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"THE WILL OF GOD IN MY LIVING"

by P.D. Warren

Romans 8 and verses 3 and 4:

"For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." (A.V.);

or in the New English Bible translation:

"So that the commandment of the law may find fulfilment in us, whose conduct, no longer under the control of our lower nature, is directed by the Spirit."

Matthew 5 and verses 13 and 16:

"Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour wherewith shall it be salted? it is henceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid; neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

John chapter 17 verse 6:

"I have manifested" prays our blessed Lord "Thy name unto the men which Thou gavest Me out of the world."

Verse 11:

"And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world."

Verse 18:

"As Thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I sent them into the world."

"The call to express the will of God in our living as individuals" -

While this is certainly the most important part of my subject, I propose to confine myself to warning of two current errors, one doctrinal and the other practical.

I believe that an ever present danger for those who have a deep appreciation of all that God has wrought in salvation and are soundly instructed in the doctrine of justification by faith, is to give too little attention to righteousness of life, and therefore we have what we can call evangelical antinomianism. The slogan "Let go, let God" has no

doubt helped many in the understanding of our relationship with God for the purpose of salvation, but it is dangerous in leading us to think that it is only the mystical or narrowly religious side of our life that matters, and that practical doing is of second or no consequence. Hence men of little or no faith often put us evangelicals to shame in practical good living. "My brother", says James in his epistle, chapter 2, "What use is it for a man to say he has faith when he does nothing to show it? Can that faith save him? As the body is dead when there is no breath left in it so faith divorced from deeds is lifeless as a corpse."

I turn to warn you of a danger from a practical point of view, and that is a dichotomy between the religious and practical sides of our lives. A business acquaintance of mine said to me of a business friend of his who is a very good and zealous Christian "John does not mix his religion and his business." And he didn't mean that John didn't shout texts to his work people. There was something far more sinister in what he meant. A second example is that occasionally one finds in evangelical Christian work a remarkable absence of those principles of fair play, courtesy, consideration for others, and instead, as one finds so often in the sphere of worldly business, all the cut and thrust of capitalist competition at its worst. This kind of spirit in our relationships with one another in the sphere of Christian work is a tragedy, and a travesty of that for which we stand. A third example is this, and we all know of cases, where in the conduct of religious controversy the laws of defamation have been offended and things have been said holding men up to the contempt and ridicule of their fellows which if made the subject of actions in the Courts would have resulted in substantial damages. The men defamed are content to leave the issue with God, and those who perpetrate this grave wrong, continue unbridled and think they do God a service. Brethren, these things among us ought not so to be. I would ask in this connection that there might be rather less concentration in our ministry on what is loosely called positional holiness and far more time given to the working out of the Biblical principles of, and the application to, our life and times of practical holiness. "So that the commandment of the law" in the words of the great Apostle in Romans 8 and verse 4 "might be worked out experimentally in us whose conduct or manner of life is no longer under the control of the lower nature but is directed by the Spirit."

"The call to express the will of God in our relationships in society" -

1. The problem stated.

The likening of our influence to that of salt and light by our blessed Lord in the Sermon on the Mount implies a moral impact upon the world in which we live. But the problem is to maintain a moral distinctiveness on a society that is morally sick. Our blessed Lord moved freely among publicans and sinners. He was known as their Friend. Very few of us are. We are, unhappily, rather more like the Pharisees, and I sometimes think that it is a social miracle that men move into our society

at all. The Lord Jesus Christ touched the fire but was not singed. He showed us how to live on this earth and He said to us "As my Father hath sent me even so send I you." That is the problem, to maintain a moral distinctiveness in a society that is morally sick.

2. A wrong solution -

This may be called Christian escapism. We will consider first the mediaeval version. The organised church very early concluded that the problem of living in the world and yet maintaining a moral distinctiveness was insoluble for the ordinary man. Eusebius as early as the second century writes "Two ways of life were thus given by the law of Christ to His Church, the one is above nature and common human living. It admits not marriage, child bearing, property, nor the possession of wealth, but wholly and permanently separates from the customary life of man, devotes itself to the service of God alone. The other life more humble and more human permits men to unite in pure marriage, to have children, to undertake office, to command soldiers fighting in a good cause, allows attention to farming, trade and other secular interests." A kind of secondary piety is attributed to them and the mediaeval church followed and developed this line. It is implicit in much mediaeval theology that the only person who can achieve perfection in this world is the one who flees from it and embraces the ascetic life of the monk or nun. Since it is clearly impossible for every Christian to do this there is introduced the double standard and in university language the monks and nuns get honours and you and I can aim only at a pass! But this is clearly contrary to Scripture and particularly to the Scriptures that head the paper. The disciple is sent into the world and as Martin Luther said "The Christian man who applies Christian standards to the vocational tasks confronting him in the workaday world was a better servant of God than any monk in the cell, and the Christian mother who cared for the all-round welfare of her children was keeping a vigil more sacred than any nun!" John Keble's well-known hymn perfectly expresses the Christian ethic:

"We need not bid, for cloistered cell,
Our neighbours and our work farewell,
Nor strive to wind ourselves too high
For sinful man beneath the sky;
The trivial round, the common task,
Will furnish all we need to ask:
Room to deny ourselves, a road
To bring us daily nearer God."

Now the modern version. Is there not a social isolation practised by evangelicals which cuts them off from the ordinary men and women for all practical purposes as surely as the monastery or the nunnery walls? This has been assisted by the large concentrations of population in which we are accustomed to live, because these large concentrations of population have produced instead of the vertical delineation of society according to their geographical grouping, a kind of horizontal lining up of society

determined by social or religious factors. No longer do we find in these large conurbations our community of interest with our fellow workers on the farm, our neighbours in the street, or with the folk in the village, our community being the geographical locality where we live or work, but there is another organisation of society on a class basis and there easily arises out of this the refinement of the religious social grouping and we are cut off from the rest of men. One of the dangers of the wonderful fellowship that we find in our Assemblies is that we tend to become a self-contained social group finding our pleasure, rightly so, within our circle, making our friends within our circle, and thus drawing a non-physical, but none the less real, wall around ourselves. Thus we deprive ourselves of the opportunity of communicating that which we have learned of God to those among whom we live and who are greatly in need of our ministry. We cease in other words to be salt. In a large pot needing savouring, we remain in the packet. Our life is in a small corner of the room and we are so huddled together that we cannot be seen. Our problems of evangelism arise very largely from this fact and because of it we find ourselves unable to communicate. As our blessed Lord moved among men there went from Him virtue and healing. He communicated from a nearness that was both physical and social to the spiritually and morally sick.

3. Towards a right solution - the manner of communication.

The way in which we communicate that which God has entrusted to us to those who need it. The first way in which we communicate is by example. There is a modern community who seem to have functioned as salt and light as few others. I refer to the Quakers of whom G.M. Trevelyan writes: "To maintain the Christian quality in the world of business and of domestic life and to maintain it without pretention or hypocrisy was the great achievement of these extra-ordinary people."

How wonderful it would be if we, who in the mercy of God are perhaps more orthodox doctrinally, and have the truth of God in the way that our dear Quaker friends seem to have let it slip, if in this day and generation as part of the revival, for which many of us pray, it could be said of the Christian Brethren something like that. That we communicate to those among whom we live a Christian quality in a world in which Christian ideals have been let slip, so that our Assemblies are no longer a haven of refuge from the wicked world outside, but a base from which a moral influence of acknowledged quality permeates society.

Secondly, by precept. Is there a more positive role than example that we as Christians ought to exercise in the society in which we live? Should we speak openly against that which is evil? Should we engage in community with our fellow men in working for that which is good? Edmund Burke said "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing." Recently, the Anglican Archbishop of Accra, with the backing of all the church leaders in Ghana, made a statement criticising

certain aspects of the Ghana Young Pioneer Movement. He referred to its Godlessness and some of the phrases and songs prescribed for the children to sing. At the beginning of the meeting the leader says "Nkrumah is our Saviour" and the response from the children is "Nkrumah is our Messiah". "Nkrumah is our Saviour" and the response from the children "Nkrumah will never die". I can well understand that men of God and leaders of the community of God find it impossible to sit by and let that sort of thing gain ground in their country - particularly if they have memories long enough to include the development of the Hitler cult in Nazi Germany. And this man, a leader in the Church of God, with the fellowship and at the request of all his brethren made a moderately worded statement by way of protest. He was deported. Should he have spoken or should he have kept quiet? Of course, we realise that here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come. Of course, we realise that our citizenship is in heaven. But this surely does not absolve us of moral responsibility for what goes on in the community in which we live? Was Isaiah misguided when, in the presence of God as recorded in Isaiah 6 he said "Woe is me for I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips", thus identifying himself with his people's sin? Do the Scriptures really relieve us of the duty of seeking, as much as in us lies, that the affairs of the world in which our lot is cast should accord with the moral principles of the Kingdom? We have only to read the prophecy of Isaiah and of the other prophets to see that they certainly conceived their duty to include duty of speaking out in relation to the society in which they lived.

Thirdly, positive exertion. Positive exercise of influence in society. God is interested in men and women of the world as a whole; enough for Christ to die for them. And whilst primarily He is concerned with their individual salvation, secondarily He is concerned with their welfare, otherwise He would not have let you and me down here with so much guidance as to how we should live in society. The Old and New Testaments are a unity of God's revelation. And this unity of God's revelation reveals to us a God who was interested in nations and not only interested in His chosen nation. Witness the sending of the prophet Jonah to Nineveh, and His patience with that great city and the postponement of the judgment that was to come on Nineveh for over an hundred years because they repented at the preaching of Jonah. This Bible, which is a unity, has shown us that God uses nations in the accomplishment of His purposes, and again not only His chosen people. He used heathen nations and refers even to King Cyrus as His servant to bring about His providential purposes in the course of history. Is there not a call to us to exert ourselves positively in the development of the society in which we live. I am sure if we do we shall be acting in accordance with the will of God expressed and revealed to us in Holy Scripture. Of course, it may be our view that politics is a dirty game which Christians should avoid or that it involves loyalties likely to clash with Christian convictions or that it necessitates unhelpful relationships. But is it right in God's sight to leave the management of civic, national and international affairs entirely in

the hands of the secularists? Is not the man who plays a truly Christian part in the City Council or in the House of Commons one whom we all admire and thank God for? And yet it is not through our encouragement that he is there, nor is it in any very definite sense our prayers that sustain him with wisdom and Christian purposefulness. I remember the story told of the late Lord Caldecot (then Sir Thomas Inskip) who was one of the very few men who stood up in the House of Commons in the 1928 debate on the Prayer Book and defended the Reformation Principles which the new book was thought to undermine. He bore the brunt of that debate upon his own shoulders. After the battle had been won he went into a small room outside the House but in the same building where were gathered a group of evangelical Church of England Christians. Grateful for what he had done, they thanked him profusely. After days of battle and nights of work he was near nervous exhaustion, and with the sweat pouring from his brow replied: "Oh dear yes, but how much more wonderful it would have been if I could have had some allies with me to help me in the House." We thank God for men like the late Sir Thomas Inskip. We thank God for William Wilberforce and the Earl of Shaftesbury who did not shun political activity for fear of being contaminated. Were they not in our history the salts that work? Today we recognise the call of men to responsibility in industry and commerce and we look with pride and affection upon those men from our own Assemblies who hold leading positions in the industrial and commercial world. We regard it as perfectly right that our brethren should take prominent positions in the Civil Service and leading parts in the professional associations, but for some reason or other we draw the line when it comes to government in the elected chambers of our country and I ask you to think, is this logical or right? Surely infiltration is the scriptural principle and a principle that should apply throughout the society in which we live. You and I should be free to seek before God His will for our lives as to the vocations in which we should spend our time, and, consistent with the principle of the stewardship of time, allow Him to lead us over the whole sphere of society. The problems that there are in some spheres should not be a deterrent but a challenge, and I submit that believers in these days have a duty not only by example but also by precept and infiltration to play a truly Christian part in every responsible section of the community to which God gives us opportunity to go. So that through us the light of God's truth might be made known and that we might exercise the ministry of salt.

Some specific problems to do with our living in this contemporary age -

(a) The first problem is our relationship to culture and knowledge. One of the reactions from which our Assemblies still suffer is to despise academic teaching. It is true as a leading Presbyterian said to me a short time ago, that one of the biggest hindrances to spiritual blessing and gospel advance in the Presbyterian church is its academic ministry. On the other hand we have suffered from too much ignorance, and the problem is to get the balance. Let us covet the brains and the spiritual power of the great apostle Paul. God has given gifts to the church and

there is a great heritage of Christian learning which is ours to study. Let us not despise what He has given and really get down to reading. It will enrich our understanding of the sacred Scriptures and so make us the more able ministers of the new covenant. But the apparent conflict between knowledge and the Faith troubles many and gives rise in this sphere to the sort of escapism of which I have been speaking in other spheres. I have used the word knowledge and not science because it applies to students of philosophy, history and the social sciences every bit as much as the biologists, physicists and the chemists. It leads some to have a split mind in relation to their faith. They learn and accept most or all that they are taught and they keep that in one compartment of their minds and on Sundays they operate through another. Surely it is proper that all these subjects should be studied and taught and thought about theistically. It is argued that science should be allowed to develop free of any theological pre-suppositions. If by science is meant the careful observance and relation of phenomena, social or natural, then the 'Christian scientist' is as free as anyone. But the inference to be drawn from these observations and these results is a matter of philosophy, and here the Christian must reject any conclusion that is contrary to the revealed Truth of God. There are three practical pleas arising from this:

First, that our 'Christian scientists' and philosophers should think and write and help those of us not trained in the sciences to see that the anti-Christian and a-Christian conclusions of some of our popular scientific writers and broadcasters are not the only valid conclusions to be drawn from the observed facts.

Second, could not our elder brethren encourage young men engaged in scientific study and research to share their problems with men of experience, and under no circumstances to smear them with the charge of heresy the moment they express an idea which seems to conflict with our traditional beliefs. Remember that the student is introduced these days almost daily to concepts which challenge his beliefs and if he is going to face them as he should and not hide his head in the sand as many do, he should and will need to think deeply and long, and he is entitled to the love and the understanding of his brethren. The conclusions by men of science are never static and our interpretation of Scripture too should never be static. As John Robinson has said as he bade farewell to the Puritans sailing for America in 1620 "I am verily persuaded" he said, "that God has yet more truth to break forth from His Holy Word." Let us bear this in mind and keep flexible minds in relation to these interpretations and to seek ever to be grounded upon the Person and the Work of Christ and upon the revealed Work of God in Holy Scripture.

Third, I would like to plead for us to continue to take seriously the wide open door of opportunity for Christian men and women to teach in our schools. The boys and girls of today are the men and women of tomorrow and the Roman Catholics are quite right in their assessment of the importance of Christian education. There is an open door not only for Scripture

teachers but also for teachers of all subjects and you, as you go into the schools to teach physics, chemistry, maths, history, whatever it is will be making a Christian contribution to the education of the boys and girls under your charge. There is a very special opportunity here for our Assembly young men, because teaching is a profession which can tie in very well indeed and very conveniently with a ministry of Bible teaching in the church.

Now last on this subject of culture a word about art. The widespread use of television has brought to the fore again the place of eye-gate in the communication of truth. The building of the new Coventry Cathedral has also brought into public controversy the role of art in the communication of religious truth. Religious art was more straightforward in mediaeval times and none of you can have been round the galleries of Rome or Florence or visited one or more of the great continental churches and seen the paintings within them without being impressed by the power, usually wielded for God, of the artist's brush. The vast majority of pictures in these places are biblical. In view of the great influence of eye-gate in those times, I wonder if we are right to allow the powerful television medium to remain today in the hands of men of no religious faith and the religious programmes in those of men whose views are so different from ours. Here again there are immense problems and the job of getting in can only be done by infiltration over a long period, but because of our inadequate concept of the will of God for us living in this society we evangelicals are miles behind. It is important to realise in this connection that strong Christians are needed to do this work, not converts from the TV world. It is a monstrous injustice to think that because John Smith has been working for the television and been appearing before the screen regularly and is converted that he is the chap to do the job. John Smith to begin with is a weak Christian and John Smith will want to get away from that which has dragged him down for so many years of his life, and understandably so. This is a field that is difficult and it is a field therefore that should have the attention of the strong Christians.

One final word about art. The truly beautiful is harmonious with the truly moral but the soul that knows not God may misuse his artistic gifts and pander to the baser instincts of the flesh. That which simply inflames passion or directs the minds to the courses of conduct that are unworthy or exhibits a non-Christian standard of values does not lose its taint because it is decked in the garments of high literary or artistic merit. Therefore, Christian artists, consecrate your gifts to God and let art, your art, never be a cover for anything unworthy of Him.

(b) The political and industrial organisations.

It is my belief that we should be ready to take a more active part in these things so that there may be in these spheres of society those who can express the will of God. One of the arguments for abstention

is that our Lord never took part in political affairs, but a little thinking may suggest that this argument is not a valid one. Our Lord did not engage in trade after He began His public ministry, and if He had engaged in political affairs it would have been in direct contravention of the unique call of God to Him. In any case, the Lord's teaching had to be teaching of enduring significance and if His teaching had been occupied with the particular circumstances of that time it would not have been consistent with the purpose of God. It is clearly contrary to God's will that His disciples should seek, by political means, still less by the sword, directly to advance the Gospel or to bring in His Kingdom, and both errors have been made by Christians in the past. But that there is a place for the Christian to play in politics and industrial organisations I have no doubt, and some of the evils which we Christians lament today are directly attributable to default by Christians in the past in this respect.

(c) International affairs and war.

I am not going to enter into the pacifist controversy in any detail, but it is a contemporary issue. The pacifist says "you cannot cure evil by evil. Our Lord's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount was to resist not evil, to turn the other cheek and to love your enemies and faced with the cross Jesus declined His disciples' offer to defend Him. Instead He chose to suffer and to reply to physical force, or threat of physical force by love and compassion", and that is a strong case. To this the Christian non-pacifist answers: "True, all war is evil, Christians must do all they can to prevent and abolish it. But there are other evils, tyranny and anarchy. If the question was only of the aggressor or me personally suffering, then fair enough I will, but it isn't so simple as that. If I do not fight then I am failing in my God-given duty to love and serve my fellows, including my family. Would the good Samaritan have stood by if the thieves had returned to finish their victim off?" These commands refer to individual relationships, the Christian non-pacifist says, and there is a different set of principles discernable in Holy Scripture for relations between nations and groups. Most believe that it is not wrong to be a domestic policeman who has, if necessary, to use violence and kill. Is it therefore wrong to belong to an international police force such as the United Nations Forces or having regard to the scriptural revelation that God was one nation to punish another to engage in what seems to right thinking people to be a just war? These are questions that we have got to think about and to seek to discern the mind of God from Holy Scripture. To what extent are these basic arguments changed by the arrival of nuclear weapons? That again is a matter for thought, and in this connection I would like to commend to you a pamphlet published by Christian Teamwork entitled "The Christian and Nuclear Warfare".

(d) The Biblical doctrine of sex.

One of the most important areas of life in which the will of God should be expressed by believers is in the sphere of the family and sex

relations. Probably this is a matter on which our Victorian forefathers did not have the truth quite in perspective for there was a clear suggestion in their thinking and writing that sex is of itself evil and only becomes justified when used for the procreation of children. In our thinking, therefore, we must proceed from basic principles and begin with the complete wholesomeness of that which God has created, and try to distinguish His handiwork from the distortions and marring which it has suffered at our hands through the Fall. If we ask why our Victorian forefathers held the views they did we shall discover that they firmly grasped one important fact which we must grasp and that is that sex, being one of the strongest instincts of mankind and being enormously fed by the imagination, is easily liable to get out of control and to lead to vice; and to some extent their attitude was a reaction against the licentiousness of the previous century and their warnings and their care were greatly to their credit. The primary purpose of marriage according to the biblical revelation and as the preamble to most marriage services tells us, is the procreation of children and that they might be brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. The commandment "Be fruitful and multiply" is a delegation by God in His grace of the work of the Creator Himself. He invites us to join with Him in a kind of partnership in the creation of new life and therefore, as all fathers will agree, the birth of a baby is a most wonderful and holy thing. The responsibility to exercise the procreative function is a responsibility laid fairly and squarely upon each of us whom God has called to the marriage state.

Family planning is a live issue and one that is not capable of a one-paragraph answer. I am going to be rather a coward here and commend you to the answer to a question on this subject which Dr. Hanton wrote in the July 1962 issue of "The Witness".

Second, the biblical revelation does not limit the function of sex to the reproduction purpose. Equally deep rooted in Genesis is the reflection of a second factor, the need of man and woman for each other to complement and to fulfil each other and to provide a durable partnership against the loneliness and the rigour of life. God said "It is not good for man to be alone, I will make him an help meet for him" and this relationship of man and woman, husband and wife, is rooted in God's creative purpose equally with the procreative functions of sexuality. "For this reason shall a man leave his father and mother and be joined unto his wife and they two shall be one flesh."

The third reason for the institution of marriage, is that man's natural instincts implanted by God may find fulfilment in a lawful relationship but this is, I think, put too negatively and there is in fact a positive duty on the part of husbands and wives to express in regular sexual intercourse the love which they have the one for the other. It is not, of course, the only language of earthly love, but it is in its full and right use the most intimate and most revealing. It has the depth of communication signified by the use of the biblical word "knowledge", and

it should be the high point of obedience to the New Testament command "Husbands love your wives as Christ also loved the church." Much more teaching on this aspect of personal relationships ought, in my view, to be given to those intending to marry. It is not just a matter of physical mechanics there are personality and social implications, and the pastoral care of the flock involves advice on these issues.

Salt and light. You may say that I have suggested that in seeking to exercise the will of God in my living I am urging the Church to seek to permeate society. I am. But I am not urging the Church to allow society to permeate the Church and there is a difference here. I believe that our Lord meant what He said when He sent His disciples forth into the world and chose to make the gospel known through them, men in whom His Spirit dwelt and as He breathed on them He said to them: "As my father hath sent me, even so send I you." Isn't it a dangerous course? Isn't it fraught with rocks on either side? It is indeed. But we have the prayer of our blessed Lord: "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil."

(The substance of an address given at the
Oxford Conference 1962).

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Take care to be on most familiar terms with those whose souls are committed to your care. Stand in the stream and fish.

C.H. Spurgeon.

Why do all unbreakable (moral) rules always turn out to be about sex and not about war?

Alasdair McIntyre.

In addition to my parish visiting, I have dealt with a criminal who has ill repaid me. I have been to a United Nations meeting. I have tried to share a wider vision with a Trades Union official. Indeed, I have been involved. I thank God I am not as one of these pietists.

George F. MacLeod.

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