

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[Issue]_[1st page of article].pdf

the successor of Nero proclaimed Rome a Christian empire. In the Middle Ages the Christian Church had adopted not only the outer form but the persecuting spirit of pagan Rome, and the splendid cathedrals became its tomb and the jewelled robes of its priests became its grave clothes; yet all the while its deathless life inspired the Preaching Friars laying in England the foundations of England's future liberty, and the self-denying sisters of mercy and charity precursors of the Red Cross of the then distant future. In the eighteenth century the Protestant Church seemed dead in England. The cross was on the spires of the cathedral but not in the lives of the clergy; the preaching was an ethic as uninspiring as that of Confucius; the religion of Dean Swift was no more Christian than the infidelity of Bolingbroke; the most famous moral teacher of his time, Archdeacon Paley, defined virtue as 'doing good to mankind in obedience to the will of God and for the sake of everlasting happiness.' And yet out of this decadent Church issued the enthusiasm of Wesleyanism in England and of Moravianism on the Continent. The nineteenth century saw dogmatism within the Church, and agnosticism without unconsciously joining their forces to destroy the Church which was the only confessed defender of the truth and of the vitality of spiritual experience, and the century was called by friend and foe alike the 'age of scepticism.' And yet it is in this age of scepticism that the Christian Church has given birth to the Young Men's Christian Association, the Young Women's Christian Association, the Salvation Army, and the Red Cross, and their work has furnished the most luminous illustration the world has ever seen of the spirit of Him who laid down His life for us that we might lay down our lives for the brethren.¹

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

Ownership.

'The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof.'—
Ps 24¹.

This was the postulate that underlay all Jewish conceptions of property. Theories that used to obtain in Judea might not meet all the detailed requirements of our own times and civilization. Still our confidence in the structural principles of the Hebrew economy is such as to assure us that

¹ L. Abbott, *What Christianity means to me.*

no system of social or political ethics out of consonance with them merits regard, or can permanently obtain. There is in ethics, as in physics, but one perpendicular. Plumb-lines are cosmic. Your little house will stand only as it is set in a true vertical with everlasting foundations. A valid administration of social and civil equity is a short line, but it is the little, hither end of the line which, in its infinite reach, makes out all the righteousness of God.

It is only of God, then, that ownership in its absolute sense is predicable. Everything else so designated can be approximation only, and imitation. God owns the world. After that it is only by accommodation of terms that I can say I own my house or my library. Unable to own things as against God, there is still opportunity for us to own them as against each other. Granted. But at the same time the absoluteness of divine ownership does break the back of all human ownership. We are not sure any more as to how much it actually means to own things as against each other; or whether it means anything. John owned his marbles as against Charles, but not as against his father; but that latter qualification took all the stiffening out of his ownership as against Charles. An idea that is absolute becomes nothing more than a caricature so soon as the attempt is made to work it under conditions. The features may some of them be preserved, but with the sacrifice of the identity.

1. The underlying postulate of Judaism, that the earth was in an absolute sense the Lord's, worked determinatively in all the dealings of the Jews with other people. Without originary title to Palestine they conceived that it became theirs by His arbitrary bestowment. God owned it, and made them His heirs. Whether there was any narrowness in their view of the case or not, it gave an assurance and an intensity to their operations that made them irresistible, and carried everything before them. The mere fact that they were settlers in Palestine constituted Hittites, Hivites, and Jebusites aggressors; and to drive them out or exterminate them was, consistently with their view of the case, a simple assertion of vested rights.

It is easy to appreciate this sentiment; easy also, perhaps, to feel some measure of sympathy with it. The remnants of that idea still lurk in

the mind of every man that calls God Father. In the filial relation is involved a proprietary claim. For a father to disinherit his child is against nature, and that is because the child is in a way joint-owner of his father's property, even before he has been distinctly pronounced his father's heir. I call God Father. The livelier my sense of filial relation to Him, the stronger and the more effective will be the hold upon me which this same idea will have, that there is nothing which He owns which I also have not at least some small property in. Ownership goes with the blood; 'If children then heirs, heirs of God,' Paul writes. 'All things are yours'; 'Whether things present or things to come: all are yours.'

It is worth noticing with what immediate and practical effect this sentiment will operate on a small field. Suppose that I am hungry and can obtain nothing to eat, and have no means of earning it. What am I to do? Starve? I cannot, of course, state what my reader would do; but I can vouch for myself that I should not perish of inanition so long as I had the power to beg bread or to steal it. The loaf on my neighbour's shelf is, in a sense, not mine; but at the same time, in a sense it is mine, because it belongs in a truer sense to God than it does to my neighbour, and I call God Father. Solomon was contemplating just such a case when he wrote: 'Men do not despise a thief, if he steal to satisfy his soul when he is hungry.' Of course the law is not going to forgive him. There are times, nevertheless, when the eighth commandment, like the sixth, is more honoured in the breach than in the observance. Christ in the twelfth of Matthew distinctly enunciates the doctrine of 'blameless' transgression. The law is for the sake of man, and not man for the sake of the law.

2. When once the idea of God's fatherhood is admitted there enters under its patronage the correlative conception of man's brotherhood. In deepening the sense of our filial relation to God, the gospel has developed the sense of our fraternal relation to one another. To actualize and universalize the idea of the brotherhood of man is the supreme triumph of the gospel. The end towards which the Christian scheme looks is not the salvation of men but the redemption of society. It is society that constitutes the true integer and not the individual man. Society is

the unit and every man a fraction. A large half of every individual subsists in his social relations. Almost the first thing that God's Word tells us about man is that it is a mistake for him to be alone; and the last consummating prospect that the same Word holds out before us is of regenerated society. 'A City come down from God.' That is the longest, largest hope that even inspiration can conceive; a condition in which the ideal of unity is fulfilled through the mutual membership which each man has in every other man.

We say that we are members of community, and that we *belong* to society. And that is exactly it: we do *belong* to society. It is very often surprising what an amount of unconscious truth there is in our commonest and most unstudied expressions, and how much sounder oftentimes our words are than our philosophy and our practice. For a slave to belong to a master means that he is subject to the will of that master. For man to belong to a corporation carries with it the idea that in all that relates to that corporation his individual choice and interest are no longer to control him, but that he submits himself to the collective choice and interest of the corporation; belongs to the corporation. A man says he 'belongs to a Church' without half realizing usually the full scope of his own admission. To belong to a Church means that in all that relates to the interests and aims of his Church he is no longer his own. Without doubt there is a great deal of 'belonging to the Church' that really denotes to the member himself nothing more than opportunity of access to the spiritual treasury of the Church—to all intents a kind of ecclesiastical communism, cherishing his connexion for the chance it gives him of holding his hand on the spigot of churchly conferment. Still the term by which he designates his relation is valid, and ought itself to teach him a wholesome lesson and hold him in that condition of subordination to the corporate purposes and interests of the Church which his own language so justly, though unconsciously, implies and confesses. The same kind of admission is tacitly made by any man who speaks of himself as belonging to a certain community, or to society, or to mankind. Nothing more is needed than that he should take the gauge of his own language and be in practice what he is in speech. He does belong to the community; and

that means that it behoves him to bridle himself with the general aims of community and saddle himself with its general interests.

3. The sense of brotherhood will prevent men from feeding on each other and making capital out of their necessities. Money-making is always a transaction between two parties, and when conducted in consonance with the Christian conception of property, each party will make account of the other's interests as well as his own. It seems to be considered that business is the art of getting whatever you can without any consideration of equivalents. Making money has taken the place of earning money. This matter is one that has no end to it. The question on the street is not one of value; but rather how much can I get for a thing if I am the seller, or how little can I get along with and pay for the same commodity if I am buyer. Values used to regulate prices; prices at present appear to determine values. And so the stockbrokers study 'quotations' and watch the 'tickers.'

Suppose that I want an article at my grocer's. It happens that he is the only one from whom I can obtain it, and that it is something I cannot get along without. The thing is worth, say, ten cents; but if he appreciates the circumstances he will quite likely charge me fifteen. That is, he will charge me the worth of the article and tax me fifty per cent. extra for the exigency. He loves me, and all that sort of thing; he 'brothers' me in the house of the Lord. It is not good form to gag and pinion me and deplete me burglariously; but if exigencies are snug enough to throttle me, and circumstances sufficiently expert to turn my pockets, he will appropriate the contents with a 'thank you,' call it trade, and invite me to come again. The element of reciprocal interest and reciprocal obligation comes into no kind of account with him. He will twist the screw upon me to the full limit of his courage. He has no conscience and no heart. I stand before him in the same posture that an oil well does to the company that is working it; with no other possible purpose to subserve but to be pumped—pumped dry. His is the true genius of a sucker, that will fasten itself to your arm and love you for the heart's blood it can drain from you. If his dealings with you are not precisely those of a cannibal, it is mostly only accident of birthplace. His methods are those of an old-

fashioned Fijian, or wild man of Borneo, only treated to a 'wash' of civilization; so that his brutality is somewhat more refined and his ferocity more polite and ornamental.

Add an illustration along a little different line. Our ladies explore the shops and stores and are constitutional bargain hunters. There are many articles—often the production of sewing-women—which come within the range of their pursuit and needs, that are obtainable at ruinously low prices. In view of such purchases it is not uncommon to hear the lady buyer declare that she does not see how it is possible for the goods to be made and sold for any such money. That is an unconscious confession that she has paid for the goods less than they are worth; and if she understands at all the state of the case it is furthermore a confession that she has allowed herself to make capital out of the extremity of the poor sewing-women, who are paid hardly enough for their work to keep their wretched souls inside of their half-starved bodies. And not only that, but if they will think a little further, they will be reminded that possibly some of the garments of their own wardrobe, purchased so economically as to allow of larger indulgence in other elegancies of attire, were made by hands so scantily remunerated that the sewing-woman's own body had to be put in the market to eke out the miserable pittance; so that perhaps the lady reader of this very page sails up and down the avenues decked in velvet and fur that were paid for in part by her own money and in balance by the hire of the brothel.¹

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

The Purpose and the Power.

'The power that worketh in us.'—Eph 3²⁰.

Before we speak of the Power let us understand the occasion for it. Let us understand first what God is aiming at, next how far that aim is from its attainment, and then let us consider the Power at God's disposal for attaining it.

1. It is a tremendous claim which is made in the Epistle to the Ephesians. The old Greek thinkers had dared to dream that somewhere up in heaven, could we but rise above the mists which shut it from our sight, would be found the pattern and the plan of all that is working itself out in the underworld of earth. The writer of the

¹ C. H. Parkhurst in *The New Princeton Review*.