humane element, the “Pelagian, Franciscan, Erastian” element (as Harnack calls it), in any form of Christianity. I include the Catholic survivals in some Protestant Orthodoxies and in many Protestant Humanisms. The humane subjectivism of the present hour threatens us now as the scientific subjectivism of the Orthodoxies did once.

How very many cultivated Christian people have no idea where they are in belief! And how many of these, again, do not know how ignorant of their ignorance they are! We are often invited to let learning alone, and produce more practical ministers and clergy. Have those who talk so any idea of the extent to which practical activity covers intrinsic bewilderment among Christian people? This active nescience is a frame of mind that must tell upon our Churches both in pulpit and pew, that reduces both to a sympathetic brotherhood of uncertainty and incapacity before the problem of the world; that robs the Gospel of authority, the pulpit of moral dignity, and the people of the guidance to which they are entitled; that lowers insensibly the tone of our communities, and allows the meaner interests to raise their head; that deprives the Church's word to the world of weight and power, and that easts the public for guidance upon the publicists and litterateurs. It moves the centre of gravity from the mind and conscience to the energies and sentiments. And, however harmless that transfer might be in some oases, in the case of a religion which is nothing if not the regeneration of the conscience it is a very ominous thing. I must sometimes, I fear, have seemed to speak without due respect of the sympathetic element in our faith and work. Far be this from me. But, in the first place, those can often do most with sympathy for others who have learnt to do without it for themselves. And, in the second and weightier place, I have nothing even to hint against this precious thing except when it is made the essence of Christianity and the substitute of schooled faith with moral intelligence. To set over a Christian community a man who has but felt and never measured the Gospel, whose only qualifications are raw zeal, ready piety, and fluent sympathies—however sincere he may be, is this not treason to the Gospel, injustice to the Church, and cruelty to souls in the end? Is it not sending nurses when we need doctors, and comforters when we need apostles and critics? We were saved not by broad sympathy, but by deep and judging

sanctity. And the sin we are saved from is not a malady which calls for kindly healing, but a revolt which needs to be reduced by moral conflict, labour, and sorrow on some one's part. Our sin is not simply alienation of sympathy, but rebellion against duty and loyalty to a Father's authority. If faith stagger, and lose its vision or strength in a haze of piety, no development of our human sympathies will do more than mitigate an evil it cannot cure.

"Fools to brood and dream of casement  
When a cure alone could ease."

Sympathy may even be acute enough to see and deplore the real lack which it is not strong or profound enough to supply. Sympathy even with Christ—I will go farther, and say the very love of Christ—might be so cultivated as to cast entirely into the shade faith in the Redeemer and His Redemption. So that the whole economy of Atoning Grace, while not denied, is only kept as in some houses you find the old spinning-wheel kept in the warm drawing-room.

III. A brief word as to the emancipation we need. We want no reactionary movement, but light and air. What a release from the Pharisaic tradition and its detail was brought by Paul! What a liberty came with the gift of the Holy Ghost! What a relief Luther offered the world from the farrago of the Church! And how freely we can sit to much exacting but outlying belief when we are secured in the central grace of the Gospel! It is not indifference, we all know, that is the mother of toleration, but conviction. And it is only the certainty of faith in grace that can give us freedom of thought about God. The believing mind is the clear mind. Devotion brings with it a wondrous lucidity and largeness. It is only a secure faith that can give a free account of itself in theology, and leave the like freedom to others. It is only the soul freed by the Gospel that is free to think with power about ultimate things. The Church must be liberal as well as positive—nay, liberal because positive. What makes it positive makes it liberal, and nothing else

can. Liberty is the native manner of a grace whose nature is to redeem.

And to concentrate on the article of grace alone would enlarge the Church also to the freedom of a true comprehension. No other principle of comprehension will make more than a *mélange*; but this is an organising principle both positive and flexible. What penetrates most co-ordinates most. All doctrines in a Church are free which are compatible with free grace, and not merely found in the same hook. A closed system that prescribes all belief is a great load. The burden of an elaborate corpus of doctrine is greater than the gain from its positiveness of definition. Even the Roman Church could not carry Thomas's *Summa* if it were dogmatised in a body, and declared as of obligation for faith. But a centre that creates life gives liberty with it. And the grace that created doctrine can continually re-create it. Some liberal Churches have been seeking rational freedom at the cost of evangelical. They have pursued freedom of thought and not of soul. But rational freedom is a narrow Held after all, Thought cannot be free, and should not. It is limited by fact and reality. We are only free as our master-reality makes us free. And that reality is the person of God in action in Christ. Our limit is but our fuller life. The soul alone can be free, and free only as released by grace into communion with the infinite person and saving purpose of its God.

P. T. FORSYTH.