

"If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

- John viii,31,32

Deuteronomy xxxii,1-14

John viii,12-32

Psalm 85

New Book of Worship, Psalm 85, p.66

In many places in the writings the importance of knowing the truth is emphasized, for it is by a life in conformity with truth that man is born again; and unless he is born again, he does not attain the end for which he was created, namely, heaven. The knowledge of the truth of which Jesus speaks in the words of our text is practical knowledge: "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

Also the Divine truth is eternal and unchangeable. "For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven." "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever." "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." No human understanding of the Lord's Word nor any human attainment is final, but the Lord's truth is eternally the same.

Of himself man is unable to acquire knowledge of spiritual truths; his faculties are not suited to such attainment. In the final analysis knowledge of spiritual truth is imparted to him by revelation. Likewise he cannot become regenerate by any intellectual activity of his own. Regeneration is effected by the Lord alone in such as learn and accept the truths He has revealed, and live according to them. All men are born unregenerate. The Lord saves all who will allow themselves to be saved, and those allow themselves to be saved who accept the truths of the Word and live a life of love to the Lord and the neighbor. There is no other way.

Our text reads, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." There is no freedom but in the truth. Yet there is much more that lies behind this simple statement. There are different levels or degrees of truth. Some truth is an intellectual concept; other truth involves a moral obligation. Some truth comes easily and gladly to the mind; for other truth one must labor, and sacrifice not only ease but also deeply ingrained prejudices.

Freedom is also of many kinds. It is proclaimed today that Africa will be free. But freedom from colonialism is only political freedom. The process may entail the loss of many other freedoms until new governments learn wisdom and build up strong, responsible leadership. Freedom from poverty, from ignorance, and from the selfishness of men is freedom of another nature. Behind all these many kinds of freedom lie different aspects of the Divine truth.

As there is a price to pay for the acquisition of truth, so there is a price on its communication to others. First of all there is the effort involved in



learning how to tell the truth so that the hearer will really see and consider it. It is one thing to speak the truth to the empty air and quite another thing to tell the truth so that it will reach the minds and hearts of men. Also there may be the cost of sacrifice when one stands fearlessly for the truth. The freedom given by truth is not the freedom to shun responsibility. The Lord told Pilate that He came into the world to bear witness to the truth - and the freedom to bear that witness led Him to the Cross.

Education that leads to truth is more than mere book-learning. And freedom involves responsibility. Truth has its price and freedom its burdens. Asia and Africa and likewise the whole world stand in need of this freedom.

The promise of knowing the truth that makes us free is never an unconditional promise. It is dependent upon a very crucial "if." The words of the Lord are, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." The future of our nation and of the world depends not only upon knowing the truth but upon meeting the conditions under which the eternal truth may be known.

Every method of seeking truth involves some condition. To acquire natural truth one must study the laws of nature. To acquire political and economic truth it is necessary to study the laws of government and of business and of the collective interests of society. We are familiar with the maxim "knowledge is power." The largest single sum spent by the government is for our schools and colleges.

Today there is a life and death race to acquire knowledge, as the fate of nations is seen to be dependent upon it. But this race is for the acquisition of natural knowledge or the knowledge of material things. But the truth that makes men free is not the truth that reveals the secrets of nature. It is the truth that leads to the acknowledgment of the obligation of obedience to the will and purpose of God, who will finally decide the outcome of the whole human venture.

Here is the special function of the church. We are told that "The church specifically exists where the Word is found, and the Lord is known thereby, consequently where Divine truths have been revealed. Still those who are born where the Word exists, and where the Lord is known, are not on that account of the church; but those are, who, through the truths from the Word, are being regenerated by the Lord" (H.D.246).

Natural laws are the Lord's laws on the natural plane. The Lord's Word is the Divine law on the spiritual plane, and though it is on a different plane and its truths are of an entirely different order, it is no less certain in its operation.

The main function of the church is to assist in the regeneration of men, and as a knowledge of truth is essential to regeneration, it is the first duty of the church as an institution to treasure and safeguard the truth entrusted to it. There have been four churches or spiritual dispensations on earth prior to the New Church, and each came to its end through the falsification of the truths entrusted to it. We are familiar with perversion of doctrine leading to the misinterpretation of the Word, and with the gross evils which afflicted the church at the time of the



Reformation, making necessary the Second Coming of the Lord. We should be ever mindful of the fact that the Lord operates in us by means of the truths of the Word, "for the Word is the sole medium through which man draws near to the Lord, and into which the Lord enters" (T.C.R.142).

When the Lord spoke to the Jews the words of our text, "They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?" At the time the Jews were actually in bondage to Rome. Strangely they were indignant at the thought of being made free. They did not think that they were in bondage. This was because they were natural men and natural men, while they are slaves to their passions, boast of their freedom, because they are uncontrolled by the restraints of religion. So the Lord goes on to explain the true nature of bondage and of freedom, saying, "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin." This, being spiritual bondage, is bondage itself. There is a fundamental difference between spiritual and natural bondage. Spiritual bondage is voluntary; natural bondage is often involuntary. Self-love, which is the master sin, is the great slave-master, the enemy of freedom both of soul and body. This is the bondage from which the truth will make us free.

In the twelfth chapter of Revelation we read of the dragon persecuting the woman who brought forth the man-child. The woman is the church; the man-child is the Divine truth, that is, the new revelation for the New Church.

There is a passage in the Arcana that bears on this situation, where it is stated that it is according to order to enter from truths into rational and scientific things, but contrary to order to enter from scientific and rational things into truth. "All of which shows how great concern it is that truths should be known and believed; for man is enlightened by truths, and made blind by falsities" (2588<sup>B</sup>). Falsities are exceedingly abundant on every hand about us, and the writings of some of the world's most eminent and scholarly men are full of them.

Man does not live from himself. He was created by a power outside of himself, which keeps him alive from day to day and gives him eternal life. We read, "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made" - the heavens of the human soul. By the truths of the Word men are brought in touch with the Lord, who is the Word. Without its truths no person or nation can be saved.

The importance of spiritual truth is emphasized throughout the writings of the church. We are told that faith is formed by truths, that by truths charity toward the neighbor is developed. Conscience is formed by truths, by truths is purification from evils, by truths are intelligence and wisdom, by truths is the beauty of the angels and the order of heaven.

We should acquaint ourselves as far as we can with the problems of the world, in order that we may bring to men the spiritual truths that apply to their solution. We have a duty to show what patriotism is and what true liberty is. We should preach the gospel of service, not simply its dignity but its necessity as a fundamental condition for the reception of heavenly life. We have the duty of preaching the gospel of ownership, that "the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof," and the duty to preach the gospel of human brotherhood, the individuality and interdependence of the races, and that it is the duty of every man so to live that the world shall be better for his creation.

So to teach the Gospel would help and inspire reform in the only way in which true reform can be brought about, by turning the world toward the Lord, the only Savior of the world.

Amen