

The Heresy of Christendom

by Peter Ainslie

The main heresy of Christendom is its indifference to benevolence, which has led to the door being opened for all kinds of heresies.

Scripture: Matthew 7:20, Acts 2:44, Galatians 6:2, 1 Timothy 5:8, James 1:27

Topics: "Christian Living", "Social Justice"

Description

Peter Ainslie preaches about the reality of Christianity, emphasizing that it is not about dogmas and creeds but about elevating character, purifying conduct, and perpetuating goodness. He highlights the importance of benevolence over religious definitions, urging the church to prioritize caring for the dependent and the aged as a vital part of Christian life. Ainslie stresses that the practice of benevolence is as crucial as faith, repentance, and baptism in reflecting the apostolic church's true essence.

Transcript

Duquesne Garden, Friday Afternoon, October 15.

I have only to remind you of one single fact, and that is that Christianity is a reality. It can no more express itself in dogmas and creeds than can human blood pulsate through books and dusty archives.

The aim of Christianity is to elevate character, to purify conduct, to perpetuate goodness, and to make men in the express image of the Father; but religious definitions and correct orthodoxy have been so prominent in the minds of churchmen that, when the English poet said,

"We have preached Christ for centuries,

Until at last men learn to scoff,

So few seem any better off."

he was expressing the world's contempt for dogmas and creeds, by the side of the world's incomparable need of benevolence. When Christ was asked what was the one test by which you would know true teachers from the false, it was not, "By their doctrines you shall know them," as many would have us think in these days, but, "By their fruits ye shall know them."

Artists have painted pictures of Christ bearing the cross up the slope of Calvary and pathos breaks down in tears when we see him fallen beneath that cross; but heavier than the cross of Christ is the theology of men. The cross of Calvary was laid upon him by the unsympathetic soldiers of the Tower of Antonia. That heavier cross of theology has been laid upon him by those whom history has called his friends, but I think that of the marks upon him of the latter cross, he will say, "These are the wounds that I received in the house of my friends."

Christianity is true, or it would long ago have perished in the theologies of men, as weak streams have perished in desert sands. In spite of the difficulties of its human prison-house, it has worked marvelous changes in the soul-soil of our race, and it has lifted characters of the redeemed to such heights [299] in holiness that the robes of angels have clothed them and light from the throne has crowned them; but darker than the noonday of crucifixion have been the clouds of opinions of men about the person of Christ. The world could only see the darkness of the clouds. It is no surprise that a French statesman cried in despair, "Christ has come, but when cometh salvation?" The world looked towards Calvary and they saw only the cross of orthodoxy. They asked for bread and they were given a stone; they asked for a fish and they were given a serpent; but God can not be confined in orthodoxy, for he is larger than the church and his heart is wider than the hearts of theologians. The generation which has already risen to

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take our places will certainly pass judgment upon the church of this generation unless she becomes as sensitive to the practice of benevolence as she is to the belief in correct orthodoxy. The generation wants the gospel of brotherhood, kindness and help. It will not ask for charity, but it will ask for Jesus Christ, disrobed of human thought, for the Christianity of victory is not to be identified with what Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, Campbell or what any other man has thought. It must have the God of human companionship, whose disciples bear the fruit of unstinted benevolence, else that generation will repeat what history has done and make its own God.

Along with the establishment of Christianity in Jerusalem was a distinct program to care for the dependent and the aged. It is as vital as the commission that Jesus gave for the evangelization of the world. It is as distinct a part of the Christian life as personal holiness. It is one of the chief pillars that uphold the divine structure of the church of God. It was as much a part of the apostolic church as faith, repentance and baptism. We have sought to restore that church in doctrine and practice. I do not doubt that we have made known the plan of salvation as clearly as Peter, or Paul, or Timothy; but this is only one phase of the apostolic church. Not until we have established as a practice among ourselves those benevolences of the apostolic church as we have established the practice of faith, repentance and baptism, can we claim that holy place of apostolic reproduction.

I know that it is said among us, as an excuse for our dereliction of duty, that we are a new people, that we have been busy evangelizing, and that we have not had the wealth for the building of orphanages and homes for the aged; but I beg to say that none of these excuses suffice. I have no more respect for these answers than I have for the Roman Catholic reason for not reading the Bible. We are not too new a people to practice Christian benevolence, neither can it be said that we have not the wealth, if the apostolic church is to be our model. On the day of Pentecost Peter preached the first gospel sermon, three thousand responded to his message and were baptized that day, and in the evening they sold their possessions to help those in need. Before they went out to evangelize Judea or Samaria, they appointed deacons to look after the needy. Before they erected a church building, they had established a system of

benevolence. It was as much a part of the church life as that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God; and had it not been a church of that type, it would have perished before the wrath of Nero, Domitian or Diocletian.

A movement that holds out its hand to help the orphan, the poor and the aged can not be defeated in this world. It has in it the pulse-beats of immortality. Its song is the song of the brook, and its music is like the music of the rustling of the corn. Since it has begun to flow, it will not cease, and all hearts are touched by its appeals. While we are threshing out our theological differences, the cry of the orphan or the stumbling steps of the aged make us forget our differences and bring us into a common kinship. When there will still be theological divergences, the Christian forces of benevolence will [300] have united into a common service for the good of all. In these sweet, warm influences the church will stack arms, and peace will flow through all her channels like the tides flow through the sea, for this is the highway of victory. We sweep over nearly nineteen hundred years, and if to us belongs one thing above another, it has been said that is the discovery of the Book of Acts. Be that as it may, but is it not true that our discovery has largely been a phase of the Book of Acts? Here it is a fact that the plan of salvation is clearer than elsewhere in all the Scriptures, but by the side of this plan of salvation is the plan of benevolence so grand, magnificent and all-embracing that the church has rarely been able to comprehend its power and beauty. In the advancement of the chariot of His redemption, if one wheel of that chariot was world-wide missions, the other was world-wide benevolence. Our missionaries on the foreign field have caught this vision, for by the side of the chapel they have planted an orphanage or a hospital. Let us, who sit in the darkness, rekindle our fires, and see that what is necessary for the conquest of China, India and Japan is likewise necessary for the conquest of America. Say what you will about the Roman Catholic Church, and I hate her heads and all her heathen appendages, as Cardinal Newman termed them, but I passionately love her orthodoxy in caring for the orphan. It has been the strongest pillar in upholding that church and saving it from decay.

Amid the clashes of creeds and one generation making orthodox what another had declared heresy, I do not hesitate to say that indifference to benevolence in all ages has been the great heresy of Christendom. On the departure of the church from that cardinal principle, the door was opened for all kind of heresies; and when you read church history, you read the history of a church that is largely prodigal, because one of the chief sources of her life was almost closed. It is no surprise that worldly aggrandizement became her policy; but the religion of Jesus Christ is not in great church buildings, pipe-organs and pulpit oratory, but pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father is to recognize the wants of the orphan and the aged as the wants of Christ himself, and go speedily to the help of Him who helped us out of sin into the light of pardon. By the side of faith in the Book must be unstinted practice of the Book. I care little about higher criticism or lower criticism, so long as this heresy is permitted to exist in Christendom with so little concern for its abolition.

It is as much our duty to think seriously of our obligation to the orphan and the aged as it was to think seriously of our obligation to be baptized. As to whether distress is more universal now than in former years, is a question we need not consider. Suffice it for duty and our sympathy that there is distress, and the sight of the needs of the orphan and the aged is the appeal from Christ himself. They are here in his stead, and through them he receives our ministries. Then, "deal thy bread to the hungry, cover the naked with thy garment, hide not thyself from thine own flesh, build up the broken-hearted, set at liberty them that are bruised. Then thou shalt be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of the paths to dwell in."

No service is more beautiful in all the pale of human activities than taking hold of the hand of the orphan and guiding his tender feet into the paths of righteousness. That child holds within himself the forces of

manhood that are mightier than a university. All unconscious of his strength, he has within himself the sunshine of heaven and the life of God is there.

Our National Benevolent Association is not simply building orphanages of stone and mortar, but when these shall have crumbled into dust amid the last conflagration there still will be remaining their real buildings, which are characters built out of fatherless and motherless boys and girls--characters strong and beautiful, that but for our National Benevolent Association might have been weak and worthless--characters that will have given muscle to our nation and adornment to our church; but the care of the aged is no less beautiful. The storms have swept over their paths, yet not fierce enough to lay them [301] beneath the sod, but there they stand without home or friends, broken in life, aching in heart. The ploughshare of sorrow has cut great gullies in their faces, and their hands are hard from the years of toil. Tired of the burden of life, their staff has broken, and our Christian Benevolent Association goes to their rescue and becomes a staff to the stumbling, a home to the homeless and a friend to the friendless. I do not disparage our missionary work nor our educational work; both are necessary for the maintenance of our service, but equally necessary is the unstinted practice of benevolence. Every believer should be unreservedly pledged to this practice as he is pledged to the Lord Almighty. The myriad of angels that look upon the trembling steps of childhood and the stumbling steps of the aged, and from whom sometimes seems to come the unseen angelic hand, must covet the task that has been given to believers. It calls for our full identification with a cause that is divine. It means that the gospel of help has indeed become the gospel of practice, and he is living in heresy who is living without sympathy for this cause. Before the New Testament was written, benevolence was the practice of the church. It came in the morning of its strength and purity, and fellowship with the saints of Pentecost can come only through the practice of the principles of Pentecost.

As distinctly as baptism is immersion of the whole body, deeper still our baptism means the surrender of the whole body and its possessions. What is money for if it is not for the use of all? That was the conception of the apostolic church. It must be the conception of the church again if it would be apostolic. "He that hath pity on the poor lendeth unto Jehovah;" "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, shall they give into your boom." On the call for the erection of the tabernacle in the wilderness, Moses received more than enough. About 170 years ago, when Saurin preached a sermon on benevolence, men gave all the money in their possession and women heaped up the collection-plate with their jewels. We depreciate the religion of the French of the last century, but this is inappropriate until we of this century shall have learned to give like those of the last century. The opportunities for money-making should not eclipse the opportunities for money-giving, yet the last decade reveals the fact. Serious issues are facing American Christianity, and with it are facing the Disciples, and we can only meet these conditions successfully in a full acceptance of the whole revelation of God. Because we are freer from human creeds, our opportunities for service are necessarily greater, and except we measure up to these divinely given opportunities, the tree, which God has planted in the garden of this new continent, shall bear the frost of the coming century. Distinctly as the call of Jesus from the cross to John the beloved disciple, to care for his weeping mother, is the sacred call to care for the orphan and the aged, the sick and the disabled, that we may be "unblameable in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints."

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