

The Church of the Future

BY REV. KERR BOYCE TUPPER, D. D.

And the kingdom and the dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the saints of the Most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.—Dan. 7: 27

Around the grand mosque of Damascus there clusters a vast accumulation of history. On the spot where it stands today, after a lapse of nearly 1,400 years there was originally erected, in the first century of our era, a heathen temple. In the middle of the fourth century this temple was destroyed by the Roman general, Theodosius the Great, and on its ruins, in the beginning of the fifth century, Arcadius, the elder son of Theodosius, built a Christian house of worship. This latter house, though for 300 years the Cathedral of Damascus, became in the eighth century a Moslem possession, and for one thousand years it has been used as a Mohammedan mosque. No visit to Damascus is quite complete without a sight of this historic structure. The most interesting feature, however, of this curious building is not its age, nor its history, nor its present prominence, but rather a single sentence engraved above the vestibule. The inscription is in Greek characters and reads thus: "Thy kingdom, O Christ, is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations." There, on this Mohammedan mosque, and after ten centuries of Moslem occupation, cut deep in the enduring stone, the Christian record remains—a record of faith, of hope, and of confidence on the part of the Damascus Christians in the ultimate triumph of the Kingdom of God.

The faith of the Damascenes is our faith today. Almost 2,000 years have rolled away since Jesus Christ opened in Bethlehem the marvellous scene of divinity in humanity, and still the church of his grace abides. Other kingdoms have perished, mowed down by the restless scythe of time—Babylon, Media, Macedonia, Persia, Syria, Egypt, Greece, Rome,—swept away almost as though it had never flourished, while the church founded on the rock by Mary's Son lives and grows.

The golden age of the church is not in the yesterday of the past, nor in the today of the present, but in the tomorrow of the future. As Whittier so well puts it:

"All the good the past had
Remains to make our own time glad."

With this deeply-embedded conviction I speak on "The Church of the Future" in its relation to six distinct doctrines and duties: Worship, the Bible, Jesus Christ, Sociology, Christian Unity and World-wide Evangelization. Each of these has vital relations to personal character, social duty, ecclesiastical development and Christian attainment.

1. In the first place, what will be the attitude of the church of the future in relation to public worship? With all confidence may we not say that the church, come what may, will never cease to worship? The worshipful impulse is as deep as it is universal, as pervasive as it is prevalent. Worshipfulness is a differentiating characteristic of the rightly constituted soul, and this instinctive worshipful impulse will be more intelligently educated and more reverently developed in the future days of Christianity's evolution. With the developing years shall come to the Church of God clearer visions and broader outlooks, and a deepened sense of righteousness, with a profounder awe in the presence of spiritual realities; pleasing, eternity-piercing worship in the hearts of God's children; more of reverence and less of realism, more of humility and less of hollowiness, more of fellowship and less of formality, more of real life service and less of mere lip service, everywhere the conviction borne that "God cares more for the breaking heart of the returning prodigal than for all the misereres of chanting Pharisees." The Church of the future, I say, will be more reverent to God and truth than the Church of the past, catching more and more of the spirit of intelligences in heaven, who make the corridors on high ring with their exultant acclamations.

2. In the second place, what will be the attitude of the church of the future in relation to the Bible as a final and authoritative revelation of God's will and way to men? Of all the books that fill our libraries and thrill our hearts this is the most wonderful. It is the fullest and richest treasure of divine wisdom and human knowledge. All books, it has been said, are of two classes—books made from other books, and books from which other books are made, and to the latter class, in a pre-eminent degree, belongs this Word of God. Not a single volume, but sixty-six volumes; not a single author, but forty authors; not the product of a single year, but the product of 1,600 years; not with one birthplace, but with many birthplaces—on the bank of the Nile, in the Arabian desert, in the land of Promise, in Asia Minor, in classical Greece and imperial Rome; not dealing with a single theme, but with all themes, biography and ethics, philosophy and poetry, romance and religion; not the offspring of the human mind, but of him in whom are gathered all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. And it came to the truest and most intelligent supporters of the old Book that things are shaping themselves today, as never before, for unlimited victories for the

Word of God. Certain facts and conditions there are which appear a sure prelude to a superb Biblical renaissance; the publication and distribution of the revised Scriptures, the profound delving and exhaustive research of historical critics, the patient investigation of modern science; the recent discovery and explorations of ancient cities by faithful archaeologists, and, along with all this, the growing intelligence of the modern Christian Church, which is rejecting, as never before, man-made creeds and formulas. Fear not, brethren, the controversies now raging about the Bible.

The ages of theological agitation and discussion have always been the ages of progress and promise. Better the agitations of the days of Augustine, and Athanasius, and Luther, than the tranquillity of the middle ages. Because of present-day controversies many interpretations of the Bible must perish, many age long theories and human traditions, but the Bible as it came from God will abide.

3. In the third place, what will be the attitude of the church of the future in relation to Jesus Christ, as God's Son and man's Saviour?

Here we confront the great problem of Christianity today, than which no greater can ever arise—the Lord of Glory; his miraculous incarnation, his spotless character, his transcendent teaching, his majestic deeds, his sacrificial death, his glorious resurrection, his radiant ascension, his position at the right hand of the majesty on high, and his strong abiding presence in human life and history. A truer and more pregnant sentence the great Christlieb never uttered than when he wrote that Christ is Christianity, as Plato was never Platonism, and Mohammed never Mohammedanism, and Buddha never Buddhism. We often speak of Christianity's unparalleled power, and yet let us remember that, since the stream cannot rise higher than its source, Jesus Christ is the living personal force, because of whom all ages and races have been agitated and convulsed. Recall the splendid words of Dr. Wace in his notable controversy with Huxley.

"The strength of the Christian Church is not in its creed. But in its Christ. They see him there; they hear his voice; they listen and they believe in him. It is not so much that they accept certain doctrines taught by him as that they accept himself, their Lord and their God. It is with this living, personal force that agnosticism has to deal, and as long as the gospels present him to human hearts, so long will the Christian faith and Christian Church, in their main characteristics, be vital and permanent forces in the Christian world."

Here, brethren, is, and ever shall be Christianity's glory, the Son of God and the Son of Mary—the Christ who on earth matched every sermon with a service and every doctrine with a doing; the Christ who in heaven is enthroned amid native scenes and clothed with divine authority, recognized more and more in the church and world as the King of kings and the Lord of lords. And this exalted Christ, let us never forget, is the once crucified Christ. More in the church of the future, if possible, than in the church of the past will the cross be emphasized and glorified. The richest theme of the church's future will be God in Christ reconciling the world unto himself. Much of the preaching in our day, even in evangelical pulpits, is struck to a lower key. It is Christ, to be sure, but not Christ crucified. It deals much with the life of Christ, in its tender human sympathies—the Christ whose face was sculptured benevolence, whose hand was friendship a symbol, whose eye was liquid sympathy for all human burdens and woes; much with the works of Christ as the pattern and inspiration of all helpful doing; much with the words of Christ as a divine philosophy, with heights to which no human imagination has ascended, depths which no human plummet has fathomed, and breadths which no human mind has compassed. Now, these are well enough in their place, but they are not central and fundamental. They are incidental rather than essential, ephemeral rather than eternal, facts rather than truths, mere chip-pings, as it were, from the grand corner-stone on which is reared the everlasting and everglorious superstructure of divine glory and human redemption. "Jesus Christ and him crucified" is the central, fundamental, energizing truth of the Christian system—not Christ the perfect man, nor Christ the elevating teacher, nor Christ the self-sacrificing philanthropist, but Christ "mighty to save" through the unlimited power of his redeeming blood. In Christ and in him alone find we a personal revelation and a satisfactory demonstration of an atoning sacrifice for sin.

4. In the fourth place, what will be the attitude of the church of the future to the problem sociological?

A most practical question this, also peculiarly suited to our day and generation. We live in a stern age of fact; an age in which as a scholarly master of sociology has well said, society is coming to itself and emphasizing sociology, social ethics, social politics; an age in which religion means the salvation of the soul, but also, as it meant with Jesus, the feeding of the hungry, the clothing of the naked, the healing of the sick, the visiting of prisoners, and relief, comfort, and help for the whole being—in short, an age for the most comprehensive and perfect application of Christian thought to all social

classes and all social relations. With the deeper life and broader outlook which the coming century will bring to the children of God there will be felt, with a new power, there is nothing secular which religion cannot both touch and glorify; that God never meant his saints to have one gospel for Sunday and another for Monday, one religion for the church and another for the world, one conscience for Caesar and another for Jehovah; that goodness is not a little island here and there in the great ocean of life, but rather the all permeating salt that fills every part of the bright, broad sea.

5. In the fifth place, what will be the attitude of the church of the future in relation to Christian unity?

To this interesting question it may be answered that there never was among God's people, as today, such a unity of spirit in the bonds of peace. Ours is an age of religious toleration of spiritual liberty, a glad period when men minimize their differences and emphasize their agreements. But the church may never, should never, become organically one. Men differ too widely in birth and education for this ever to be accomplished. The universal law of God in grace as in nature, is unity in diversity. The stars, though having fellowship with one another through fellowship with the central luminary, differ greatly in size and color and distance from the sun. Each Christian man must have his own Christian convictions, his own denominational affinities. There should be in the church no boneless, nerveless liberality. And yet, with absolute fidelity to the great fundamental truths of the gospel, we shall more and more realize the prayer of the Master, "that they may be one, as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee;" not one in organic union, but one in heart and purpose, in will and work. Differ speculative Christian men and women may, but differ essentially they never can so long as they agree upon absolute fidelity to Jesus Christ, as Sovereign and Saviour. Our controversial swords snap when we bow before the pierced One.

6. In the sixth place, what will be the attitude of the church of the future in relation to world-wide evangelization?

The spirit of missions, which is the spirit of Christ, is recognized and actualized today as perhaps never before. The history of the sacred, self-sacrificing anointing of nineteen hundred years ago repeats itself from time to time. Mary of Bethany is a representative of thousands today, with more light than this saintly woman and clearer visions of the Christ, and a broader survey of God's kingdom on earth, pour out the best gifts of hand, and heart, and mind, and life upon him who rejoices to be known as the Saviour of the nations. As twenty centuries ago, so also today, there may be witnessed both in our land and in the regions of darkness across the sea the costly box of spikenard, the ardent impulse of affection, the splendid deed of devotion, all crowned with the loving appreciation of Jesus. One hundred years ago the church drew out of its hiding place, where for centuries it had lain in almost absolute inutility, the glorious commission of its Lord. And today, everywhere in Christian lands the orders of our Lord are being obeyed and appreciated with something of their far reaching and transcendent glory. Today the Bible is within reach of 5,000,000 of the human race, and many things in connection with the missionary cause—the Word of God, the history of the past, the condition of the present, the promises of the future—appear to be hastening "that one divine, far off event to which the whole creation moves," the conquest of the world by the King of Glory and the Prince of Peace!—The Treasury.

Moody Bible Institute, Chicago.

It was more than a dozen years ago that the first steps in the enterprise now embodied in the thoroughly equipped institution at 80 Institute Place, Chicago, were taken. A little mission Sunday School, organized by Mr. Moody when the city was comparatively young, was the seed out of which the tree grew. The Sunday School became a church, now the Chicago Avenue church,—and in the church were organized the periodical meetings for the study of the Bible, whose success inspired Mr. Moody with the thought that a Bible Institute, conducted on the most practical lines, might be possible in Chicago.

In April, 1889, the Chicago Evangelization Society was incorporated under the presidency of Mr. Moody. In the following October the school was formally opened, and during the first year of work 82 students were enrolled, 52 of them men and 30 women. The institution occupied three houses, and the building of another, a three storey brick structure, was begun at once. It was finished in January, 1890. So the foundation was laid. The following year the attendance was nearly three times that of the first year. Mr. Moody's experiment had "worked." Students came from the ends of the earth. They brought to the school every sort of religious opinion embraced in Christianity. Some of them intended to study further after leaving the Institute, some did not. Some intended to be pastors; some merely to strengthen their ability to work in the ranks. They were all bound together by intense zeal for work, and they were attracted to the Institute by the simple and practical