

Reflections

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AGAPE ISN'T HOLDING HANDS

Gridiron gladiators are prayed over, and spectators are entertained with half-time repertoires that include "Put Your Hand in the Hand of the Man of Galilee." It is a new day in Christendom. Conversions after the modern order of things fill more stadiums than a Henry Aaron. Moreover, the lexicon of today is replete with *relevance*, *commitment*, *concern*, *involvement*, *compassion*, and *love* — proclaimed from bumper and ballad, from coffee shop and commune. The aboriginal and sentimental bent of its proponents is touted as "primitive godliness."

Primitive godliness, however, found its expression in the hands of a carpenter. The Person with those hands commissioned a fisherman and a tentmaker to raise the church militant, not the church rapturous. If we can trace continuity back to these men, we are then comrades-in-arms and not trysting lovers. Let us, therefore, salute each other as workmen on the walls of Zion, as watchmen at the gate, or as Gideon's noble three hundred — not as some effete corps exhausted by the very thought of encounter. Our song is "Onward, Christian Soldiers, Marching As to War."

Today is not the day of pick and fiddle, but of pick and shovel. The *loud cry* is not merely amplified sound, nor is Daniel 12:4 fulfilled by summer buses. An "army of our youth rightly trained" refers to the substantial skills of service from bookkeeping to beekeeping. Such a field force would go forth to battle in pickup trucks armed with hammers and saws . . . paintbrushes and primers . . . shovels, rakes, and hoes. Let us clean up some widow's yard, repair her porch and plumbing, paint her kitchen, stock her pantry, and tell her the Good News of Redemption through Jesus Christ

our Lord. Then if we have energy left, let us sing the songs of Zion — “Lead On, O King Eternal, the Day of March Has Come.”

OUR FATHER —

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At this vesper hour, we acknowledge your gifts.

You gave us time, and we squandered it.

You gave us speech, and we profaned it.

You gave us appetite, and we perverted it.

You gave us mind, and we devised cunning fables.

You gave us sensitivity, and we became brutish.

You gave us love, and we became sentimental.

You gave us mountaintops, and we built carnivals.

You gave us a holy day, and we made a holiday.

You gave us the Lord of the Sabbath, and we crucified him.

In all things we have been prodigal.

Lord, in the twilight of this day, in the twilight of this earth,

It is only our need that recommends us to thee.

From the wreck of our own vanity and folly, we look up and see

One who took formless space and created a universe —

One who made the lame walk, the blind see,

The dumb speak, the spotted clean, the dead live —

The only one who can say with authority, “Thy sins be forgiven thee!”

And thus we cry: Create in us a clean heart, O God,

And renew a right spirit within us! For our hope is built

On nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.

SHAMA

With a practiced hand, John snaked the battered and scarred hawser around the capstan and cautiously prepared to make fast. Conning from the bridge, the captain bellowed, “Heave on that line!”

“I think it will part, sir,” John replied.

"Who in the blankety-blank told you to think?" the captain thundered. "Heave."

The redness creeping up John's neck was as much from embarrassment, anger, and rebellion as from heaving. Sixteen years of physical and verbal abuse from an authoritarian father should have hardened John to the captain's manner, yet he chafed as an unwilling servant as much as he had as a reluctant son.

Small wonder, indeed, that he saw the Lawgiver as a vindictive, crusty old sea captain thundering from the mountaintop. The tender, steady fearlessness of a Christian mother was the only incongruity in John's mental image of God. Even now, her last letter, speaking of Bible truth and the Sabbath, sounded to John like just more heaving on the line. Her warmth and love, however, compelled him to listen and think.

The summer became a strange mix of heaving on the line, pulling on the oar, and reading his mother's letters. But slowly, surely the mother's love won that tug-of-war. Late that fall, with baptism, John entered into fellowship with a new Captain of his life.

For many, unfortunately, the word *obedience* suggests an image of a harsh taskmaster, a cat-o'-nine-tails discipline, and a hellfire and brimstone theology — an ignoble connotation that neither the Bible writers nor God ever intended the word to achieve. The Hebrew word for obedience, *shama*, means "to hear intelligently," and the Greek word, *hupakoe*, means "to be willing to listen." Ellen White caught the essence of the thought when she referred to obedience as "the service and allegiance of love."¹

It is easy to say, within such constraints, that John, while complying with the captain's command, had not obeyed. Obedience thrusts far deeper than mere compliance and performance. It goes to the heart of the matter, to the very seat of the affections. Obedience is a willingness to listen *intelligently* to one you love. Such motivated behavior is the test of true discipleship, the evidence of faith and trust, the only requirement for heaven. How refreshing, then, to discover a God who created man not only *empowered* to think but expressly *invited* to think: Come . . . let us reason together. Here again Ellen White caught the tempo when she stated that "the kingly power of reason, sanctified by divine grace, is to bear sway in our lives."²

In a day when reality is equated with a caramelized, caffeinized, carbonated beverage, when the hue and cry is for relevance and immediacy in personal experience, it might be well to pinpoint which question is the big one: "Do you have Jesus?" or "Does Jesus have you?"

"Do you have Jesus?" was answered in the beginning, for Christ was

identified as "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). It was ratified at Calvary: "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). It was rediscovered at Wittenberg and reemphasized at Minneapolis: "We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (Hebrews 4:15).

Basic to the Christian faith is the reality of a Creator-Redeemer who is personally identified with every individual and interested in the eternal well-being of each. Implicit in the question "Do you have Jesus?", however, is an egocentric possessiveness that tends toward a subjective, mystical, introspective audit of one's personal righteousness. Indulged, such an orientation leads to smugness, self-righteousness; and ultimately it makes God a personal bellhop, a genie, a bailsmen.

On the other hand, the question "Does Jesus have you?" accepts the reality of a personal Saviour while maintaining a proper Creator-creature, Redeemer-redeemed perspective without in any way destroying the intimacy of the relationship between God and man. Implicitly this question asks, "Are you listening intelligently to Jesus?" whereas the other question demands, "What overt demonstration can you place in evidence that Jesus hears you?"

The voice may be still and small, but the message is loud and clear: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). Many have been called, but few *have chosen*, unfortunately — thereby failing to enter into that "rest" spoken of by Paul. For that matter, neither has the present generation comprehended the invitation fully.

Could it be that God even yet proposes that the Sabbath rest become the ultimate evidence of faith, trust, and obedience? If so, why not enter into it fully today? Surely it must beat heaving on the line!

REFERENCES

- 1 Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Washington, D. C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association 1908), p. 60.
- 2 White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association 1909), p. 130.