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AGGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY

## CHAPTER 1: AGGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY

MARK 16:15.—"Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature."

ACTS 26:15-18.—"And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee: Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me."

I WAS thinking, while I was reading the lesson, that, supposing we could blot out from our minds all knowledge of the history of Christianity from the time of this Inauguration Service—from that Pentecostal Baptism—or, at any rate, from the close of the period described in the Acts of the Apostles, suppose we could detach from our minds all knowledge of the history of Christianity since then, and take the Acts of the Apostles and sit down and calculate what was likely to happen in the world, what different results we should have anticipated, what a different world we should have reckoned upon as the outcome of it all. A system which commenced under such auspices, with such assumptions and professions on the part of its Author (speaking after the manner of men), and producing, as it did, in the first century of its existence, such gigantic and momentous results. We should have said, if we knew nothing of what has intervened from that time to this, that, no doubt, the world where that war commenced, and for which it was organized, would have long since been subjugated to the influence of that system, and brought under the power of its great originator and founder! I say, from reading these Acts, and from observing the spirit which animated the early disciples, and from the way in which everything fell before them, we should have anticipated that ten thousand times greater results would have followed, and, in my judgment, this anticipation would have been perfectly rational and just.

We Christians profess to possess 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-men—a panacea, we believe it to be, for all the moral and spiritual woes of humanity, and in curing their spiritual plagues we should go far to cure their physical plagues also. We all profess to



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believe this. Christians have professed to believe this for generations gone by, ever since the time of which we have been reading, and yet look at the world, look at so-called Christian England, in this end of the nineteenth century! The great majority of the nation utterly ignoring God, and not even making any pretence of remembering Him one day in the week. And then look at the rest of the world. I have frequently got 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 "rivers of water do often run down my eyes because men keep not His law," and because it seems to me that this dispensation, compared with what God intended it to be, has been, and still is, as great a failure as that which preceded it.

Now, I ask, how is this? I do not for a 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 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 propound theories that are at variance with things as they are.' There has been a great deal too much of this, and it has had a very bad effect. The world is in this condition, and here is a system launched under such auspices, with such purposes, with such promises and with such prospects, and yet nearly nineteen hundred years have rolled away and here we are. How little has been done, comparatively. What a little alteration has been effected in the habits and dispositions of the race.

But some of you will say, 'Well, but there is a good 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 far reflects upon the love and goodness of God as to make Him to blame for this effectness of Christianity, and, so far as my influence extends, I will not allow the responsibility and the blame of all this to be rolled back upon God who so loved the world that He gave His only Son to ignominy and death in order to redeem it. I do not believe it for a moment. I believe that the old arch-enemy has done in this dispensation what he did in former ones—so far circumvented the purposes of God, that he has succeeded in bringing about this state of things—in retarding the accomplishment of God's purposes and keeping the world thus largely under his own power and influence, and I believe he has succeeded in doing this, as he has succeeded always before, by DECEIVING GOD'S OWN PEOPLE. He has always done so. He has always got up a caricature of God's real thing, and the nearer he can get it to be like the original the more successful he is. He has succeeded in deceiving God's people: – First:-AS TO THE STANDARD



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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 got the Church, nearly as a whole, to receive what I call an 'Oh, wretched man that I am' religion! He has got them to lower the standard which Jesus Christ himself established in this Book—a standard, not only to be aimed at, but to be attained unto—a standard of victory over sin, the world, the flesh, and the Devil, real, living, reigning, triumphing, Christianity! Satan knew what was the secret of the great success of those early disciples. It was their whole-hearted devotion, their absorbing love to Christ, their utter abnegation of the world. It was their entire absorption in the salvation of their fellow men and the glory of their God. It was an enthusiastic religion that swallowed them up, and made them willing to become wanderers and vagabonds on the face of the earth—for His sake to dwell in dens and caves, to be torn asunder, and to be persecuted in every form.

It was this degree of devotion, before which Satan saw he had no chance. Such people as these, he knew, must ultimately subdue the world. It is not in human nature to stand before that kind of spirit, that amount of love and zeal, and if Christians had only gone on as they began long since, the glorious prophecy would have been fulfilled, "The kingdoms of this world" would have "become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ."

Therefore, the arch-enemy said, 'What must I do? I shall be defeated after all. I shall lose my supremacy as the god of this world. What shall I do?' No use to bring in a gigantic system of error, which everybody will see to be error. Oh, dear no! That has never been Satan's way; but his plan has been to get hold of a good man here and there, who shall creep in, as the Apostle said, unawares, and preach another doctrine, and who shall deceive, if it were possible, the very elect. And he did it. He accomplished his design. He gradually lowered the standard of Christian life and character, and though, in every revival, God has raised it again to a certain extent, we have never got back thoroughly to the simplicity, purity, and devotion set before us in these Acts of the Apostles and in the Epistles. And just in the degree that it has approximated thereto, in every age, Satan has got somebody to oppose and to show that this was too high a standard for human nature, altogether beyond us, and that, 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 got the Church into a condition that makes



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one, sometimes, positively ashamed to hear professing Christians talk, and ashamed also, that the world should hear them talk. I do not wonder at thoughtful, intelligent men being driven from such Christianity as this. It would have driven me off, if I had not known the power of godliness. I believe this kind of Christianity has made more infidels than all the infidel books ever written.

Yes, Satan knew that he must get Christians down from the high pinnacle of whole-hearted consecration to God. He knew that he had no chance till he tempted them down from that blessed vantage ground, and so he began to spread those false doctrines, to counteract which John wrote his epistles, for, before he died, he saw what was coming, and sounded down the ages—"Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." The 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 repeat it in my maturer years, that if it sent me to hell I would never pull it down. Oh! that God's people felt like that. There is the glorious standard put before us. The power is proffered, the conditions laid down, and we CAN all attain it if we will; but if we will not—for the sake of the children, and for generations yet unborn, do not let us drag it down, and try to make it meet our little, paltry, circumscribed experience. LET US KEEP IT UP. This is the way to get the world to look at it. Show the world a real, living, self-sacrificing, hard-working, toiling, triumphing religion, and the world will be influenced by it; but anything short of that they will turn round and spit upon.

Secondly:—Satan has deceived even those whom he could not succeed in getting to lower the standard of their own lives with respect to their duties and obligations to the world. I have been reading of late the New Testament with special reference to the aggressive spirit of Primitive Christianity, and it is wonderful what floods of light come upon you when you read the Bible with reference to any particular topic on which you are seeking for help. When God sees you are panting after the light, in order that you may use it, He pours it in upon you. It is an indispensable condition of receiving light that you are willing to follow it. People say they don't see this and that, no, because they do not wish to see. They are not willing to walk in it, and, therefore, they do not get it; but those who are willing to obey shall have all the light they want.



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It seems to me that we come infinitely short of any right and rational idea of the aggressive spirit of the New Testament saints. Satan has got Christians to accept what I may call a namby-pamby, kid-glove kind of system of presenting the Gospel to people.

'Will they be so kind as to read this tract or book, or would they not like to hear this popular and eloquent preacher. They will be pleased with him quite apart from religion.' That is the sort of half-frightened, timid way of putting the truth before unconverted people, and of talking to them about the salvation of their souls. It seems to me this is utterly antagonistic and repugnant to the spirit of the early saints: "Go ye, and preach the Gospel to EVERY CREATURE"; and again the same idea—"Unto whom now I send thee." Look what is implied in these commissions. It seems to me that no people have ever yet fathomed the meaning of these two Divine commissions. I believe we of the Salvation Army have come nearer to it than any people that have ever preceded us. Look at them. Would it ever occur to you that the language meant, "Go and build chapels and churches "and invite the people to come in, and if they will "not, let them alone?" "GO YE." If you sent your servant to do something for you, and said, 'Go and accomplish that piece of business for me.' You know what it would involve. You know that he must see certain persons; and run about the city to certain offices and banks and agents, involving a deal of trouble and sacrifice; but you have nothing to do with that. He is your servant. He is employed by you to do that business, and you simply commission him to 'Go and do it.' What would you think if he went and took an office and sent out a number of circulars inviting your customers or clients to come and wait on his pleasure, and when they chose to come just to put your business before them? No, you would say, 'Ridiculous.' Divesting our minds of all conventionalities and traditionalisms, what would the language mean? "Go ye!" To whom? "To every creature." Where am I to get at them? WHERE THEY ARE. "Every creature." There is the extent of your commission. Seek them out; run after them, wherever you can get at them. "Every creature"—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 the spirit of the commission.

And then again, to Paul he says, "Unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." They are asleep—go and wake them up. They do not see their danger. If they did, there would be no necessity for you to run after them. They are preoccupied. Open their eyes, and turn them round by your desperate earnestness and moral suasion and moral force; oh! it makes me tremble to think what a great deal one man can do for another! "Turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." How did Paul understand it? He says, "We persuade men." Do not rest content with just putting it before



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them, giving them gentle invitations, and then leaving them alone. He ran after them, poor things, and pulled them out of the fire. Take the bandage off their eyes which Satan has bound round them; knock and hammer and burn in, with the fire of the Holy Ghost, your words into their poor, hardened, darkened hearts, until they begin to realize that they are IN DANGER; that there is something amiss. Go after them. If I understand it, that is the spirit of the Apostles and of the early Christians; for we read that when they were scattered by persecution, they "went everywhere, preaching the word." The laity, the new converts, the young babes in Christ. It does not mean always in set discourses, and public assemblies, but they went after men and women, like ancient Israel—"Every man after his man," to try and win him for Christ.

Some people seem to think that the Apostles laid the foundations of all the churches. They are quite mistaken. Churches sprang up where the Apostles had never been. The Apostles went to visit and organize them after they had sprung up, as the result of the work of the early laymen and women going everywhere and preaching the Word. Oh! may the Lord shower upon us in this day the same spirit! We should build churches and chapels; we should invite the people to them; but do you think it is consistent with these two commissions, and with many others, that we should rest in this, when three parts of the population utterly ignore our invitations and take no notice whatever of our buildings and of our services? They will not come to us. That is an established fact. What is to be done? They have souls. You profess to believe that as much as I do, and that they must live for ever. Where are they going? What is to be done? Jesus Christ says, 'Go after them.' When all the civil methods have failed; when the genteel invitations have failed; when one man says that he has married a wife, and another that he has bought a yoke of oxen, and another that he has bought a piece of land—then does the Master of the feast say, 'The ungrateful wretches, let them alone?' "No." He says, "Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled." I will have guests, and if you can't get them in by civil measures, use military measures. Go and COMPEL them to come in. It seems to me that we want more of this determined aggressive spirit. Those of you who are right with God this afternoon—you want more of this spirit to thrust the truth upon the attention of your fellow men.

Oh! people say, you must be very careful, very judicious. You must not thrust religion down people's throats. Then, I say, you will never get it down. What! Am I to wait till an unconverted, godless man wants to be saved before I try to save him? He will never want to be saved till the death-rattle is in his throat. What! Am I to let my unconverted friends and acquaintances drift down quietly to damnation, and never tell them about their souls, until they say, 'If you please, I want you to preach to me?' Is this



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anything like the spirit of early Christianity? No. Verily we must make them look—tear the bandages off, open their eyes, make them bear it, 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 and get their souls saved. This is what Christianity ought to be doing in this land, and there are plenty of Christians to do it. Why, we might give the world such a time of it that they would get saved in very self defence, if we were only up and doing, and determined that they should have no peace in their sins. Where is our zeal for the Lord? We talk of Old Testament saints, but I would, we were all like David. Rivers of water ran down his eyes because men kept not the Law of his God. But you say, 'We cannot all hold services.' Perhaps not.

Go as you like. Go as quietly and softly as the morning dew. Have meetings like the Friends if you like. **ONLY DO IT.** Don't let your relatives, and friends, and acquaintances die, and their blood be found on your skirts!!!

I shall never forget the agony depicted on the face of a young lady who once came to see me. My heart went out to her in pity. She told me her story. She said, I had a proud, ungodly father, and the Lord converted me three years before his death, and, from the very day of my conversion, I felt I ought to talk to him, and plead, and pray with him about his soul, but I could not muster up courage. I kept intending to do it, and intending to do it, until he was taken ill. It was a sudden and serious illness. He lost his mind, and died unsaved,' and she said, 'I have never smiled since, and I think I never shall any more.' Don't be like that. Do it quietly, if you like; privately, if you like; but do it, and do it as if you felt the value of their souls, and as if you intended to save them, if by any possible means in your power it could be done.

I had been speaking in a town, in the West of England, on the subject of responsibility of Christians for the salvation of souls. The gentlemen with whom I was staying had winced a bit under the truth, and instead of taking it to heart in love, and making it the means of drawing him nearer to God, and enabling him to serve Him better, 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 anybody 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 are aware that we build the chapels and churches, and pay the ministers, and if the people won't be saved, we can't help it.' (I think he had given pretty largely to a chapel in the town.) I said, It is very heartless and ungrateful of the people, I grant; but, my dear sir, you would not reason thus in any temporal matter. Suppose a plague were to break out in London, and suppose



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that the Board of Health were to meet and to appropriate all the hospitals and public buildings they could get to the treatment of those diseased, and suppose they were to issue proclamations to say that whoever would come to these buildings should be treated free of cost, and every care and kindness bestowed on them, and, moreover, that the treatment would certainly cure them; but, supposing the people were so blind to their own interests, so indifferent and besotted that they refused to come, and consequently, the plague was increasing and thousands dying, what would you in the provinces say? Would you say, 'Well, the Board of Health have done what they could, and if the people will not go to be healed, they deserve to perish; let them alone?' No, you would say, 'It is certainly very foolish and wicked of the people, but these men are in a superior position. They understand the matter. They know and are responsible for the consequences. What in the world are they going to do? Let the whole land be depopulated!' No! If the people will not come to them, they must go to the people, and force upon them the means of health, and insist that proper measures should be used for the suppression of the 'plague.' It needed no application. He understood it, and I believe, by the Spirit of God, he was enabled to see his mistake, to take it home, and set to work to do something for perishing souls.

Men are preoccupied, and it is for us to go and force it upon their attention. Remember, you can do it. There is some one soul that you have more influence with than any other person on earth—some soul or souls. Are you doing all you can for their salvation? Your relatives, friends, and acquaintances are to be rescued. Thank God! we are rescuing the poor people all over the land by thousands. There they are, to be looked at, and talked with, and questioned—people rescued from the depths of sin, degradation, and woe—saved from the worst forms of crime and infamy; and, if He can do that, He can have your genteel friends, if only you will go to them desperately and determinedly. Take them lovingly by the button-hole, and say, 'My dear friend, I never spoke to you closely, carefully, and prayerfully about your soul.' Let them see the tears in your eyes; or, if you cannot weep, let them hear the tears in your voice, and let them realize that you feel their danger, and are in distress for them. God will give His Holy Spirit, and they will be saved.

I was going to note that both texts imply opposition for, He adds, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world." As much as if He had said, 'You will have need of my presence. Such aggressive, determined warfare as this will raise all earth and hell against you;' and then He says to Paul, "I will be with thee, delivering thee from the people and the Gentiles unto whom I send thee." Why would they need this? Because the Gentiles would soon be up in arms against him, and indeed they were.



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Opposition! 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 should know it from that. When the Church and the world can jog along comfortably together, you may be sure there is something wrong. The world has not altered. Its spirit is exactly the same as it ever was, and if Christians were equally faithful and devoted to the Lord, and separated from the world, living so that their lives were a reproof to all ungodliness, the world would hate them as much as ever it did. It is the Church that has altered, not the world. You say, 'We should be getting into endless turmoil.' Yes; "I came not to bring peace on the earth, but a sword." There would be uproar. Yes; and 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, lest he should have been torn in pieces. 'What a commotion!' you say. Yes; and, bless God, if we had the like now we should have thousands of sinners saved.

'But,' you say, 'I see what a very undignified position this would bring the Gospel into.' That depends on what sort of dignity you mean. You say, 'We should always be getting into collision with the powers that be, and with the world, and what very unpleasant consequences would result.' Yes, dear friends, there always have been unpleasant consequences to the flesh, when people were following God and doing His will. 'But,' you say, 'wouldn't it be inconsistent with the dignity of the Gospel.' It depends from what standpoint you look at it. It depends upon what really constitutes the dignity of the Gospel. What does constitute the dignity of the Gospel? Is it human dignity, or is it Divine? Is it earthly, or is it heavenly dignity? It was a very undignified thing, looked at humanly, to die on a cross between two thieves. That was the most undignified thing ever done in this world, and yet, looked at on moral and spiritual grounds, it was the grandest spectacle that ever earth or heaven gazed upon, and methinks that the inhabitants of heaven stood still and looked over the battlements at that glorious, illustrious sufferer, as He hung there between heaven and earth. The Pharisees, I know, spat upon the humbled sufferer, and wagged their heads and said, "He saved others, himself He cannot save." Ah! but He was intent on saving others. That was the dignity of Almighty strength allying itself with human weakness, in order to raise it. It was the dignity of eternal wisdom shrouding itself in human ignorance, in order to enlighten it. It was the dignity of everlasting, unquenchable love, baring its bosom to suffer in the stead of its rebellious creature—man. Ah! it was incarnate God standing in the place of condemned, apostate man—the dignity of love! love! LOVE!

Oh, precious Saviour! save us from maligning Thy Gospel and Thy name by clothing it with our paltry notions of earthly dignity, and forgetting the dignity which crowned Thy sacred brow as Thou didst



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hang upon the cross! That is the dignity for us, and it will never suffer by any gentleman here carrying the Gospel into the back slums or alleys of any town or city in which he lives. That dignity will never suffer by any employer talking lovingly to his servant maid or errand boy, and looking into his eyes with tears of sympathy and love and trying to bring his soul to Jesus. That dignity will never suffer even though you should have to be dragged through the streets with a howling mob at your heels, like Jesus Christ, if you have gone into those streets for the souls of your fellow men and the glory of God. Though you should be tied to a stake, as were the martyrs of old, and surrounded by laughing and taunting fiends and their howling followers—that will be a dignity which shall be crowned in heaven, crowned with everlasting glory. If I understand it, that is the dignity of the Gospel—the dignity of love. I do not envy, I do not covet any other. I desire no other, —God is my witness—than the dignity of love.

Oh, friends! will you get this baptism of love! Then you will, like the Apostles, be willing to push your limbs into a basket, and so be let down by the wall, if need be, or suffer shipwreck, hunger, peril, nakedness, fire, or sword, or even go to the block itself, if thereby you may extend His kingdom and win souls for whom He shed His blood. The 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 go down under it by thousands, and, by the grace of God, they SHALL.

From a series of lectures given by Catherine Booth in 1880.