

Aggressive Christianity

by Catherine Booth

"And He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to all creation.'" -Mark 16:15

"And I said, 'Who art Thou, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But arise, and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; delivering you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.'" -Acts 26:15-18

I was thinking, while I was reading these passages, what if we could erase from our minds all knowledge of the history of Christianity from the close of the period described in the book of Acts - and then looking at the book of Acts, sit down and try to calculate what was likely to happen in the world. We would most likely expect very different results - a radically changed world as the outcome of it all. A system which started with such power, under such promises and declarations on the part of its Author, and producing, as it did in its first century, such gigantic and monumentous results! We would have thought (if we knew nothing of what has intervened from then until now) that the whole world would have fallen long ago to the influence of that system, and would have been brought under the authority of its great Originator and Founder. I say from reading these Acts, and from observing the Spirit which moved the early disciples, that we should have anticipated ten thousand times greater results - and in my opinion, this anticipation would have been perfectly rational and just.

We Christians profess to have in the Gospel of Christ a mighty lever which, rightly and universally applied, would lift the entire burden of sin and misery from the shoulders (that is from the souls) of our fellow man - a total remedy for all the moral and spiritual woes of humanity. We all profess to believe this - Christians have professed to believe this for generations - and yet look at the world, look at so-called "Christian England and America." The great majority in these nations utterly ignore God, not even making a pretense of remembering Him even one day a week. And then look at the rest of the world. I have often become so depressed with this view of things that I have felt as if my heart would break. I don't know how other Christians feel, but I can truly say that *"My eyes shed streams of water, because they do not keep Thy law."* (Psalm 119:136) And because it seems to me that this dispensation¹ compared with what God intended it to be, has been, and still is, as great a failure as the one that preceded it.²

Now I ask, **how can this be?** I do not for one moment believe that this is in accordance with the purpose of God. Some people have a very convenient way of hiding behind "God's purposes," and saying, "Oh! He will do His own will." **I wish He did!** They say, "You know, God's will is done after all." **I wish it were!** He says (in the Scriptures) it is not done, and over and over again laments the fact that it is not done. He wants it to be done... but it is NOT DONE! It is of no use to stand up and state theories and theologies that are in conflict with things as they really are. There has been far too much of this, and it has had a disastrous effect. We see the world is in this terrible condition... nearly 2,000 years have rolled by and here we are! How little has been done, comparatively. What little change has occurred in the habits, attitudes, and choices of the human race.

But some of you will say, "Well, but there *has* been a great deal done." Thank God for that! It would be sad if there were **nothing** done; but it looks like a drop in the ocean compared with what **should** have been done. Now I cannot accept any theory which so tarnishes the love and

goodness of God in people's eyes, so as to make **Him** to blame for this lack of vitality and power in Christianity. And so far as my influence extends, I will not allow the responsibility and the blame for all of this to be rolled back upon God, Who so loved the world that He gave His only Son to suffering and death in order to redeem it. I do not believe it for a moment! I believe that the old arch enemy has succeeded in bringing about this state of things - in retarding the accomplishment of God's purposes and keeping the world largely under his own power and influence. And I believe he has succeeded in doing this, as he has *always* succeeded before - by **deceiving God's own people**. He has *always* done so. He has always conjured up a look - alike of God's real thing, and the closer he can get it to look like the original, the more successful he is.

He has succeeded in deceiving God's people:

First, as to the standard of their own religious life.

And secondly - he has succeeded in deceiving them as to their duties and obligations to the world.

He has succeeded first in deceiving them as to the standard of their own religious life. He has gotten the church, nearly as a whole, to receive what I call an "Oh, wretched man that I am" religion! He has gotten them to lower the standard which Jesus Christ Himself established in His Book - a standard not only to be aimed at, but to be **attained** - a standard of victory over sin, the world, the flesh, and the devil - **real, living, reigning, triumphing Christianity!** Satan knew the secret of the great success of those early disciples. It was their wholehearted devotion, their all-encompassing love for Christ, their utter renunciation of the world. It was their entire absorption in the salvation of their fellow man and the glory of their God. It was an enthusiastic religion that swallowed them up and made them willing to become wanderers and vagabonds - for His sake to dwell in dens and caves, to be torn in two, and to endure persecution in every form to the ends of the earth.

It was **this** degree of devotion which Satan saw he had no chance against. Such people as these he knew would ultimately conquer the world! People could not resist that kind of spirit, that amount of love and zeal, and if Christians had only gone on as they began long ago, then the glorious prophecy would have **already been fulfilled** - the kingdoms of this world would have already "*become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ.*" (Rev. 11:15)

Lowering The Standard

Therefore the arch enemy said, "What must I do? I will be defeated after all. I will lose my supremacy as the god of this world. What can I do?" No use bringing in a gigantic system of error, which everyone will see to be error. Oh dear no! That has never been Satan's way. **His** plan has been to get a hold of a good man here and there who will, as the apostle says, creep in unaware and preach another doctrine, and who will "*mislead, if possible, even the elect.*" (Matt. 24:24) **And he did it!** He accomplished his design. He gradually lowered the standard of Christian life and character. And although in every revival in church history God has raised it again to some extent, we have **never** gotten back completely to the simplicity, purity, and devotion set before us in these Acts of the apostles. For every time God was raising the temperature in the church so that people were once again on fire with the Holy Spirit - in every age Satan has gotten someone to oppose and to show that **this** was too high a standard for human nature. It was altogether beyond us, and therefore Christians must sit down and just be content to be "Oh wretched man that I am" people, to the end of their days. He has gotten the Church into a condition that sometimes makes one positively ashamed to hear professing Christians talk. It is no wonder that thoughtful, intelligent men are being driven from such

Christianity as this. It would have driven me off too, if I had not known the **power** of godliness. I believe **this** kind of religion has made more atheists than all the "atheist books" ever written.

Yes, Satan knew that he must get Christians down from that high pinnacle of wholehearted consecration to God. He knew that he had no chance till he tempted them down from that blessed vantage point. And so he began to spread those false doctrines, to counteract what John wrote in his epistles - for before he died, John saw what was coming and sounded the alarm down the ages - "*Little children, let no one deceive you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil.*" (I John 3:7-8) Oh Lord revive that doctrine! Help us afresh to put up the standard!

Oh! The great evil is that dishonest-hearted people, because they feel it condemns them, lower the standard to their miserable experience. I said when I was young (and I have repeated it many times in my mature years) that **even if it sent me to hell** I would never pull the standard down. Oh, that God's people felt like that! There, in the Bible, the glorious standard is placed before us, the power is offered, the conditions laid down, and we **can** all attain it if we are willing. But even if we are not willing - for the sake of the children and for generations yet unborn, do not let us drag the standard down, trying to make it meet our weak and failing Christian experience. LET US KEEP IT UP! That is the way to get the world to look at it. Show the world a real, living, self-sacrificing, hard-working, toiling, triumphing Christianity, and the world will be influenced by it; but anything short of that, they will turn around and spit upon.

Duties And Obligations To The World

Secondly, Satan has deceived even those whom he could not succeed in getting to lower the standard of their own lives, concerning their duties and obligations to the world. I have been reading the New Testament lately with special reference to the aggressive spirit of original Christianity. And as far as I can see, we come infinitely short by comparison. "**Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to all creation.**" Look at what is implied in this commission. I believe that no generation since that first century has yet fathomed the meaning of this divine commission. **Look at it!** Would it ever occur to you that it really meant, "Go and build chapels and churches, and invite the people to come in, but if they won't - leave them alone"? "**GO!**" To whom? "*To all creation.*" Where am I to get at them? WHERE THEY ARE. "*All creation.*" This is the extent of your commission. Seek them out, run after them, wherever you can get at them. "**All creation**" - wherever you find a creature that has a soul - there go and preach My Gospel to him. If I understand it, **that** is the meaning and spirit of this commission.

In another commission to Paul, God says "*...I am sending you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God.*" (Acts 26:17-18) They are asleep - go and wake them up. They do not see their danger. If they did, there would be no need for you to run after them. They are **preoccupied**. Open their eyes, and turn them around by your desperate earnestness, intense persuasion, and moral force. Oh! It makes me tremble when I think of how much one man can do for another! "*Turn from darkness to light, and from the dominion of Satan to God.*" How did Paul understand this? He says, "*We persuade men.*" (II Cor. 5:11) Do not be content with just putting it before them, giving them gentle invitations, and then leaving them alone. Paul ran after the poor souls, and pulled them out of the fire. Do the same! Take the blindfold off their eyes which Satan has bound them with; knock and hammer and burn your words into their poor, hardened, darkened hearts with the fire of the Holy Ghost, until they begin to realize that they are IN DANGER! Go after them. If I understand it, **that** is the spirit of the apostles and of the early Christians.

Sure it's okay to build churches and chapels; we **should** invite the people to them. But do you think it is consistent with these commissions to rest only in this, when three-fourths of the population utterly ignore our invitations and take no notice whatsoever of our buildings and of our services? **They will not come to us.** That is an established fact. Jesus Christ says, "Go after them." He says, "*Go out into the highways and along the hedges, and compel them to come in, that My house may be filled.*" (Luke 14:23) I **will** have guests, and if you can't get them in by nice, civil measures, use military measures. Go and **compel** them to come in.

Oh! People say you must be **very** cautious. You must not push religion down people's throats. What! Should I wait until an unconverted, godless man **wants** to be saved before I try to save him? Am I to let my unconverted friends and acquaintances go quietly down to damnation, and never tell them about their souls until they ask, "If you please, I want you to preach to me!" Is this anything like the spirit of early Christianity? No! Therefore we must **make** them look, and if they run away from you in one place, meet them in another, and let them have no peace until they submit to God. This is what Christianity **ought** to be doing in this land, and there are plenty of Christians around to do it. Why, we might give the world such a time of it, that they would get saved in **self-defense** - if we were only aggressive enough and determined that they should have no peace in their sins.

An Example

I had been speaking in a town in the west of England on the subject of the **responsibility** of Christians for the salvation of people's souls. The gentleman with whom I was staying had winced a bit under the truth, but instead of taking it to heart in love and having it enable him to better serve God, he said, "I thought you were rather hard on us this morning." I said, "Did you? I should be very sorry to be harder on anyone than the Lord Jesus Christ would be." He said, "You can push things to extremes you know. You were talking about seeking souls, and making sacrifices. Now you know that we build the chapels and churches and pay the ministers - and if the people won't get saved, we can't help it!" I said, "It is very heartless and ungrateful of the people, I agree. But my dear sir, you would not reason this way in a serious physical matter. Suppose a plague were to break out in London, and the Board of Health appropriated all the hospitals and public buildings for the treatment of the disease. And suppose they were to issue proclamations saying that anyone who came to these buildings would be treated free of charge - and best of all, that the treatment was **guaranteed to cure them.** Now what if the people were so blind to their own well-being, so indifferent and uncaring, that they refused to come, and consequently the plague increased and thousands were dying. What would you say? 'Well, the Board of Health has done all they could, and if the people will not go to be healed, they deserve to perish - let them alone!' What? Let the whole land be depopulated? No! If the people will not come to them, **they must go to the people** and make sure that everyone had the necessary treatment to be saved from the plague."

I did not have to explain any further... he understood perfectly, and I believe, by the Spirit of God, he was able to see his mistake, to take it to heart, and determine to get to work for perishing souls.

What We Must Do

Men are preoccupied with many things, and we need to bring this subject of salvation powerfully to their attention. There is some one soul that you have more influence with than any other person on earth. Are you doing all you can for their salvation? Take them lovingly aside and say, "My dear friend, I have never spoken to you closely, carefully, and prayerfully about your soul." Let them see the tears in your eyes, or if you can't weep, let them **hear** the tears in your voice.

Let them realize that you feel their danger, and are in distress for them. Then God will give His Holy Spirit so they **can be saved**.

It is a bad sign for the Christianity of this day that it provokes so little opposition. If there were no other evidence of it being wrong, I could tell from just that. When the Church and the world can jog comfortably along together, you can be sure there is something wrong. The world has not compromised - its spirit is exactly the same as it ever was. If Christians were equally as faithful to the Lord, separated from the world, and living so that their lives were a reproof to all ungodliness, the world would hate them as much as it ever did. It is the **Church** that has compromised, not the world. You say, "You're implying that we should be getting into endless conflict with the world!" Yes- "*Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword*" (Matt. 10:34) **There would be uproar, yes!** The Acts of the apostles are full of stories of uproars. One uproar was so great, that the Chief Captain had to get Paul over the shoulders of the people, otherwise he would have been torn to pieces. "What a commotion!" you say. Yes, and bless God, if it was like that now, we would have thousands of sinners saved.

The Dignity Of Love

"But," you say, "wouldn't that be inconsistent with the dignity of the Gospel?" It depends on what you mean by "dignity." It was a very undignified thing, humanly speaking, to die on a cross between two thieves. The Pharisees spat upon the humbled sufferer and shook their heads and said, "He saved others, He cannot save Himself." Ah! But He was intent on **saving others**. That was the dignity of everlasting, unquenchable love, baring its bosom to suffer in the place of its rebellious creature - man. It was incarnate God, standing in the place of condemned man - the dignity of LOVE!

Oh friends! Will you get this baptism of love! Then you will, like the apostles, be willing to stuff your body into a basket and be let down by the wall, if need be - or suffer shipwreck, hunger, peril, nakedness, fire, or sword, or even beheading (*II Cor. 11:23-33*) -if thereby you may enlarge His Kingdom and win souls for whom He shed His blood. Oh Lord, fill us with this love and baptize us with this fire! And then the Gospel will arise and become glorious in the earth, and men will believe in us, and in it. They will feel its power, and they will yield to it by the thousands, and by the grace of God, **THEY SHALL!**

Catherine Booth (1829-1890) and her husband William founded The Salvation Army in 1865 in heir home country, England. Together they raised eight dedicated Christian children and preached the Gospel worldwide. Intent on saving others to the end Catherine stepped out boldly in ways that many women (even in our day) are reluctant to go. And in the Army William and Catherine led, men and women worked side by side for the salvation of the world. Her life made such an impression that at her death over 50,000 people flocked to Congress Hall in London to pay tribute to the "Mother of the Salvation Army." More than 36,000 attended her funeral, and at the invitation to give their hearts to God, hundreds rose to their feet.

Catherine authored six books as well as various pamphlets and articles. Her biography "Catherine Booth," written by her granddaughter, is published by Hodder & Stoughton.

Catherine Booth

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