

It is sobering to think that this might be a large element missing from our own ministry. Let us examine ourselves and ensure that God's priorities are our's as well.

#### Footnotes

1. Harris, Laird, *TWOT*, Vol. 1, p. 248.
2. J. Finnegan, *Myth and Mystery*, p. 37.

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# CELEBRATING LUTHER!

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To celebrate the life of Martin Luther is to celebrate the rediscovery of the Gospel. Not indeed that Luther was without father or mother in those seemingly empty tracts of the days of the mediaeval church. The Gospel had been offered, the Gospel had been received and in the writings of a man like Anselm we see something of the power of the mediaeval theologians at their best. Kindling had been laid in the place where the fire of reformation would ignite. But Luther was something different. Not just in his destiny, to be the man whose theological argumentation laid one civilisation to rest and the foundations of another, but also in the extraordinary gifts which God had given this man and which God was pleased to use to bring that about. For he was a big man, he was big as we know in some ways in which present-day evangelicals would find him to be more than a little embarrassing; but it was in his stature that God had forged an instrument to do something which had not been done before, to bring about the reformation of his church.

Now it has become our custom to see Luther's rediscovery of the Gospel and its relevance very much in one way; to see it as aimed at the Roman Catholic church of his day and of ours. I don't intend to discuss the position of the present-day church of Rome, save to say that I don't think one can make a simplistic identification of the church of Rome today with the church of Rome then. But Luther's guns were not built like the defences of Singapore, to fly in one direction alone. They may be turned, upon Protestantism, upon our evangelicalism, that which claims so loudly to be the legatee and the heir of the Protestant Reformation. The guns will fire well in the direction in which Luther fired them then, but it seems to me that they will fire equally well in another. This is to say that the doctrine of justification by faith alone needs to be preached within the churches of the Reformation and to Protestant people as much as it needs to be preached elsewhere.

Martin Luther was a man confronted chiefly not by

irreligion as we would understand the term, he was a man confronted by religion, confronted by religion in perhaps its most splendid edifice; and he spoke chiefly to the religious people of his day. As a monk he had of course known that religion, he had known it much as Paul the Apostle had known Judaism, a very similar religion; he had known it not merely at its worst but at its best. He had experienced it heart and soul. He had sought in it, as Paul had sought in his religion, not merely form, not merely show, but God. He had learned thereby that piety in itself does not bring peace because even piety can be formed without content, even a tradition and a tradition of orthodoxy can be a tradition without the spirit of God. And why? Because there is one religious principle, one doctrine if you will among all others, one that is supremely determinative of the nature of religion and of whether or not that religion will bring access to God. Now I would ask you to note what this principle was *not*. It was not in general the principle that doctrine must be orthodox, because by and large the church in which Luther was brought up was an orthodox church. Mediaeval Catholicism stood in the great tradition of classical orthodoxy, a tradition from which indeed many of the modern denominations have signally departed. The great credal statements which are the foundation-stones of the doctrinal developments of the church's reflection upon Scripture, these were not denied. The error of the mediaeval Roman church is not that it was an apostate church in the sense in which it might be said that many modern churches are, it was in another matter and in its implications, in one other matter that the church had gone astray.

It was almost a small matter, in the sense in which if you look down the contents page of a systematic theology it is one among many; and yet it was the matter which determined the character of the whole religion. It was a very similar matter to that which in the early church raged between the apostle Paul and the Galatian churches, churches under the influence

of those whom we call Judaisers, people who are *prima facie* Christians who wished to cling to the principles of that Jewish tradition in a way which was inimical to the Christian gospel. And it is perhaps for that reason that Luther's own exposition of Galatians supremely captures his message to the church of his day. So it is that in texts like Galatians 2:16, 'by the works of the law shall no-one be justified', that we find the issue in controversy between Luther and his contemporaries.

I should like to read to you a few lines of Martin Luther's comment upon that verse, partly because it captures something of the enormous energy with which this man wrote everything and did everything, partly because it is particularly relevant to our considerations there. He says, speaking of Paul, 'He sayeth not, flesh is not justified by works contrary to the law as are murder, adultery, drunkenness and such like, but by works done according to the law which are good. Flesh therefore according to Paul signifies all the righteousness, wisdom, devotion, religion, understanding and worth there is possible to be in a natural man. Now, if a Jew is not justified by works done according to the law of God, much less shall a monk be justified by his order, a priest by mass, a philosopher by his wisdom, a divine by his divinity, a Turk by the Koran. Briefly, though a man be never so wise and righteous according to reason and the law of God yet with all his righteousness, works, merits, devotion and religion he is not justified'.

Now the question which Luther bequeathed to the church today is this: wherein does our confidence before God lie? It is not enough to say that we eschew and deny any ground of confidence in our good works. Something more radical than that is required. We must come to a perception that not merely good works but our religiousness, our piety, our very faith in God itself will count for nothing before God toward our salvation. And so it is that evangelical religion, Protestant religion, converted, prayer-meeting religion, that kind of religion is as susceptible as any other kind of religion—in some ways more so—to the kind of interpretation with which Paul was struggling in Galatia and with which Luther was struggling in mediaeval Germany. There is a self-satisfaction and a complacency which cling to orthodoxy in belief and in practice and which are that very thing which must be dislodged if a mere form of orthodoxy is to give place to the thing itself, a religion which will bring men and women to God.

Now let me go into that a little. You see, the Pharisees, with whom there is more dispute in the Gospels than with any other of the Jewish parties, the Pharisees were the theologically orthodox party of the day. They were the conservatives, the Sadducees were liberal, doubting, the Zealots were the liberation theologians, the revolutionaries. The Pharisees were the people with whom in almost everything Jesus Christ was in a theological agreement. He told people to listen to what they said because they sat in Moses' seat; and so they did. They were his theological allies, and yet it was with them that he found himself most in debate, and for the simple reason that Pharisaism is a peculiarly evangelical sin. It is the sin of the man

who thinks he is better than the next man because he is more of a Calvinist, or because he believes more of the Bible, or because he goes to the right church, or because he has the right books on his shelves, or because he is tea-total. Pharisaism is a distinctly evangelical sin, it is a sin of the man who is proud and pleased before God because of his faithfulness to the Protestant tradition. Pharisaism is the sin of being pleased with yourself for all the right reasons, and that is why it is so peculiarly evangelical to fall into it. And it is against the Pharisees that—of course—Jesus told what I think is the most telling of all his parables, which captures very precisely the concern of Martin Luther with the mediaeval church of Rome. It is the little parable of the two men who go into the temple to pray. One a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

'I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get', said the Pharisee, but the tax collector, 'standing far off would not even lift up his eyes to heaven but beat his breast saying "God be merciful to me a sinner".' 'I tell you', said Jesus to the Pharisees, 'this man went down to his house justified rather than the other'.

We have here characterised for us the two kinds of religion, both of them orthodox in the sense that neither of them is liberal. Two men who would have put their name to the same kind of credal, confessional statement, two men one of whom would be marked out in the community as a good man, a fine man, it may be no hypocrite. Not all Pharisees were hypocrites in that sense. Yet the man who was pleased with his faithfulness, was proud of his goodness, who when he came before God he offered what has the form of a prayer of thanksgiving but is in fact a boast and a slight upon the other man. 'God I thank thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust adulterers or even like that tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I have, I go to the prayer meeting, the church treasurer knows about my covenant'. You see the kind of man he was, and the great tragedy of this man and of the many who are so like him is that they cannot see the kind of men they are, they are blind to it. He is not like the tax collector, this wretched man may be guilty of all of the sins of which the Pharisee was not. He is indeed not like this man, and there is no attempt to commend the tax collector; except to the point at which it mattered, that the tax collector had gained access to God in the temple that day and the Pharisee had not.

And that is the message of Martin Luther to the church of God today. It is a message that concerns itself with the ground on which we would claim access into the presence of God. It is a message which would send us out searching our hearts before we look into the heart of the next man. It is a message which concerns itself with the distinction between two kinds of religion, both of which seem to be orthodox; one of which may be the religion of this dreadful sinner, who could only call out to God for mercy, and yet which was the religion which gained him access to the throne; the other, apparently very similar, yet a religion which would not bring a man to God. Martin Luther's legacy to the church was his discovery and his reiteration and his convincing of the church of his day that not only will the evil works

of evil men gain us no credit before God, not only where the good works of irreligious men gain us no credit before God, but our good work as believers who seek to be faithful to God they too will gain us no credit before God, because *credit before God is something which is given by God and may be had in no other way.* Unless we can enter the temple with the tax collector and stand afar off and not even lift up our eyes and beat breasts and say 'God be merciful to me a sinner', unless that is what is characteristic of our approach to God, then the question we must ask ourselves is whether when we leave the temple of God we go down to our house justified, or whether we do not.

Martin Luther's guns, turned on the church of God, and our prayer to God must be that they will continue so to be and with a merciless intensity every effort of every religious man to gain credit before God on the grounds of our righteousness will be destroyed and blasted out from us that the Gospel might be seen alone as that on which we stand, and the righteousness of another is that alone which will bring us to God.

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## THE BALTIMORE DECLARATION

This is included in *Evangel* to offer an example of evangelicalism seeking to express itself in modern language and interactively with contemporary debate. It is printed with permission.

Throughout the history of the Christian Church, there have been times when the integrity and substance of the Gospel have come under powerful cultural, philosophical, and religious attack. At such times, it has been necessary for Christian believers, and especially for pastors and preachers, to confess clearly, unequivocally, and publicly 'the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints' (Jude 3), and to define this faith over against the heresies and theological errors infiltrating the Church. Thus the Church is led into a deeper comprehension of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the communal identity of the Church is strengthened in its mission to the world.

We, the undersigned, who are baptized members of the Episcopal Church of the United States, believe that such a time has now come upon the Church which we serve. We are now witnessing a thoroughgoing revision of the faith inconsistent with the evangelical, apostolic and catholic witness, a revision increasingly embraced by ecclesiastical leaders, both ordained and lay. In the name of inclusivity and pluralism, we are presented with a new theological paradigm which rejects, explicitly or implicitly, the doctrinal norms of the historic creeds and ecumenical councils, and which seeks to relativize, if not abolish, the formative and evangelical authority of the Holy Scriptures. This paradigm introduces into the Church a new story, a new language, a new grammar. The 'revelations' of modernity, infinitely self-generating

and never-ending, supplant and critique that historic revelation which God the Holy Trinity has communicated by word and deed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Israelite.

Fully aware of our own sinfulness, as well as the spiritual dangers inherent in issuing such a call, we humbly and prayerfully summon the Church to return to and remain steadfast in that Gospel entrusted to it by the Apostles of Jesus Christ. We also summon the clergy of the Church to stand up boldly and declare that Trinitarian faith which they have sworn at their ordinations to uphold and preach. We are well aware of the possible personal and professional costs of such a confession in the present situation; but we are convinced that the integrity and substance of the Gospel, that Gospel which is the only hope and salvation of the world, are at stake. The Lord is calling us to fidelity to him—and to him alone.

We offer, therefore, the following Declaration of Faith. This is not a comprehensive confession. It addresses those critical theological issues which we believe to be at the heart of the present crisis.

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*'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the*