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HE REV. J. GRESHAM MACHEN, assistant professor of New Testament Literature and Exegesis in Princeton Theological

Seminary, rated by Dr. J. Fort Newton in his book as preaching one of the best sermons for 1926, has furnished The Eagle with a sermon on "The Claims of Love," herewith reproduced. The text is from Mark xiv.: 3-8. Professor Machen said:

This incident delivers the Christian world from a crushing tyranny.



The Rev. J. Gresham Machen.

There are many other forms of tyranny from which the Christian man is set free—the tyranny of guilt, the tyranny of the power of sin, the tyranny of fate. The tyranny from which this incident sets us free is different from these; yet it is a crushing bondage all the same. In these words to the woman at Bethany our Lord

sets us free from the oppressive tyranny of the efficiency expert.

"Might it not have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor?" Certainly it might. The price of the ointment amounted to the wage of a laborer for three hundred days; there were many poor people in Jerusalem who could well have used such a sum. Yet the precious box was emptied upon the head of Jesus as He sat at table in Simon's house, and the poor were allowed to remain in want. The slightest calculation might have led the woman to act differently, but the point of the narrative is that she did not calculate at all. All that she saw was Jesus—the whole rest of the world was forgotten. There sat her dear Saviour and Lord, and her heart was full of reverence and love. What place was there for exact calculations as to the best use of funds, what place for aught save gratitude and honor for Him? Who was her only hope for time and for eternity? Little did she care for the cold criticism of the disciples; broken was the flask and the room filled with the lavish fragrance of the ointment. Calculation and efficiency were conquered by the might of love.

A Striking Change.

But since that time there has come, in some quarters at least, a striking change. The churches a few years ago discussed money and questions of organization but now they are discussing, to some extent at least, the basis of the Christian faith. There are many who deprecate the change; there are many who deprecate the discussion; there are many who say, "Let the constructive work of the Church go on irrespective of doctrinal differences." But, of course, that begs the whole question. The question is just exactly what the constructive work of the Church is. According to the Bible, the constructive work of the Church is found in the propagation of a message—call it a doctrine if you will—a message in which Jesus is offered as the Saviour of men. If the Church is propagating that message, well and good; then we are interested in having it as well organized as it possibly can be; but if it is not propagating that message, then we care little whether it is well organized or not. One cannot possibly avoid the basal question what it is that the Church is in the world to do. A church that does not stop to examine itself, that does not stop ever and again to examine the basis of its life, is in danger of death.

A great movement, it seems to me, is now going forward in many churches—a reaction against machinery, a recourse to what is central, and particularly a return to the Cross of Christ. Some men stand coldly aside; they are deterred by obvious imperfections in the leaders of the movement; they refuse to be shaken out of the even tenor of the way into which they are fallen. It sounds so strange sometimes—this word of the Cross! There is much opposition to the movement. But pray God that it may make its way! It is very pleasant to discuss merely ways and means and business methods and keep dangerous doctrinal questions in the background. Great, truly, in our day is the offense of the Cross. But there are those whose hearts have been touched. The dear Lord died for them upon the Cross, and even amid all the machinery of ecclesiastical business they cannot forget what He has done. The bystanders murmur at their unconventional acts; the bystanders talk of efficiency and of "constructive work." But what says the Lord Himself? There, my friends, is the real question. He commended the woman at Bethany, despite her inefficiency and her waste, when she proclaimed His death afore. Perhaps He may commend you if, in our day, despite sins and imperfections, yet out of a heart overflowing with love, you seek amid committees and machinery and boards to put back into its rightful place the wondrous Cross of Jesus our dear Saviour and Lord.

Love and the Work of the Church.

But we need to recognize the claims of love not only in our own individual lives, but also in the collective work of the Church. The Church to which I belong—and it is the same with other similar bodies—has come to be a powerful organization. It carries on the most varied work in all parts of the world; it conducts a great publication agency, and a great chain of book shops with a huge volume of business; it maintains many scores of hospitals and colleges and institutes of all sorts at home and abroad; one can scarcely embrace in a single view all of its vast and varied service. Certainly such an enterprise cannot be conducted without business organization; and I certainly am not advocating any diminution of efficiency. I am not even advocating for the moment any particular changes in the form of the organization. I do, indeed, believe that the organization of the Church is becoming dangerously over-centralized. The Church, it seems to me, is falling into somewhat the same error as the state—the state with its vast bureaus at Washington which, I am constrained to believe, with their discouragement of local initiative, their materialistic paternalism, are sucking the lifeblood of the people. But such questions cannot be discussed now; they are matters of personal opinion in the preacher. What is clear, at any rate, is that any organization, however good, is a menace if it becomes an end in itself and if it ceases to subserve the end which justifies its existence. And that danger of forgetting the end in the means, I am convinced, is menacing very seriously the life of the Church of today. Yet there are hopeful signs of a change.

Some years ago the Church seemed to me to be interested in nothing in the world except money. Great spiritual questions were shunted aside; the councils of the churches discussed methods of preaching, but seemed to be totally unwilling to attend at all to the question what it is that is to be preached.

and the center here as well as elsewhere is found at Calvary. The woman probably did not know about our Lord's approaching death, but Jesus knew; and in a word of beauty unsurpassed He placed that woman's act at the beginning of the long series of acts of love and gratitude in which Christians throughout the centuries have celebrated the Cross. Jesus did not go to Jerusalem to bring about a revolution or a reformation; He went there to die for the sins of the world; and, when the woman, forgetting all calculations, forgetting the cold criticism of those who stood by, poured out the precious ointment upon His head, He took it as the response of the human heart to His redeeming love.

Let us take the example to our hearts; let us not be so engrossed in our service that we forget our Saviour's love; let us not forget to pour out upon Him, in the secret place of prayer, the vials of our gratitude and praise. The woman anointed Him aforehand for the burial; we look back upon His completed work in which He loved us and gave Himself for us. Let us not, through overmuch serving, forget the better part; let us rather bring service forth from the contemplation of the Cross.

A Contrasted Service.

Here, in one of the most unforgettable, characteristic words that Jesus ever uttered our Lord actually contrasts the service of the poor with the service of Him. "Ye have the poor with you always," He said, "and whensoever ye will ye may do them good; but me ye have not always." We have not Jesus always with us in the sense in which the woman had Him with her at Bethany; we cannot pour any precious ointment upon His head. But in a higher, better sense we have Him with us still. And surely we must not neglect the privilege of communion with Him.

Certainly I am not advocating neglect of external service. Without that it is quite impossible that we should be true disciples of Jesus. It is a poor and untrue religion which leaves the hungry in distress. But we shall perform such service all the better if we take time also to commune with Jesus Himself. Do you think that the Christian life is concerned only with philanthropy? Do you think that activity in social service is all that our Lord desires? Oh, no, my friends. Those things are absolutely necessary to the Christian, but they are not all that is necessary. If we are true Christians, we shall not neglect those things, but we shall also take time to go into our closet and close the door and there, with the world shut out, with even our service forgotten for the moment, we shall think no longer of what we do but of what our Saviour has done and we shall pour out upon Him, with an abandon like that of the woman at Bethany, our gratitude and love and praise.

What did Jesus say about that woman? We have reviewed part of what He said. But the most important part is yet untouched. "She hath done what she could," said Jesus, "she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying." **There is the center of the incident,**

N Lesson for Present Days.

Do you think that we can learn anything in these days from that woman's act? Our Lord thought that we could. "Whosoever this gospel shall be preached," He said, "throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her." "For a memorial of her"—yes, and also for an example to us. In these days of cold efficiency we need to learn the claims of love.

We need to learn the claims of love, first, in our own individual lives. Even service, no matter how efficient and how diligent it may be, cannot take the place of the deep affection of the heart. I am not forgetting those texts of Scripture where service is celebrated in the loftiest terms. "Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward." "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this—to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction and to keep himself unspotted from the world." Certainly service is necessary to religion; but do you think that service is all that is necessary? I think that you will find if you read your Bible with sympathy and care that even service is comparatively useless unless it comes from the heart; true service is not a substitute for love, but the expression of love.

The love spoken of in the New Testament is not merely love of the brethren, but it is also love of Christ. We are sometimes inclined to ignore that fact; we are sometimes inclined to quote one text and not to quote also another text that God gave us as the supplement of the first. We are sometimes inclined to quote the words of Jesus in the 25th chapter of Matthew, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren ye have done it unto me," and to neglect the gracious words that have been read today. We are sometimes tempted to think that Christ is only a collective name for the totality of those who need our help; we lose sight of the central fact that He is a living Person. And in doing so we miss the center and core of the Christian life.

The error can be avoided if we attend to the words of Jesus in the passage read today. If we are tempted to think that the service of the poor is all that there is in the service of Christ, if we are tempted to make of Christ a mere collective name and not an individual Person, then we should have recourse ever anew to this incident of the anointing at Bethany.