

THE STATE OF THE CHURCH

Being
Extracts from a book entitled
"THE STATE OF THE CHURCH"
by

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Introductory Note

Subsequent events have proved that the great WORLD MISSIONARY CONFERENCE held in Edinburgh in 1910 was a momentous gathering. The principal outcome of that Conference was a deep realisation of the unparalleled opportunities for Missionary expansion throughout the world, coupled with an alarming revelation of the inability of the Church at home to enter the open doors. Soon after that Conference Dr. Andrew Murray published a notable book called "The State of the Church," in which he endeavoured to arouse the Church at home to a realisation of its febleness in the day of such opportunity.

The situation confronting us in the world to-day greatly accentuates the need to re-emphasize the solemn truths brought out in Dr. Murray's book. The second great world-war has brought about conditions of need and opportunity more pressing than ever, and the Church instead of being better prepared seems weaker than ever.

Believing that "The State of the Church" (now out of print, and copies unfortunately very rare), sets forth a message which is of the utmost importance and relevance for the Church to-day, these extracts have been made in the hope that a renewed demand for the book may make a re-print practicable.—L.G.B.

A NEW VITALIZING OF THE CHURCH NEEDED

"As we contemplate the work to be done, we are conscious that the fundamental difficulty is not one of men or money, but of Spiritual Power. The Christian experience of the Church is not deep, intense,

and living enough to meet the world's need. The only hope of the Church being able to meet the opportunity is, that there should be a new vitalising of the whole Church. The most direct and effective way to promote the evangelisation of the world is to influence the workers on the field, and indeed the whole membership of the Church at home, to yield themselves completely to the sway of Christ as Lord. We must make men understand that it is only their lack of faith and half-hearted consecration that hinders the rapid advance of God's Kingdom."

"Here before us lies a world dying in its need of the very message which the Church of Christ alone can bring. This world in its need is accessible and open to this message, as it never has been in ages past. The Lord Jesus Christ, having laid down His life to redeem this world, waits still for that message of His redeeming love to be brought to those for whom He died, and His Church has not the power, nor vitality, nor consecration, which would make it possible for her to fulfil her blessed mission."

HOW IS THE CHURCH TO BE AROUSED? .

Dr. Murray says, 1. "First we shall have to set clearly before ourselves and others what is the true calling of the Church and of every believer. Christ expects that every one that knows His love shall tell of it."

"Christ claims that everyone who is made partaker of His redemption shall yield himself, as the first object of his existence, to live for the coming of His Kingdom."

"As long as these claims are counted too high, and are not accepted as the very groundwork of the relation between Christ and His Church, and every member of it, our attempt to lift the Church into the more Abundant Life will be in vain. Unless God's children can be brought to accept this standard and to count such a life their highest happiness and to believe in the power of Christ to work and maintain it in them, there will be little hope of that intense vitality without which the Church cannot fulfil her calling."

2. A second step will be "the discovery of what the real cause of the evil is, its terrible power over us, and our utter impotence to overcome it."

"We shall find that, at the root of all, lies the selfishness that sought and looked to Christ merely for our personal salvation; the worldliness that kept us from living in the power of His Death and resurrection; and the self-satisfaction that rested content with a religion which was for the greater part in the power of human wisdom and in the 'form of godliness.' We shall have to be brought to the conviction that there is an entire revolution in our inner life needed."

3.—Who is to take the initiative in all this? Are we to wait for some great Conference or for our Church leaders or for the rest of the congregation to make a move? No, Dr. Murray says, it depends upon the individual Christian.

4.—Naturally, much depends upon the Christian Ministry.

"Let us, therefore, begin at once and beseech God that He would raise up men in the ministry, with the courage of their convictions, to sound the call to a new repentance and consecration, and in the boldness of faith to tell what Christ is willing to do for the Church if it will but yield to Him."

"There are many who are longing for someone to lead them out into a life of Liberty and devotion to Christ, which they have seen from afar, but have never yet been able to attain. Let men and women take courage and speak out, telling those around them what happiness there is in a life spent for Christ, and what certainty of strength there is to be found in Him. Dear Fellow-Christian, begin at once, and give God no rest until Christ has the place in your heart which He claims."

WHY COULD WE NOT CAST HIM OUT?

See St. Matthew, Ch. 17, 14-21: "The disciples were ashamed at not being able to cast out this evil spirit, and asked the Master to tell them the cause of their failure. He answered with one word: UNBELIEF. They had not been living in communion with God and separation from the world—they had neglected prayer and fasting."

Speaking of the serious decline in Church membership reported from all quarters, Andrew Murray says, if we face the situation honestly, we shall discover that

"The real cause is the decay, not in religious interests or sympathies, but in personal religion of a positive and experienced kind, and often in the pulpit. Decay in Church membership is due to decay in membership in Christ."

"Even among those who remain in active membership in our Churches, the type of religion has changed, the sense of sin can hardly be appealed to by preachers now, and to preach grace is in many, even orthodox quarters, regarded as theological obsession and the wrong language for the hour, while justification by faith is practically obsolete."

"The grace of God cannot return to our preaching, or to our faith, till we recover what has almost clean gone from our general, familiar and current religion—what liberalism has quite lost—I mean a due sense of the Holiness of God. This Holiness of God is the real foundation—it is certainly the ruling interest of the Christian religion."

"WHAT IS REALLY CHRIST'S CLAIM UPON US? Nothing less than this—that as completely as He gave Himself for us and to us should we give ourselves for Him and to Him."

"This claim of Christ must be proclaimed in the Church with a new power from on high, by those who have yielded themselves wholly to it, who have given their lives to let Christ work in them all that He wills."

THE STATE OF THE CHURCH

"The United Free Church of Scotland has 1700 congregations, and during the last five years the average increase in membership has been about 850; that is to say, every second congregation has added one and every other congregation has added none. Think of this. Seventeen hundred ministers, the Shepherd's of Christ's flock, sent by Him to seek and to save the lost, reporting that each of them has gathered in at the rate of half a member for the year's work. Just think of an Insurance Society or Commercial Company counting up the clients that it has succeeded through its agents in gathering in during a year and receiving such a report. What an urgent call there would be at once for a thorough-

going inquiry, and a review of all the methods and men under whose charge the failure was reported."

"In every investigation in connection with a business undertaking the great aim is to lay the blame on the guilty one."

"WHO IS TO BLAME HERE? The Ministry as a whole, or individual Ministers? Or the congregations who, by their worldliness and lack of spiritual life, hinder the Minister? Or the Church as a whole with its Synods and Assemblies because they have allowed things to come to such a pass, and not sounded the alarm in the ears of minister and people?"

"But apart from the question of blame, there is still the deeper question as to the spiritual significance of the situation."

"TO WHAT IS THE DECLINE OWING? Is it that the Gospel has not been faithfully preached? Is it, as some think, that the Higher Criticism is beginning to do its work? Or is it true that Christ is faithfully preached, that the doctrine is sound, but that it is preached with persuasive words of human wisdom, and not in 'demonstration of the Spirit and of power?' Or is it simply that the worldliness and selfishness, the pleasure-seeking and money-loving spirit, have so poisoned the whole atmosphere, the Holy Spirit cannot reach through to win new hearts for Christ and His Service?"

"And what does God think of it? When Joshua saw Israel defeated before his enemy he felt that it was a sign that God had withdrawn His presence from His people. And God confirmed this, saying 'Israel hath sinned; I will no more be in the midst of you except ye put away the accursed thing from among you.' The decline in membership has this most solemn aspect—it is a token of God's displeasure."

REPENTANCE, CONFESSION, CONSECRATION

"The great thought that must take hold upon us is the dishonour and the grief caused to God by this reproach resting on the Church of His beloved Son. As we think of all the sins that are implied in this decrease of membership, we shall feel the need of the conviction of the Holy Spirit to bring us to true repentance and sorrow of heart before God. There is the sin of blood-guiltiness, of unfaithfulness in the discharge of our duty, of unbelief

in not having trusted God for His Grace, in neglect of prayer and fellowship with God, all calling for deep humiliation. God is demanding of us all a new order of life, of a more arduous and self-sacrificing nature than the old."

"There are thousands of Christians who long to be helped to such a life (of entire consecration), but they cannot understand how it is to be. May God raise up men in the pulpit and in the pew who can testify to their brethren what the strength is in which Christ can keep the soul that trusts Him, and enable it to walk in His presence all the day. Let us get hold of the thought that if the Church is to be lifted out of her feebleness into the abundant life Christ came to give, it can only be by ministers and people taking a new stand of separation from sin and the world, yielding themselves in a fuller surrender than ever before to follow Christ and live for Him alone."

THE VALLEY OF DECISION

"If God's Spirit begins truly to work in the church the preaching will need to recover A NOTE OF DECISION HITHERTO BUT LITTLE KNOWN. The hearer must feel that he is CALLED UPON TO FACE A CRISIS. He is to say whether he is really going to yield to Christ's claim, and to surrender his heart and life to His Service . . . By the grace of God the minister must seek to lay hold of him and not let him go until the decision is made. People are content when they hear what they think to be a profitable discourse. They carry away an impression and hope that some way or other, an effect will be produced. And still they go on in that half-hearted religion, to which they confess, but from which they cannot find power to escape."

"Can anything be done to bring Christians to a sense of their shame and to the restoration of that spirit of loyalty and self-devotion without which Christianity is but a form?"

"If we are to look to the ministers to lead people to a conviction of what is wrong in their state, to a desire for what is better, to a faith in the possibility of an entire change in all who are willing for it, we must have men in whom the Spirit of

God works such a faith in the power of Christ as shall enable them to inspire their hearers with an entirely new hope. Let a few band themselves together to ask God for this one thing, viz., the full insight into the terrible condition of a church in which so few members are won to Christ by the preaching of His Word. Let them not rest until they begin to gather together, however few they be, the people who are willing to be living witnesses that Jesus Christ does indeed save from the power of selfishness and the world."

"Next to the act of conversion, in which a man turns from sin to God, and after that, of the reception of the Holy Ghost, as the power of a new life, I know of nothing that will aid a man so much in the Christian life as the undiscourageable resolution to spend at least half an hour in the morning alone with God."

A PERSONAL PLEA

"Will you not take time to come under the full sense of this terrible position?" (Two-thirds of the world are still without the knowledge of Christ and of the one-third nominally Christian a vast majority are indifferent to, if not contemptuous of, Christ's Church).

"I ask you, will you not turn aside from the world and from men, to take up this burden and wait upon God to see if He cannot use you to help His Church to some right sense of and contrition for all this sinful neglect. I know of no other way of restoration, than a beginning made by individual men and women pleading on behalf of the Church with God and pleading on behalf of God with men. I plead with you pointedly and personally, will you not be one?"

"You feel as if you have not the enthusiasm or the faith for such an undertaking? You fear that you may not be faithful in fulfilling your vow? I beseech you, do not give way to such thoughts, What is needed is simply this: ARE YOU WILLING TO YIELD YOURSELF UP TO GOD for his Holy Spirit to get entire possession of you? I know no solution to the tremendous problem how the Church

is to be lifted up into a fuller spiritual life than this:
LET EACH OF US GIVE HIMSELF FOR GOD TO
USE."

Speaking of prayer, Andrew Murray says, "Many a man has resolved to pray more and has failed because he did not know that the average Christian life is not sufficient to give power with God in prayer. It needs self-denial, a turning away from the world, and a sacrifice of what may appear legitimate to others—it needs a heart given up to God, and longing to be led by the Holy Spirit, if we are to claim all the wonderful promises in God's word, connected with prayer."

"It is our conviction that none can pray their best, few can pray with any fullness of effect, who have not received some careful training in the practice of prayer, and have not acquired, as well, the grace of holy perseverance in it."

Speaking of the revival required to-day, Andrew Murray says it needs to be different from those of the past. "In them the chief object was the conversion of sinners and incidentally the quickening of believers. The revival we need, however, is among the members of the Church. The great defect of past revivals was that the converts were received into a church that was not living on a high level of consecration and holiness, and speedily they sank down to the average standard of church life."

"If our missionaries are to be fitly and fully prepared for their work, they must go forth from a church in which the Spirit of Christ is evidently at work, in whose whole policy and character and life the Gospel is continuously and irrefutably proved to be in very truth the power of God unto salvation."

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