

THE GOSPEL TRUST.

AN

ADDRESS

TO THE STUDENTS

OF

THE GENERAL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

OF THE

PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH

IN THE UNITED STATES.

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BY WILLIAM H. DELANCEY, D.D.

BISHOP OF THE DIOCESE OF WESTERN N.Y.

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Not to read, is to tempt God: to do nothing but study, is to forget the Ministry. To read in order to appear more learned, is a sinful vanity. But to read in order to exhort, and to instruct with wholesome doctrine, this is according to God's will and word.

QUESNEL.

Inflame my soul, O God, with an ardent love for Thy Word, an ardent zeal for Thy glory, with a pure and disinterested love for Thy Church, and with a hearty desire of establishing Thy kingdom in the world.

WILSON.

ADDRESS.

MY YOUNG BRETHREN :

VERY unexpectedly to myself,¹ I am to be the organ of the parting counsels with which, having completed your preparation in the Seminary, you are now to proceed to your respective Dioceses to be clothed with the high and holy commission of the Gospel Ministry. That commission constitutes one of the most important trusts that can be assigned to a human being. It is a designation of him by the Almighty to the momentous work of carrying forth to an alienated and guilty race, the great tidings of redemption from the present power and future penalties of sin. The very existence of religion involves the existence of a Ministry. Consisting of doctrines and precepts for the mind and life, and visible ceremonies, the separation of a distinct class of persons, charged with the promotion of its interests, has in all ages and countries, been regarded as essential to its continuance and influence. The Patriarchial and Jewish, no less than the Christian religion, evinces that in every economy under which Divine Truth has existed, God has been pleased to employ this agency of man to promote the moral and spiritual welfare of his brother man. As part and portion of Christianity, the Ministry claims the same origin as Christianity itself—the institution of Jesus Christ: and as exercising this Ministry, continued down from Him by an unbroken succession of valid

¹ The Missionary Bishop of Arkansas, Louisiana and Alabama, was expected to deliver the Address. His absence imposed upon the author the necessity of adapting to the purposes of the Commencement, a Discourse written for another occasion.

commissions, it maybe alleged of every true Minister in our day (distant as it is from that early age) that He is “allowed of God to be put in trust with the Gospel.”

My object at this time is to present to you a few plain suggestions as to the mode in which this sacred trust is to be fulfilled, so far as relates to the preaching of the Gospel. These remarks, more especially designed for such of you as are to exchange the quiet studies of the Seminary for the laborious duties of an active Ministry, will not be undeserving of the attention of those who are to continue still longer the favored inmates of this important Institution of the Church. May the Divine Spirit bless and apply these suggestions to all our hearts!

It is a difficult office so to present the holy message of the Gospel, that the responsibility of its rejection may not be thrown back upon our unskilfulness, our neglect, or our faithless development of its import or its claims.

On the point named to you as the leading topic of these remarks, viz., the manner in which the Gospel is to be preached, the Apostle St. Paul has instructed us both negatively and positively, when he says, “Allowed of God to be put in trust with the Gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God, who trieth our hearts.”² Let this declaration be the guide of our reflections on the subject.

In their native simplicity, the truths of our religion, it must be confessed, are not acceptable to men. The Gospel supposes men guilty, and offers pardon—it supposes them in captivity to sin, and provides redemption—it supposes them ignorant, and tenders spiritual knowledge—it supposes them corrupt, and brings to them the means of sanctification—it supposes them irresolute and weak, and offers them grace and strength from Heaven—it supposes them alienated from God by wicked works, and wandering, as sheep going astray, and it seeks to bring them back to the sacred fold of a holy Church, where they may go in and out and find pasture—the spiritual nourishment requisite for their souls. The very first requisition, therefore, which it makes, is, that men acknowledge themselves possessed of the evil character thus supposed, and to stand in need of the gracious remedy which is offered. To press upon them such an admission, and the conduct which grows out of it, forms indeed the great object of the various ordinances of religion, as well as of the Ministry.

But mankind cannot readily be brought to adopt such humbling views, nor the repentance, the faith in Christ, the humiliation, the

² 1 Thess. II. 4.

abandonment of sin, and the hearty devotion to God's service, which such views imply. In the way of such admissions and such a life, start up not only indolence, indulgence, and sin, but the pride and self-confidence of nature, the aspirations of earthly ambition, the lofty consciousness of integrity and honor, and the thousand ties which connect the energies of mind and body with the claims, duties and interests of the present life. The man of moral habits will not easily acquiesce in the sentence which pronounces him guilty before God, and needing pardon, or sinful, and requiring the renewal of his heart, although daily omissions of religious duty prove the one, and daily exhibitions of unsubdued tempers prove the other. Equally difficult is it to bring men to the confession of moral weakness and spiritual ignorance, or of an alienated mind. Hence it follows, and ever must follow, that if regard be had simply to the gratification of men in preaching the Gospel, it must be brought down from its high standard in order to be accommodated to their sinful and defective views. All its distinctive features as a revelation to fallen and guilty beings, must be cast aside—its standard of holiness lowered—the strictness of its claims released; and the whole system changed from its true character as a gracious remedy for guilt, rebellion and sin, into a mere code of morals, secondary to the law of nature, and the civil enactments of the land. The Church of God, established by Himself, according to His own infinite wisdom, must be exhibited, as a mere human association, originating in the caprice, shaped by the prejudices, and dissoluble at the will of its members, and wholly subject in its laws, usages, and discipline, to the decision of individual mind, or at least to the fickle judgment of the majority of its members, consulting expediency rather than truth. In respect to the Great Being above us, all His attributes are to be swallowed up by an indiscriminating mercy—the Sovereign of the Universe proclaimed a careless observer of human actions—the great Lawgiver and Judge of men pronounced indifferent as to the neglect or obedience of His laws—and the awful Being, from whose very nature, are derived the unalterable principles of moral rectitude, and to whom sin is pronounced by Scripture to be utterly abhorrent, must, to please men, be represented as seated indeed upon the throne of the universe, and reigning supreme over intelligent creatures, but utterly heedless whether they obey or violate the principles of His nature, or the edicts of His revelation.

It is wholly impracticable to preach the truths of the New Testament, under views that shall render them entirely grateful to the corrupt heart, but by the entire prostration of their most essential points. The whole scheme of religion as there detailed, is rested upon the two great facts, that man is sinful by nature, and guilty by practice. These are

the pillars of the Christian system, which, with the edifice of truth reared upon them, must be overthrown if we seek only to speak as pleasing men.

But, my young brethren, you are not so to speak. Both Scripture and the vows which you are to assume, prohibit all attempts to accommodate Christian truth by any species of change to the tastes, or prejudices, or sentiments of men, either to evade their displeasure, or to secure their applause. The favourable opinion of our fellow men, is an object, in many views of it, worthy of regard; but far be it from any one of you, to desire it at the expense of those momentous truths, which he is bound faithfully to preach, or to purchase it at the risk of his salvation. His object must be, not to gratify, but to instruct and benefit the people. He must speak, “not as pleasing men, but God,” who trieth the heart.

Here is announced *positively*, the manner in which this solemn trust of the Ministry is to be executed. He must speak as pleasing God. To do this, it is essential that the Gospel be preached plainly, earnestly, unreservedly, fearlessly, intelligently, affectionately, and in humble dependance on the Holy Spirit.

It must be preached *plainly*—not by refining on its positions, softening its declarations, or retrenching its mysteries,—not by reducing it to the level which the pride of some, the prejudices of others, or the sinful habits of the many would desire to see established as its standard. You will be bound by every consideration, by respect to the true interests of men, by desire for your own salvation, by the force of most solemn vows, by regard for the approbation of God, to preach the Gospel in all its fulness and simplicity—to place the offer of pardon and salvation on its true ground as the gratuitous gift of God through Christ, to be secured by men only through a living faith in Christ, open repentance towards God, and an unreserved conformity in inward temper and outward life, to the requirements of the Gospel. Never may you, through hope of man’s applause, or fear of human censure, swerve from those instructions which you have received, or seek to engraft your own mere opinions on the Word of God. The solemn language of the Almighty to His Prophet of old, applies most aptly to the Christian Minister, and should be well weighed by each of you: “Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the House of Israel,—when I say unto the wicked, Oh wicked man, thou shalt surely die, if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.”³

The Gospel must be preached *earnestly*. With a deep conviction on

³ Ezekiel XXXIII. 8.

your part of its necessity to the salvation of your hearers, and with as deep anxiety that the same conviction may be established in their minds. This is the only proper and justifiable ground on which to vindicate your zeal and earnestness, in pressing the truths of religion on their notice. Every effort within the limits of your powers, you are bound to make in order to rouse men from indifference, the lethargy of sin and worldliness, and to induce their acceptance of the proffered terms of life, without which, so far as we know any thing of a future state by the Gospel, they are undone for ever. Persuaded as you are of the truth of the Divine Word, and that the revelation made by Jesus Christ, contains the only method, which God has disclosed to this world, for the restoration of His rebellious creatures to His favor, no earnestness within the limits of propriety can be too great in the endeavour to produce a similar conviction in the minds of those who hear you. For you urge the subject by the command of God, for the salvation of your hearers, and at the peril of your own eternal welfare.

Here will lie one of the main avenues to your future success as stewards of the mysteries of God. It is not boisterous declamation—it is not splendid imagery—it is not extravagant action—it is not flippant witticisms in the pulpit, that I am now urging. These may astound, may amuse, even may gratify some. They seldom win the soul to Christ. No! it must be heart speaking to heart; it must be one sin-burdened conscience guiding its suffering brother to the Cross of Christ; it must be the enlightened judgment overpowered with its own convictions of truth and duty, pressing upon intelligent but alienated and heedless minds, the deep and solemn arguments which have arrested and fixed its own determination to the path of God. In short, it must be the Messenger of the Almighty, in the full consciousness of his own escape, through Christ, from the penalties and thralldom of sin, and of his admission to the grace and blessings of the Gospel, proclaiming as it were, from the very banks of the River of Life, to the thirsting, fainting, perishing multitudes around him, “Ho every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat, yea come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price. Wherefore should ye spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which satisfieth not. Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye the bread of life, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.”⁴

The Gospel must also be preached *unreservedly*—not withholding what is offensive to the fastidious taste of some, or mysterious to the haughty reason of others, or contradictory to the reigning fashions or

⁴ Isaiah LV., 1, 2.

customs of an evil world. On no point, whether of doctrine, discipline or duty, are you permitted to add or to detract, to soften or to conceal. Every precept must be enforced, unrelaxed from its native rigor. Every truth must be asserted without attempting to hide its offensiveness, or blunt the edge of its application. Every ordinance must be set before men, without seeking to mould and modify it to suit defective or perverted views. You are to abide by your instructions, and to declare them freely and fully; the words of the commission are explicit, "Preach the Gospel."

Again, the trust must be executed *fearlessly*—i. e. with entire disregard of personal consequences, in whatever form they may come. St. Paul encountered them in the shape of persecution, imprisonment, stoning, and death. But, though such dangers have passed away, there is still some degree of evil report to be met in the discharge of this sacred office. The very nature of the office involves it. What is our business, brethren, but to remind men of neglected duties and positive sins, calling on them to repent and amend, forcing upon them the conviction of guilt and vileness in the sight of God, and their need of pardon through Christ, arid of renovation by His Spirit, watching for the interests of souls, for whose salvation they are themselves often wholly reckless, warning against dangers, of which it is difficult to render them aware, urging duties to which they are averse, upholding the Gospel and Church of Christ against infidelity on one side, and heresy and schism on the other, and in regard to Christian professors, standing between them and the world, and firmly sustaining the claims of Christian consistency against the arts and seductions of this corrupt and corrupting scene? This is an office, the duties of which are seldom faithfully performed, without exciting some species of opposition, though it may proceed no further than to sneer at the fanaticism of the preacher, or to charge him with illiberality, sourness and bigotry. But however his instructions be received, fidelity to Christ, the vows of office, and regard to his own salvation, demand that he permit himself on no account to be deterred from an honest and fearless execution of the trust committed to him by the Almighty.

Still further, the Gospel must be preached *intelligently*. It is a system which agrees most fully with the soundest principles of reason, resting not on fancy, nor on feeling, but on the basis of eternal truth. Men are not required to enter blindfold, and grope their passage with uncertain and faltering steps, along the narrow path of salvation. They are to be addressed as intelligent beings; weakened and corrupted, it is true, but still capable, under the gracious dispensation of Christ, of appreciating the claims, testing the evidences, and judging of the adaptation of the Gospel. The sinner is not to be drawn by illusion, any more than by force, into the

way of life. The appeal is to his mind and to his heart. Who that reads the discourses of Christ and His Apostles, can fail to perceive that they are characterized by a bold and manly sense, far removed from rhapsodies of enthusiasm on one side, and from the incoherences of ignorance on the other, so plain as to be comprehended by the lowest, so dignified as to be worthy the attention of the most refined and learned. It is the same character that must be impressed on the preaching of the Gospel now, in order to render it permanently successful. Men must be reasoned with as men—intelligence must meet intelligence. If Apostles were inspired to fit them for the Ministerial office, if supernatural qualifications were required in their days, if knowledge was so necessary that its light must descend from above to illuminate and prepare them for this work, can it be possible that in an age of much wider and more accurate information, and of deeper workings of the human mind, intelligence in the servants of the Cross is needed less? No, my young brethren, you may be plain, you may be earnest, you may be unreserved, you may be fearless in expounding the heart-searching truths of the Gospel, but you will preach in vain the unsearchable riches of Christ, unless you come, in dependance on the Spirit of God, with an intelligence and information correspondent to those rational faculties with which, God has invested men, and through which alone you can appeal to them in the great work of calling them off from the follies and vanities of a perishing world, to the momentous concerns of an everlasting life. Be, then, throughout your Ministry, men of diligent and prayerful study. Regard your present attainments in Theo-1°SV> whatever be their extent, as a starting point, not as a goal in this race. Let me tell you, on the authority of hundreds who have gone before you in the Ministry, that on the very first contact with the actual duties and responsibilities of the sacred office, there will burst upon you the conviction of how little you know, of how much you have yet to learn, in the very profession for which you now regard yourselves prepared. Over this vast territory, there hangs now a misty, hazy atmosphere of vagueness, which hides from the view of the youthful candidate its full extent and actual difficulties. But as experience shall disperse these mists, and reveal more fully to your eyes, the rugged paths of truth, the intricate labyrinths of error, the impenetrable thickets of delusion, the dark forests of heresy, the arid plains of ignorance, the desolations of schism, the strongholds of bigotry, the rushing torrents of fanaticism, the frozen seas of apathy, and the gloomy morasses of corruption and crime, which make up this great field of Ministerial labour, you will be ready enough, not only to cry-out with the Apostle, “Who is sufficient for these things?” but to shrink back in dismay at your incompetency in mind or information, to grapple with

such work as lies before you. I say **i**, however, not to discourage and alarm; but to warn and admonish you, that the only remedy against utter despair, is study, prayer, and humble reliance on Him who has called you by His Spirit to this work, and who will, according to His promise, be with every faithful, studious and diligent Minister, to sustain and bless him on earth, and reward his fidelity in Heaven.

Yet again, the Gospel must be preached *affectionately*. It is an emanation from Infinite Love—the offspring of a mercy that man can never fathom. The redemption which is in Christ Jesus, is a scheme which goes directly to the heart, in the very annunciation, that “He suffered the just for the unjust, that He might bring us unto God.”⁵ Love is its origin—love, its character, and in the spirit of tenderness and love, must you carry forth its glad tidings of grace and mercy, to hardened and rebellious men—if you hope to move them to accept its offers. The sternness of truth must be softened, not by mutilation or suppression, but by the accents of affection. Mark the language of the Apostle: “Knowing the terrors of the Lord, we persuade men.”⁶ No shrinking from duty—no withholding of any truth—no conniving at sin or error, is implied in this attractive attribute of the preacher’s office. But, let it be seen, that though burning with zeal and energy in the cause of Christ, your hearts are penetrated with that purer and gentler spirit, which weeps for the sinner, while it denounces his sins, and which seeks to bring him to Christ, not by the goads of denunciation, but by the cords of tenderness and love.

But most of all, the Gospel must be preached in *humble dependance on the Spirit of God*. Paul may plant, and Apollos water, but God—God the Holy Ghost—giveth the increase. Look, then, to Him, who alone putteth in the heart good desires, and enables us to bring the same to good effect, as the efficient agent of your future success. With importunate, daily, unceasing prayer, seek His blessing on your studies, and preparation for the pulpit. Cherish the conviction, that human talents, skill, and learning, are nothing but the mere aliment of pride and vanity, unless employed in dependance on the Holy Spirit, and in unceasing recognition of His agency to impart success to all efforts to win back alienated minds to truth and godliness. In the very outset of your Ministry, strive to bring your minds and hearts to the moulding of the Spirit, that through His blessing and guidance, you may ever speak as the oracles of God. “It is the unction of the Divine Spirit only” (wrote the fervid pen of one whom we may well suppose to be, in the mansions above, rejoicing

⁵ 1 Peter III., 18.

⁶ 2 Corinthians V. 11.

over this present scene⁷) “It is the unction of the Divine Spirit only, that can give efficacy to those Literary and Theological talents, which, without this unction, will be but a sounding-brass and a tinkling cymbal.”

Such is the mode in which the Gospel Trust, so far as preaching is concerned, is to be executed.⁸ May you have grace to enable you in this

⁷ Bishop Hobart; whose son, John H. Hobart, was among the pupils of the Seminary, addressed on this occasion. A son of Bishop Dehon was also among the number about to assume the vows of the sacred office.

⁸ The following selections from a work familiar to many, will fortify the general views presented in this Address:

You are to *lay open* the wonderful scheme of *man’s redemption*. You are to lay it open in its entirety; you are to set it forth *faithfully* and *exactly*, as it is exhibited in the Holy Scriptures; and, upon the authority of the Scriptures, in their plain, natural, unsophisticated meaning, in the offices, the thirty-nine articles, and the homilies of the Church of England. This doctrine will always find its way to the hearts of those that shall be saved, and bear down all opposition, internal or external, of the carnal man. But if, instead of thus preaching Christ, you are content to preach only Socrates or Seneca; if, instead of the everlasting Gospel of the living God, you preach some extract only of your own, accommodated by a bold retrenchment of mysteries, to the blindness and the pride of human reason;—depend upon it, *animated enthusiasm* will be an overmatch for *dry frigid ethics*: *superstition* will be an overmatch for all such mutilated Gospels; and *crafty atheism*, taking advantage of the *extravagance* of the *first*, the *insipidity* of the *second*, the *enormities* of the *third*, and of the rash concessions of *half-believers*, will make an easy conquest of them all. Bishop HORSLEY.

It is not sufficient for a *Minister of the Gospel* to amuse his hearers with ingenious moral essays upon the dignity of human nature, the beauty of virtue, and the deformity and inconvenience of vice. This will be a feeble and ineffectual effort,—will be as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. He must lay before his people with plainness and with force the *great fundamental doctrines of the Gospel*. He must *show them to themselves*. He must tell them plainly and honestly what they are, and what they ought to be. He must convince them that they are *frail*, *corrupt*, and *fallen* creatures; that man since he came out of the hands of his Creator, has contracted a *radical taint*, which has miserably vitiated his moral frame; that the remedy, the *only* remedy for this great, this inveterate disease of the soul, is to be found in the Gospel; in the application of the means there pointed out for the recovery of what we have lost—in the *renovation* of the heart and life by its doctrines—in the *illumination* of the understanding—in the *sanctification* of the soul—in the aid given to the infirmities of our nature by the heavenly influences of the *Holy Spirit*; and, above all, in the sacrifice made for all mankind upon the cross by our Redeemer, and in *humble reliance* on that *sacrifice* for pardon and acceptance. Bishop PORTEOUS.

It is part of the solemn exhortation of the Church to him, and of his own promise, that he will never “cease his labour, his care, and diligence, until he hath done all that lieth in him, using both public and private monitions and exhortations, as well to the sick as to the whole within his cure, to bring those committed to his charge, unto that agreement in the faith and knowledge of God, and to that ripeness and perfectness of age in Christ, that there be no place left among them, either for error in religion, or for viciousness in life.” His congregation are his charge. “Feed my sheep,” guide, reclaim,

way to fulfil the high trust which is to be committed to you. Not only in this, but in all the parts of the sacred office, may you be instant in season and out of season, rightly dividing the word of truth—diligently feeding the flock of God—blessed in winning souls to Christ—wholesome examples to all around you; and finally, may every one of you be welcomed to the realms of eternal bliss, with the approving sentence, “Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

My Brethren of the congregation, let the views of the Christian Ministry, which I have now presented, produce in your minds a due estimate of the trials and difficulties of those who are over you in the Lord, especially of the younger brethren in the holy office. The relation which they bear to you, as God’s approved servants, to preach to you the Word, and to break to you the Bread of Life, is one far above the sordid view of a mere contract, to fulfil a stipulated engagement. They hold an office instituted by God, for the spiritual and eternal benefit of man, and that office is to be exercised by them in your behalf. Let them have the sympathy, the forbearance, the respect, the cordial support, the affectionate deference, so appropriate to the touching relations in which they stand to you, so essential to the full influence of the Ministry among you, so requisite to the good and the growth of the Church of the Redeemer throughout our land. And may God give us all, both Clergy and Laity, grace so to improve the privileges of the Gospel and Church of Christ, that becoming a holy people, zealous of good works in the Church militant below, we may all share in the glories, and partake of the rewards of the Church triumphant above, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

PRAYER.

O God, the fountain of all wisdom, enlighten my mind that I myself may see, and be able to teach others, the wonders of Thy Law. That I may learn from Thee what I ought to think and speak concerning Thee, and that whatever in Thy Holy Word I shall profitably learn, I may indeed fulfil the

comfort, lead them to heaven, was the commission of Him from whom he received them. To the care of his flock then, every other care is made subservient. The lambs of his fold he diligently feeds with food convenient for them; the weak he encourages; the strong he confirms; the self-confident he cautions; the timid he animates; the desponding he enlivens; the mourning he comforts; the ungodly he prudently reproveth; the scoffer he puts to silence. In the abodes of poverty and wretchedness he is seen dispensing comfort. At the bed of the sick and the dying he appears, sometimes, indeed, the messenger of wrath, but only that he may exercise, with more effect, the benign office of the angel of consolation. Bishop HOBART, of New-York.

same.

Direct and bless all my labors. Give me a discerning spirit, a sound judgment, and an honest and religious heart, that in all my studies my first aim may be to set forth Thy glory, by setting forth the salvation of men.

And if by my Ministry, Thy kingdom shall be enlarged, let me in all humility ascribe the success, not unto myself, but unto Thy good Spirit, which enables us both to will and to do, what is acceptable to Thee, through Jesus Christ our Lord.—Amen.