

Downers Grove Reporter

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"And The Star Spangled Banner Forever Shall Wave, O'er The Land of The Free and The Home of The Brave."



REV. MacWHORTER DELIVERED BACCALAUREATE SERMON

Large Audience Present at M. E. Church as Graduates Receive Christian Advice.

By way of an introduction to the Baccalaureate Address delivered in the Methodist Church last Sunday evening, the Rev. Hugh M. MacWhorter, Priest-in-Charge of S. Andrews Episcopal Church, expressed his appreciation of the honor and privilege granted him in appearing before such a representative gathering of the citizens of Downers Grove. He explained that his address was prepared not only for the class of 1919 of the High School, but especially for that class of people who are indifferent to the claims of Christianity, who criticize the number of churches in the community and yet fail to support any form of organized Christianity. His text was taken from the Book of Proverbs 1:7: "The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of Knowledge." Fear in this passage denotes reverence and humility before Jesus Christ and not slavish terror.

The three points discussed in his address were:

- Belief in God.
 - Faith in Jesus Christ.
 - The New Life in Jesus Christ.
- Following is the Rev. MacWhorter's address:

One of the most important lessons of the World War is this: If the Christian doctrines of duty to God and reverence for man were to be banished in favor of the Prussian theory that might is right, then mankind has a hopeless outlook. The only hope of salvation from a world committed to mutual hatred and selfish rivalry lies in the recovery of a real and vital religion which shall teach to nations, as well as to individuals, the old religious obligations of respect for the plighted word, of obedience to the claims of God and the conscience, of respect for man as man. There have been those who hailed discoveries of the human mind and the great advance of science as destructive of religion and endeavored to build up a world on the sole foundation of human ingenuity and discovery. But once more experience has been a useful teacher. To-day men realize that human knowledge has its impassable limits, and its own great difficulties; moreover, they see with horror that science unchecked by faith in God and love of man, turned itself, pre-eminently and successfully, to forge the most ingenious and deadly weapons for the destruction of mankind.

At this time therefore, there is no great amount of actual opposition to religion. The failure of any alternatives has brought again to the front the enormous possibilities of real religion for making human life tolerable and joyful.

But there survives, as a result of past confused and false ideas, a widespread ignorance of what the Christian religion is and on what grounds it is based. In a large degree this ignorance is the fault of the Church. There has been worldliness, timidity, inaction, confused thinking on the part of Christians, clergy and laity alike. There has been neglect of clear teaching, unwillingness to take opportunities, hesitancy in action, and inability to sympathize with national movements or tendencies. But we as Christians mean to do better. The will of God still sounds in our hearts. We are ready to co-operate and to serve. And we believe that thru us, however unworthy, our Master is still ready to give the message without which the world will continue in strife

and futility.

And one of our first steps is to give our credentials to the world we would serve, and, in so doing, to bring to an enthusiastic allegiance to Jesus Christ, all those ignorant and wandering souls who seek for light, that they may realize the peace and security of the Christian religion, and that with a quiet mind they may set their hands to accomplish the work which God has given us to do for our country and the world at large.

All religion begins with the fact of God; the spiritual needs and capacities of man; and the possibility of an intelligent relationship between them.

No one can doubt the fact of religion; there are any number of people whose life is lived in a loving relationship to a God of whom they are spiritually conscious. Such persons have no doubts themselves. They believe because they know. But you and I know many people who have never had this religious experience and who ask for proof. Of course, they have a right to do so, but we must ask them what sort of proofs they want. And if they reply that they must be absolutely certain before they start we must answer that there is no adventure in the world that supplies that kind of proof. Proof comes with experience; never before. It is not only so in religion but is equally true of all the experiments in life which a man or woman makes. For example, what certainty has a young man entering the business world, or the medical or legal profession, or any pursuit of life, that he will be happy and successful?

In all such cases he can be given sufficient reasons for making the venture, but experience alone can make him certain.

This is certainly true of religion and is the very argument used by Christ Himself and His Apostles.

"He that doeth the Will of God," said Christ, "shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God."

So we must and do put the burden of proof upon boys and girls, men and women themselves. No one can escape this burden, this cross. "You cannot be certain until you try." The proof is with the individual, and comes from experience.

Consequently, the Church has done its work completely when it offers to you such considerations as are certainties to itself, but probabilities to you at the commencement of your religious pilgrimage. All thru the journey however, the Church stands by the pilgrim, sustaining and encouraging him and ready to raise him up if he falls. But the Church does not make your pilgrimage for you. You must make it yourself, while Christ and the Church look on. If only you seek the probabilities with which you start will become as certain and proved to you as they have already become to the consciousness of the Church.

At this point, let us discuss some of the strong possibilities and persuasive considerations which Christianity offers to mankind. Here we must remember that mankind is composed of people of different temperaments and spiritual capacities, and therefore different considerations will effect different minds. However, three prominent arguments present themselves at once.

First: The consciousness of a Supreme Being. There is the enormous number of unknown and unheralded conversions in which the person concerned is aware—quite apart from any anticipation of expectation—of vast spiritual powers and agencies which are dealing with his soul. He becomes conscious of a certain pressure put upon his soul by a Presence, a personal influence, which he cannot explain, but which is simply there. Sometimes the invisible powers are forbidding some course of action; sometimes they are pressing for a response of love and trust from the soul; but always they are overpoweringly real. You may ask, what val-

ue is all this as evidence? Well, for the person who experiences such revelations the proof is complete, but for others obviously it cannot be so. Yet for them it is something. A fact of spiritual experience, vouched for by many thousands of otherwise quiet and sane people, makes it likely that there is something in it. It is a probability in fact, and therefore forms part of the considerations which urge a person to try religion for himself. Secondly: For some people the order and harmony and intelligibility of the universe compel a belief in an intelligent Creator of the world. And this feeling is shared by many, if not most, people. They find a world which, when undisturbed by man, is scientific, orderly, and intelligible. No doubt a strain of evil runs thru human life; and even animal life seems cruel and wasteful, and these problems demand much concentrated and deep study. But the large movements of the world seem expressive of some intelligent law. The stars, their orderly courses, the movements and accuracy of sun and moon, the beauty of spring, sunshine, and flowers, the songs of birds,—all speak to so many souls of an intelligent Creator who delights in harmony and beauty. Again, this is not proof to those who have not felt it, but it adds to the probabilities and is a fresh item of evidence.

Then, thirdly, we have to consider the whole spiritual history of that human race which has been the religious genius of the world—the Jews. Just as the Greeks, by their instinct for beauty, are recognized as the world's genius in art, or as the Romans, by their natural sense of orderliness, are admitted to be the world's genius in law; so the Jews are the religious genius and school of the world.

What are we to say of their intense religious perceptions when we consider their deep consciousness of God; the foundation of their national life on the basis of His Will; the inspired fire and force of their prophets; the devotion and intimacy of their psalms; are we to dismiss all these as delusions, or are we forced to believe that there is something real and solid in it all?

Those of us who believe in God have not the least hesitation in saying that if you add together all the above considerations, together with such others as any thinking person can suggest for themselves (such as the mysterious fact of conscience, that inward judge, that still, small voice within us, which refuses to be guided or silenced by expediency and seems to be a natural organ by which the Will of God can be known to us) they form such a strong probability in favor of the fact of God and the genuineness of the religious faculty in man, that it places on the soul of every thinking person the solemn obligation of making the personal adventure of trying to prove the matter by experience.

Some people will be convinced sooner than others, but even the man who finds the greatest difficulties will at least strive to live up to the best he knows, and will pray to the God who is yet largely unknown to him; O God, if Thou really dost exist, send me the light I need." Time and effort alone will bring proof. But the Church does its part if it can testify from its own past experience that religion is true and real, and can influence the soul to make the great adventure for itself.

Now the final proof of God's existence and goodness lies, as must be insisted, in the experience and in the heart of the person who is seeking light and truth.

How then does the matter stand with regard to the Christian's faith in Jesus Christ as God and as the revealer of God? Let it be stated at once that this conviction is arrived at in precisely the same way, that is to say, by the experience that faith in Jesus Christ leads to inner harmony: to light, peace and power.

Some people seek to dodge this difficult and exacting pilgrimage by a sole reliance on authority. "The Church" says so: I trust the Church." Well at best, this statement means that a man relies on other people's experiences, at worst it means that he is too lazy or incompetent to thrash out the matter for himself. Our Lord shows no sign of approval of this lazy second-hand belief. In S. John's Gospel, 5:39 we have His command; "Search the scriptures—they testify of Me."

The final test of faith in Jesus Christ, is that it leads a soul to light and truth, to goodness and to God. That Christianity does so is the verdict of the Church, which speaks with authority because it not only voices the experience of past saints of all ages but also because it is conscious of an inspiration of the Holy Spirit. But the Church cannot expect the world to accept its claims without inquiry. A seeker after God must be first conscious of his own spiritual needs and intuitions; he must have come to believe in God and in goodness; he then examines the claims of Jesus Christ as leading him nearer to

God and satisfying his best religious instincts. At that point he also examines the credentials which the Church gives as having been founded by Jesus Christ and endowed with His Holy Spirit, and therefore able to guide the souls of men and to produce those saint-like characters which are indicative of a true faith.

If the seeker agrees to all these stages, and further finds by experience that the following of Jesus Christ and the teaching of the Church lead him to truth and peace, then he will cease to worry about the various intermediate stages, and will henceforth lean his whole weight on the Church's authority and his own inner spiritual life: but, mark you well, his trust is based not on untested authority and unquestioned faith, but on an authority he has tested and a faith he has proved.

What then are some of the probabilities and considerations which lead a soul to investigate and finally to accept the Person and claims of Jesus Christ?

Now to start with there is the instinct for God and goodness which is in the soul of every man. Man has within him the faculty of discerning and loving light rather than darkness. He may check this faculty or leave it undeveloped, but that is at his own risk and condemnation.

Thus it is by means of this instinctive groping, or feeling towards the light—in men of goodwill—that Jesus Christ works, and He puts Himself and His teaching and inspiration as the satisfaction of men's spiritual needs.

If it were not for his natural ability in man for discovering goodness and light, the claims of Jesus Christ would have no meaning and no power. Darkness can never recognize light. Man can recognize God because he has within himself a spark of the divine, a faculty of the soul whereby he can—if he seeks—discern God Almighty.

To this faculty of discernment, (this power of preception) accordingly, the Church can bring forward solid considerations for faith in Jesus Christ, as God and as Guide, with the understanding that after boys and girls men and women have tested them by experience and proved them true, they will remain faithful disciples of Jesus Christ forever.

Such considerations are as follows: First, The history of the Jewish people with their firm, intuitive faith in God, which was, however, so far from being final and satisfied that their best representatives looked forward to a Messiah or Messenger from God who should complete their faith and give them real power to find God. Now this longing after a Messiah is greatly intensified and ratified by the spiritual vision of the prophets and their writings, by which not only was a definite Messiah predicted but also, His life, and even details of His life, were anticipated in language largely unintelligible to the first hearers, but absolutely fulfilled by the facts of the life and sufferings of Jesus Christ.

Second, Again, it is not possible to separate the Person of Jesus Christ from His character and claims. What sort of person was this Man who claimed to be God, and who stoned for the "blasphemy" of "making Himself equal with God?" Does He give you the impression of being a fraud, or an evil-doer, or an impostor. Even

if it hates and despises the Church, the world admits it in increasing numbers, "Never man spake as this Man." But if this is so, must we not believe what Our Lord said of Himself?

Third, The fact of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Many miracles have to be accepted simply because they are harmonious details in a consistent plan which is accepted as a whole. We have no check on these individual miracles. We believe them because we think that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, and that the Holy Bible is trustworthy. But with the miracle of the Resurrection it is different. Here we have a real means of testing, which is operative to-day. How did the Church of Christ ever begin, and begin so triumphantly, if the Resurrection never took place? If He did not rise, then His dead body was either in the possession of the Romans or the Jews, or else had been secretly buried by the Apostles. There is no other alternative. If the dead body was in possession of Christ's enemies why did they not produce it? They had only to produce it in some public place for a single day, and Christianity would have been crushed in its cradle. Because dear friends Christianity was founded on a Christ who was dead but now alive and had been seen and handled. Whatever controversy there may now be as to the exact nature of the Resurrection-body, no one disputes that the sight of Christ's dead body would have

paralyzed the Apostles who said that Christ was risen, and was seen alive still bearing the marks of His suffering.

Why then did not the Jews produce the crushing piece of evidence to prove their hated foes to be liars?

There can only be one answer: "Because they had not got it in their power to do so. Jesus Christ was indeed risen from the dead and had appeared to His apostles and to the "500 brethren", mostly still alive, to whom S. Paul appeals in the 15th chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians.

On this supposition alone can be explained not only the enthusiasm of the Apostles, but even the very existence of that Christian Church which is in our midst today, and which was founded on no other basis of faith than that the Lord Jesus was risen from the dead.

Fourth, We then come to the witness of the Christian Church. For some 1900 years men have believed in Jesus Christ as alive, as their friend and Master, as their Lord and God. They have written their testimony in the Holy Bible, they have lived out their faith in their lives, they have guaranteed it by their self-sacrifice. Men and women have tried the life of Christ for themselves, it is no theory to them: they have lived it out in love for God and humanity and have paid for it in tears and blood. What witness do they hand

(Continued on Page 8)



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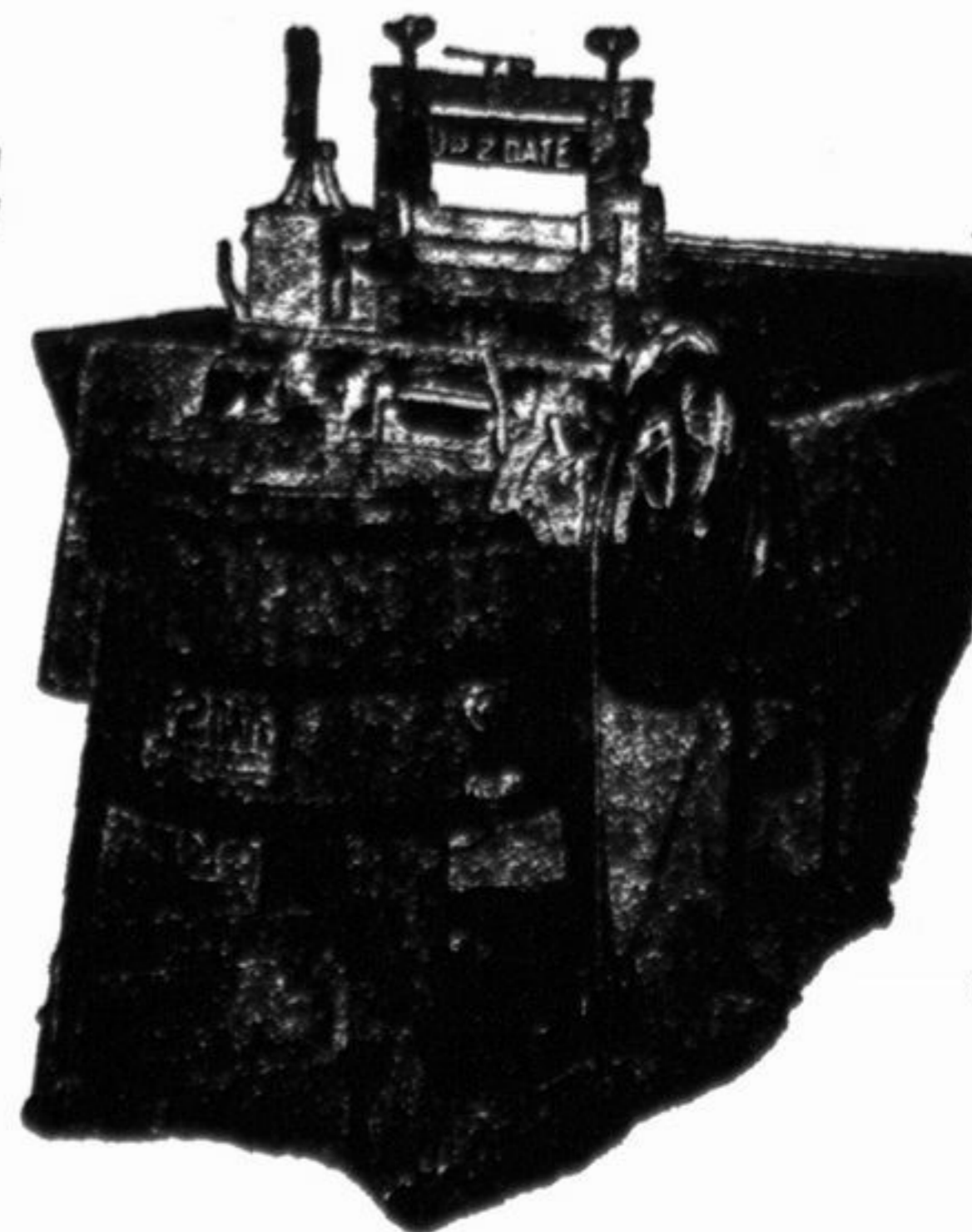
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