

## THE REFORMATION IN LIFE: PERSONAL.

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I TAKE it that the purpose of the last paper of this Conference is to relate the subject, which we have had under discussion, to present circumstances. I am not, therefore, going to devote myself so much to the teachings of the Reformers concerning the personal life of the Christian, but rather to face our life to-day, in the light of the Reformation, and see how it should be affecting our individual living and conduct.

When the Reformation gave the Englishman liberty of conscience and freedom of action in the cause of Religion, it gave him something further. It laid upon him the obligation of using this liberty wisely and efficiently if he were to show to the world the full value of the truths which the Reformation had once again brought to light.

For the purpose of indicating the main principles which underlie this obligation, I am dividing the subject under four heads :

### *I. The Reformation gave us a personal Access with a devotion to be practised.*

In the Pre-Reformation Church the layman had little or nothing to do on his own initiative. The priest stood between him and God. Provided that he attended the services as ordered by his priest, provided that he told his beads and said the round of prayers which he had been taught, all was well. What the prayers and services might mean was a very secondary matter. When and how often they came into his life, was a question which the Church alone determined. The only thing of account to the ordinary layman was that he was in line with the orders of his priest.

When, through the Open Bible and the teaching of the Reformation, the individual found that there was a New and Living way opened for him into the presence of God "by the Blood of Jesus," his practical devotional life had to be transformed. Now he was his own master. No priest would carefully regulate and scrutinize his inner life of devotion—though his minister, no doubt, would be glad to provide him with advice if he were to seek it.

The truth of "entering into the Holiest" by the new and Living Way, is one of the mightiest revelations of the Scriptures in which all true Evangelicals and Protestants rejoice. But practically—How many of us are day by day finding the truth a fact and a present experience in our daily life?

I am certain that everyone of those who is proving it a reality will be found to be practising some definite plan of Devotion in their daily life. Still further they will be found to be those whose lives are showing forth the fragrance of Christ, and the glorious liberty of the children of God. This paper is, however, headed personal, and it is vital that we face this matter personally. May we then ask ourselves, is this personal access into the presence of God a reality, and a dominating fact in our own lives? Each of us clergy present, may we ask ourselves, are there many in our congregations to whom this fact is a daily living power?

If in facing this great truth we are conscious of coming far short, is not the reason this—that we have been abusing our liberty? The fact, that in our own personal lives there has not been any definite and ordered devotional practice? In our parishes, is not the weakness of many of the Christian laity in this respect due to the fact that they have never been guided along the path of organizing their devotional life?

It might be a most healthy thing for us here to tell the time which we set apart daily, on deliberate principle, to pray for the work of God committed to our charge, and also for the worship of the Almighty. How easy it is to live on for years, regarded as a man of prayer and devotion by others, and yet in one's inner being to know oneself to be an utter hypocrite in this regard.

To illustrate my meaning I will merely quote here from a book entitled *The Prayer Life* by Andrew Murray :

“ In 1898, there were two members of the Presbytery, New York, who attended the Northfield Conference for the deepening of the spiritual life. They returned to their work with the fire of a new enthusiasm. They endeavoured to bring about a Revival in the entire Presbytery. In a meeting which they held, the chairman was guided to ask the brethren a question concerning their Prayer Life: ‘ Brethren,’ said he, ‘ let us to-day make confession before God and each other. It will do us good. Will every one who spends half an hour every day with God in connection with his work, hold up a hand?’ One hand was held up. He made a further request: ‘ All who thus spend fifteen minutes, hold up a hand.’ Not half the hands were up. Then he said: ‘ Prayer, the working power of the Church of Christ, and half the workers make hardly any use of it! All who spend five minutes hold up hands.’ All hands went up. But one man came later with the confession that he was not quite sure whether he spent five minutes in prayer every day. ‘ It is,’ said he, ‘ a terrible revelation of how little time I spend with God.’ ”

The Reformers and other Evangelicals such as Charles Simeon, and John Wesley had set times for prayer. They had often to fight to get the times. It meant discipline, it meant foregoing sleep and many claims in life. But they put the definite practising of their devotional life in the first place in their lives. And these were the men who did exploits.

A system of rules has always been distasteful to the Evangelical, savouring as it is thought to be of all that the Reformation removed. We have lost ground for too long by such a belief. Some system is essential. And I am absolutely certain that, if, as the result of this Conference, we

all were to order and systematize our devotional lives afresh or for the first time, so that this personal "access" became a living reality, we should do much to prove again in our day the glory and power of the Reformation. And this leads us naturally to our next heading :

II. *The Reformation gave us a personal Liberty with a discipline to be adopted.*

We have already thought of this liberty and the discipline which it calls for in the Devotional sphere ; but it is obvious that this discipline should extend into every department of life. It must start in the inner life, but as the liberty, which the Reformation heralded, reached every phase of human experience, so too, it is essential that the discipline which it demands should be felt in the daily walk and conduct.

In the Cadet Corps at my public school the recruits were invariably the show platoon ! Under the stern discipline of a sergeant-major from the Coldstream Guards they had to obey to the letter. The signallers, left largely to develop on their own, in virtual liberty, were by far the most inefficient. They did nothing to commend the corps.

The serious thing to-day is that there would seem to be far too many free-lance "signallers" in the ranks of the Evangelicals. They rejoice in the liberty—but they badly need a spiritual sergeant-major !

The names of Simeon and Wesley have already been mentioned. The glory and power of the Evangelical Revival was largely due to the fact that the leaders, and their followers too, were Methodists in very deed. They lived each day according to a set plan, and each evening they closely examined themselves to see how it had been spent.

Here, for instance, are the rules which Fletcher of Madeley, Wesley's friend, drew up for his guidance and daily examination :

1. Did I awake spiritual, and was I watchful in keeping my mind from wandering this morning ?
2. Have I this day got nearer to God in prayer, or have I given way to a lazy and idle spirit ?
3. Has my faith been weakened by unwatchfulness or quickened by diligence ?
4. Have I walked by faith, and seen God in all things ?
5. Have I denied myself *all* unkind words and thoughts ? Have I delighted to see others preferred ?
6. Have I made the most of my time, as far as I had light, strength, and opportunity ?
7. Have I kept the issues of my heart in the means of grace, so as to profit by them ?
8. What have I done this day for the souls and bodies of God's dear saints ?
9. Have I laid out anything to please myself when I might have saved the money for the cause of God ?

The personal Liberty which the Reformation has brought us, demands some such definite scheme of individual examination—say once a week. And I am quite certain that if all here, and all those who will be reached by the message of the Conference, were each week to examine their actions, thoughts, use of the tongue, reading and relationships with others, a spiritual movement would at once begin. If they

were willing to learn the lessons of the failures, and put right anything which might be advisable, their witness would at once begin to touch the thirty-and-a-half million in our land to-day, who have no use for the church and organized religion.

This discipline will also have to include the Matter of Time. Few people realize that the loss of an hour a day means the total irrecoverable loss of slightly over  $45\frac{1}{2}$  eight hour working days in the course of a year. This may sound dramatic, but actually the loss of time is far higher in most lives. With liberty in the use of their spare time, many Christians have no definite period allocated each day for their Prayer and Bible-reading, their Study and Recreation. It would be both a revelation and a profitable exercise if for one week we set down the amount of time we gave to the various activities which make up our days. The keeping of a careful journal of each half hour and how it was spent, and how much time was wasted, was a practice which made the early Methodists those who redeemed the time in very truth.

Never will we be able to give the essential time to prayer, study and work, unless we make it by definite planning. Never shall we fulfil the trust which we received through the Reformation, if our lives are merely drifting, as far as time is concerned.

The matter of Money was touched on in the questionnaire used by Fletcher ; but how little do the majority of Christians practise any definite discipline in the realm of their possessions? Because they now have liberty concerning the amount given to God's work, the minimum—in keeping with respectability—often marks the limit of their gift.

I was at a church, not long ago, where the deputation in appealing for support, referred to the fact that many a business man will readily spend a guinea at the Golf Club on Saturday and feel it generous if he puts a 1s. instead of his usual 6d. into the plate on Sunday. The collection was double the amount usually given, that Sunday. And seeing that the preacher said little or nothing about his Society, it was obvious that many of those present had seen, perhaps for the first time, that it should always be the individual Christian that feels the pinch, and *never* God's work.

Every department of Evangelical endeavour is being held up to-day at home and abroad because of the lack of funds. It really comes to this—God's work is checked and hampered, largely because Christians are either neglecting or are unwilling to review their manner of living and annual expenditure periodically, so that it never becomes out of due proportion to that given to God's work.

May I put in one further practical plea that in this personal liberty which we enjoy through the Reformation, we should, through real discipline, seek to commend the Gospel in all things. The delay and failure to answer letters is an old and painful subject, and so is the careless settling of bills months after they become due—or never. Yet, perhaps especially to a secretary, they appear to be very common failings amongst Evangelical churchmen. The development of Accuracy, Neatness and Punctuality requires discipline—but how essential and worth while. If Evangelicals far and wide would conscientiously

accept for themselves a stern discipline in these connections, it would open the eyes of many business men to the practical value of the Reformation message of Salvation.

III. *The Reformation gave us a personal responsibility with a duty to be fulfilled.*

There is an easy way of living a Religious Life. It is to be linked with such a Church as Rome where the definite tenets of the faith are clearly laid down, and must be accepted, without scope for thought or argument, because they are settled by the Church. A layman also, linked in such a way, may speak for his Church, but can never bring another individual into living touch with Christ and His Church. That is a duty belonging to the priest alone.

We glory in the fact that the Reformation established the right of private judgment ; that the open Bible became available to all men, so that within its pages the individual might search and discover the Truth for himself. But personally are we doing it ? Are we " able to give an answer to every man of the hope that is within us ? "

One of the tragedies of the past few years appears to be the way in which step by step Evangelicals have given way before the returning tide of pre-Reformation teaching and practice. Constantly practices are admitted and given currency, solely because their widespread use is held to make them devoid of meaning. Yet it is surely a curious logic which maintains that because a practice becomes fairly general that it therefore becomes both harmless, and one that should be adopted for the sake of uniformity.

An example of this fact lies to-day in the practice of the Eastward Position in the Holy Communion Service, and the customs which nearly always accompany it. There is no doubt that those in the Church who are working against the Reformation settlement have thought out their position on this point, and have a definite teaching on it. In tracts and books they have stated constantly that it both teaches the sacerdotal view of the priesthood which they hold, and also is an essential in their service, if these tenets are to be proclaimed to the congregation by *action* as well as by oral teaching.

On the other hand the reason generally given by Evangelicals who adopt these customs is that the practice has become so widespread that it has lost its significance. Rarely do we hear any argument based upon the study of history or liturgiology. It is to them merely a matter of expediency. Prevailing custom, an aid to devotion, and an æsthetic appeal are held to be the only matters of importance in determining the issue. Surely, if this had been the attitude of men like Latimer, Cranmer, and Ridley there would have been no Reformation and its martyrs.

I have raised this one example, not in order to bring about a heated discussion on this point, but to illustrate from an issue which is facing Evangelicals to-day, that many are not fulfilling the duty which the Reformation lays upon them.

And if this is true about the lack of knowledge on this point the same thing is true on the majority of vital though controversial problems

in our Protestant heritage. When some matter is raised in chapter meetings, rural-decanal and diocesan conferences, all too often the Evangelical remains silent (if he has even taken the trouble to be present) because he has not the knowledge with which to put his case.

We glory in the Reformation standard set in the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Book of Common Prayer. Can we but blame ourselves, if we lose them, when they seem to mean so little to us that we utterly neglect the responsibility of studying and knowing them, and boldly standing and speaking for them as occasion may arise. Clergy present may we ask ourselves personally are we teaching our people these great Reformation principles? In our ministry are we progressively leading our people on, so that they have a firm and intelligent grasp of these great truths? Are we encouraging them to go forth and speak and stand for them in church meetings and conferences to which they may be elected?

In the material published by the National Church League, the Young Churchmen's Movement together with other Evangelical Societies which are issuing reliable literature, I am certain that the majority of the machinery for definite instruction and Evangelical advance is ready and waiting. Yet how little this material is used! The demand is waning rather than increasing. The Catholic Truth Societies boast that they sell two million copies of their penny and twopenny booklets annually in England alone. Every Roman Church has its book-rack carefully set out, and kept bright. Yet how few Evangelical parishes run bookstalls and keep them up-to-date. How few Evangelical Clergy are circulating the literature amongst their church members, and encouraging the reading by definite courses of sermons along the themes covered by them.

There is another side also to this responsibility. The Reformation gave to the individual Christian the Ministry of Reconciliation. The words of John, xv. 16, "Ye have not chosen Me but I have chosen you and ordained you that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain," come as a statement of fact to layman as well as minister.

Let us apply this personally. Christ's purpose for you, is that you should be bearing fruit. Are you? A friend of mine, speaking at a meeting of younger Clergy—at which I happened to be taking the chair—stopped in the midst of his address with the words, "Will you all take out a piece of paper and a pencil, and put down on it the name of the last person whom you have been used to win for Christ. Then put against this the date. When was it? This year? Last year? Can it be that some of you would have to say, Never?" Sitting as I was, facing the audience, I may say that the expression on the faces of many was a study. The cause was this—that a number, when it came to a matter of black and white and definite names, had nothing to write. They were always hoping to touch souls, but actually the days and years had slipped by without any definite results.

Going further may I ask the clergy present if they are really building up a band of soul-winners in their parishes? I am certain that the only thing which will reach and win England now, is an

**Indigenous Church.** The clergy alone can never touch the whole country. Their main responsibility must be to gather round them, and then send out, Christians in the fellowship of their Church who are winning souls, so that they may become true Fellow-workers in the task of reaching the parish.

It is being done in some parishes. It should be a fact in every parish where the Evangel is known, believed, and preached. I think of Grantee parishes of the C.P.A.S. where "cottage" meetings are being held in tenement buildings and homes in new housing areas. These are being conducted solely by members of the Congregation, and are reaching "outsiders" and are being followed by definite results. I think of other Grantee parishes where the vicars have adopted the principle of the communist "cell," and have used it most successfully for the training of soul-winners. A group of five Christians is set to work as a "cell." They meet from time to time, on their own, for prayer over those whom they are seeking to win, together with discussion of their experiences in personal work since last they met. When any of the "cell" are instrumental in reaching another, that new one is linked to the "cell" and joins in the individual witness work. The vicar only steps in when the "cell" has doubled itself and numbers ten. Then he splits it in half, and the two "cells" continue on the same method.

Surely the majority of parishes would be able to start one "cell." And if, after a year's work, the "cell" had doubled, and the vicar had ten people, who had really got the vision that they were called to be witnesses, and who had had the joy and experience of winning a soul to Christ, he would have something in his parish which would continue whether he were there or not. He would have a living organism producing more possibly in the way of results than years of arduous individual sermonizing and parochial routine.

As Protestants and Evangelicals we have a personal responsibility for the Gospel and our heritage. May God find us in this hour ready and willing for the hard work, even the change of method and outlook, so that we may be fulfilling faithfully our duty to God, our Nation, our Church, and our fellow-men.

#### *IV. The Reformation gave us a personal Saviour and Indweller with a dynamic to be demonstrated.*

My time has all but gone, but as we close this conference let us remember especially that all our work and testimony must be linked to the Living Saviour and the Indwelling Spirit. Without Him, known and proved in heart and life, we are without hope and can do nothing. The Reformation brought to the fore, as the most vital question which every man must face, "What then shall I do with Jesus Who is called the Christ?"

Everything commences with the fact of knowing Him as Redeemer and Sin-bearer. The Open Bible brought the personal challenge of the Cross home to the Individual. The first question that every honest person must ask is: "Do I know Him as *my* Sin-bearer, and

redeemer?" Can I say with Paul of old: "He loved *me* and gave Himself for *me*?"

But that is only the beginning. It is to such, that the Risen Saviour comes saying: "Ye shall receive *Power*, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses."

We live in a day of Dictatorships. A day when Might is once again being hailed to be the only Right. We live in a day when science so-called, and certain psychological teachings would seek to remove the miraculous from the history and work of Christianity.

The world is waiting for Facts. The world is waiting to see a Power which can transform individuals and through them a Nation which may prove again that Right is Might.

These are days of destiny, when the world is in the melting-pot. If we go forth from this Conference, thankful for the Reformation and the Scriptures, instructed but content to slip back into our old habits, ruts, and undisciplined ways of life, the day is *lost* as far as we are concerned.

Doors in the Home and Mission Field will soon be closed for ever if the men and money are not soon forthcoming. Revival alone will bring them. In the year after Moody's mission in London the income of the C.P.A.S. increased by £11,000, and remained at that figure for years. Foreign Missionary Societies were effected in exactly the same way. Men and women soon followed to fill the gaps in both the home and foreign fields.

The war-clouds will soon burst over the world, unless through Revival God brings our nation back to Himself, so that it may again take the lead, which it did in bygone days, through national prayer and righteousness, in evangelizing the sin-sick nations.

Men around us are being challenged and won day-by-day to this or that Ism or Ology which claims to supply individual and international peace and prosperity and power. In the days of the early Church, the Reformation, and Evangelical Revival, men and women were compelled to face the claims of Christ by the demonstration of His power which they saw at work in the Church. It must be so to-day.

A personal experience of Pentecost alone will enable us to meet the needs of the hour, and translate the Reformation truths into dynamic facts for the present.

*Even* as we meet here, God is working in various parts of the Mission Field in reviving power. This fact alone disproves the cry of the pessimist who declares that matters spiritually must steadily grow worse and worse. In Ruanda, China, and elsewhere God has been bringing native Christians, and through them the missionaries, to face the barrenness, powerlessness and lack of discipline in their lives. In many cases they have had to devote days to waiting on God in order that they might be broken, emptied, cleansed, and filled. But how well worth while! From these bands of waiting Christians, who were willing to pay the price, has gone forth the power of the Indwelling Spirit, so that heathenism and indifference has been broken down and Revival has come.



The question which this conference brings is—shall it be so with us? Everything depends on whether we are willing to pay the price. It will mean heart-searching, and much time for waiting on God. It will mean sacrifice, stern discipline, and possibly a thorough readjustment of our lives, our study, and our work.

Christian discipleship is not an easy thing. When Garibaldi went forth to free Italy, he won through because he had behind him men who had whole-heartedly answered this challenge of his :

“ I offer you hardship, rags, thirst, sleepless nights, footsores in the long marches, privations innumerable, and VICTORY in the noblest cause that ever asked you.”

Christ calls you to-night to the same uncompromising dedication :

“ If any man come after Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple ” (Luke xiv. 26, 27, 33).

Our Lord, Who won the Victory in the days of the Reformation is able to do it to-day. He is abundantly able to build up here, through us, a Church which shall Evangelize to a Finish. The question then, which each of us must *personally* face is—shall we let Him ?

*Brotherhood Economics*, by Toyohiko Kagawa (Student Christian Movement Press, 5s. net), is the latest work of the great Japanese Christian leader who has put his Christianity into practice in the most convincing way by living a life of poverty in the slums and sharing with the poorest their hardships.

In this book he has set out the theme of four lectures delivered in America on Christian brotherhood and economic reconstruction. He believes that it is possible to reach a Christian social order, and he explains the nature of the opposition that has to be encountered, and the spirit of Christian brotherhood by which alone a perfect system of co-operation can be attained. The book is full of interesting facts drawn from many sources and illustrating the many schemes that have been put forward for better economic conditions and the causes of their failure. His conclusion is that peace will come only when the consciousness of redemptive love as manifested on the Cross permeates the life of international economy through brotherhood love in co-operative movements.

The Rev. John Burr, M.A., in the *Prayer of Prayers* (Allenson & Co., 2s. 6d. net), provides an interesting study of the Lord's Prayer in which he analyses each petition and sets out with clearness the fullness of meaning which may be found in phrases that are very familiar and appear quite simple. The treatment of the subject provides ample material for the use of teachers or preachers.