

There Must Be Heresies

“Thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath
a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument:
for they hear thy words, but do them not.”—Eze. 33:32

IN the first reading for this morning (2 Kings 24 & 25) we are at the end of the major epoch in the great plan of God—a time when things that had seemed unchangeable began to crumble and fall.

Such times call for deep foundations. Lives grounded merely upon the upper layers of immediate fact cannot stand the shock of these periods of earth-shaking transition.

Within the Household of God, the present time is of a similar nature.

The old landmarks are disappearing. Rifts are developing where solid rock was expected, and every individual is forced again and again to examine his own foundations to see whether they are still firm and unchanged, or whether they turn out to have been built upon what had only the appearance of stability.

Paul said to the Corinthians—

"There must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you" (1 Cor. 11:19).

Mere membership is meaningless. Each must stand upon a firm foundation of intelligent belief and perception, cemented by constant study. Vital decisions are being forced upon us. Only a daily and affectionate familiarity with the Word will make us ready for them. Those that are not ready will be weeded out and left behind.

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After the storm has passed, some houses will be left standing—some will have been swept away. It is hard, but it is necessary. The stones of the Temple must be sound and solid. In battle training, real bullets are used. A false move means death, even in the training period. It is hard, but it is necessary. Facts are always hard, but wisdom will face them.

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THE end of Israel's kingdom is a sad consideration. Not particularly because of the immediate circumstances and individuals concerned, but because of what lay behind—because of the great underlying tragedy that was involved.

Our minds go back to the beginning. To the glorious blazing mountain, enveloped in cloud and smoke, and rocked with thunder—to Moses, the man of God—to the commandments and the Covenant. Then to Solomon at the dedication of the Temple—the House filled with the glory of God—the nationwide dedication and rejoicing.

Wonderful beginnings! — so full of possibility and promise!

But now this is the end. The Temple plundered...the city burned...the leaders slain...the people scattered.

Why? Because the pull and example of the world had overcome the influence of God's law and institutions. They never thoroughly grasped the superiority of God's way, nor the necessity for their own well-being of following it.

To them it was always a burden—a meaningless restriction upon their natural desires. They never perceived its spirit and purpose, so the day of judgment came upon them unawares. They had never really come out of the world.

The clouds of judgment were gathering for a long period, but they were unheeded. The great fallacy that prevented them from discerning the ominous trend of events was their dependence upon Egypt as the basic stability of the times.

Stretching far back in the dim past, Egypt had always seemed vast, solid and unmovable. The world revolved around Egypt, and Egypt was their friend. These upstarts from the East, Assyria and Babylon, would soon pass away. Egypt would arouse, gather her strength, and crush them.

But history had reached a turning point. Something deeper than dependence upon Egypt was going to be necessary to carry them through this time.

Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, all the prophets repeatedly urge the children of Israel to lay a deeper foundation than upon the fleshly arm of Egypt. But allegiance to Egypt appealed to them more than allegiance to God because their ways were more in keeping with the ways of Egypt.

Egypt offered them insurance, and God offered them insurance, but Egypt's requirements were less exacting and more pleasing to the flesh and more assuring to the natural eye.

The economic system that God had set up under the Law of Moses was entirely different from the selfish way that natural man carries on his business. If they were to depend on God, they would have to do what God wanted and live the way He commanded. They would have to give up a lot of things that were very desirable to the natural man.

The Law of Moses prevented the accumulation of great wealth and the development of a class of exploited workers. It was aimed at general national well-being and equality, rather than personal ambition and advancement.

They had long since forsaken all these principles. They had built up a system of caste and oppression. They had patterned themselves in all things according to the heathen who surrounded them. The rich oppressed the poor; and the Lord's inheritance, which was given impartially to all, was seized by the stronger who trod down the weak.

Born with superior ability, or favored by superior opportunity, by some perverse twist of logic they came to feel that they were entitled also to superior prosperity, and that the less favored and less fortunate were fair game, provided they kept an appearance of legality.

They forgot that all that they had was of God, and given to be used solely for God's purposes. They forgot that their possessions and abilities were not a favor from God to be squandered on selfishness, but a responsibility and stewardship.

This is how the heathen have always done. It is the way of the world. God gave them a law designed to develop unselfishness, generosity, consideration for others, and disregard of personal advancement. They were not to glean their fields or orchards; they were to be open-handed; they were to lend freely without interest. They were taught that all was from God and intended for the general good and not personal aggrandizement.

They were above all not to make profit out of the position of others less fortunate.

Such were the self-destructive abominations of the heathen. He had showed them a better way—burdens mutually borne and joys mutually enjoyed.

The natural way has the great advantage of being the natural way. It takes no effort, no patient investigation, no tiresome self-analysis and burdensome self-discipline, no stepping out

of line and opposing the majority. Relax the efforts and it immediately asserts itself. And it is always SO reasonable—to the natural mind.

God's purpose was that the Jews should be a witness to the world of a community operating according to the divine Way, to demonstrate that Way's infinite superiority to those who had eyes to see. HE HAS THE SAME PURPOSE TODAY.

But the great lament throughout all their history was that they had no mind or attention for the way of God. They would not rise above the natural level of vicious selfishness and greed. Again and again they were forcibly raised above that level—the way of God was forcibly thrust upon their consciousness, but they fought it bitterly, and settled back as soon as the pressure was released.

And so the judgment descended on them, and the privileged classes were destroyed or removed to Babylon, and Palestine was given to the poor of the land to be vinedressers and husbandmen, and the Kingdom of the Lord came to an end.

And yet, even those that were left in the land still clung to the empty shell of Egypt — and went down to ruin with her soon after.

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The reading from Ezekiel (ch. 9) is from the same time in Israel's history. Ezekiel was one of the great historic figures who stood out during this period pointing out the way of wisdom and life.

Like all the rest, his words received little attention. Not that he was ignored. He was politely—even eagerly—listened to, and looked upon as a great prophet from God—but, as God said to him (Eze. 33:32)—

"Thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument:

"For they hear thy words BUT THEY DO THEM NOT"

They listened to him, and solemnly agreed with him, and remarked how sad it was that things had come to such a pass. They doubtless gravely discussed, and lamented, and protested, and deplored.

But it went no further. This effort exhausted all the urgency and vitality of their disquietude, and they drifted along with the rest. They could not see that they were called upon to DO something about it—to courageously take a clear stand for God and for the Truth.

They could not see that this was THEIR hour of decision and destiny—that this was God's test for THEM—

"There must be heresies, that the approved may be MADE MANIFEST."

Today's reading from Ezekiel is a bitter denunciation of the prophets who said "Peace," when there was no peace. Those who smoothed over the problems and soothed the people, instead of stirring them up to the ever-present dangers of complacency.

Soft, flattering words that "All is well" always grate upon the ears of wisdom, for there is never any justification for relaxed vigilance or for the pleasant indulgence of self-satisfaction—

"Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

"When you have done all things commanded you, say. We are unprofitable servants."

"If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?"

Such is always the trend of scriptural admonition. The reward is within everyone's reach. There is no excuse for defeatism. With God all things are possible, and He delights in strengthening the weak.

But still God is not mocked, and He can see what infinite time and effort we can give other things—if we want them badly enough.

In sacrifice, God demanded the best that a man had. A man might be poor, and his best might be but a handful of meal, but it **MUST BE HIS BEST**.

And a man seeking to draw near to God in sincerity and love would be content with doing no less. Anything less than our utmost effort and devotion cheapens the whole transaction and robs it of much of its unique satisfaction and pleasure.

Man is only truly happy when he is using his best possible efforts in the best possible direction — when he is giving his whole heart and soul to the one great thing he believes in.

But it must be free from pride. That is where wisdom comes in to direct. Pride is the delusion of limited minds that do not realize how poor their best really is.

We cannot overcome pride by just concealing it. If we do, it will break out in the repulsive form of false humility. Pride is an inseparable companion of ignorance and limited vision, and it is only cured by enlightenment and a divinely-adjusted perspective—

"What is man that Thou are mindful of him?"

—G.V.Growcott, *The Berean Christadelphian*, April, 1954 and April, 1966