

"Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the
God of my salvation."

Psalm xxv, 5

Isaiah xxxi

Mark xii, 1-18

Psalm 25

New Book of Worship, Psalm 25, pp.47,48

Of all God's creatures on earth man alone is interested in truth. Other creatures live their day, impelled by their animal instincts, reacting mechanically upon their environment. But from the dawn of history man has pondered upon and tried to understand this marvelous universe in which he finds himself placed, and his own relation to it.

Man's knowledge of the universe grew slowly from age to age, but in recent generations it has grown by leaps and bounds. The results of scientific research on the material plane have been so extensive and so positive that the claim is made that through it can be found the answers to all our problems. Sometimes it oversteps its boundaries and speculates about things which are above the material plane - with disastrous results. Theology is one of these realms. Natural science knows nothing of God, of the sanctity of the Word, of redemption, of faith, of free will, of repentance, of the remission of sins, of heaven and hell, of the state of man after death, of salvation and eternal life, or of baptism and the Holy Supper.

One good, however, has come from this. False ideas about the Bible, about religion, and about God, inconsistent and irrational beliefs, are brought to light, and the chaotic nature of much of modern religious thought is revealed. So one effect of the rise of natural science is that blind faith is gone forever as a satisfactory foundation for religion. Religious truths must be capable of being presented in such a way that any good man of average intelligence can understand and apply them; otherwise the foundations of religion must remain rationally insecure - an alternative that is not acceptable to the man of this new age.

Blind faith is entirely opposed to the spirit of the New Church. It betokens the state of spiritual slavery from which the New Church seeks to deliver us. Her teachings commend themselves to us by the very fact that they are clear and reasonable. They encourage us to study them with open minds. We then accept them because they are manifestly true. And if we follow them, we find them capable of endless development. They lead us from strength to strength and, as they are from the Word, they open up countless opportunities for progress in the way of the life everlasting.

However, although they encourage the constant using of our reasoning powers, we are continually reminded that we must shun all pride of self-intelligence and

arrogance. There is no limit to the progress that can be made, but even the longest life-span here on earth is sufficient only for the acquisition of a few general principles and the beginning of their application.

Life must be guided by some standards, and the world of today there is no agreement as to what these standards should be. Worldly standards largely prevail, those connected with rank, class, or station, social status, standard of living, dress, and so on, which fashion decrees. These, in spite of their temporary and superficial nature, are of some value if properly subordinated, as they add to the comfort and graces of life. But they are not among the essentials of life and they have little effect on the formation of character. Then there are the standards that control our activities in the work-a-day world - our regard for law and order, our conduct in our occupations, and our civic responsibilities. And there is the realm of our educational life, which is catered to by our literature, our periodicals, text books, libraries, and the theater. These, too, have their standards - in many cases very low standards.

Lastly there are our religious standards, and these are the most important of all, for they have to do with the highest and most vital things of life, our conceptions of what life is in its origin, its purpose, its destination. This is the realm of man's inner life of thought, of motive, of will, of desires, affections, and loves, which dominate and control all things of life and give them color and character.

The purpose of life is to come into the image and likeness of our Creator, and truth is the measure by which this is effected. The present confused condition of human faith and belief reveals the need of clear and definite knowledge. Without truth we walk in darkness. Beginning where we begin - in infancy - there is the need of learning things about ourselves and the world in which we are to live, that our human possibilities may be opened up.

Our text reads, "Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation." It is truth about the Lord which alone can guide us and make life worth living. And we are told in the writings of our church how important it is that little children have the Word read to them and that early they begin to learn its commandments and precepts.

As the child's life opens, his love for knowledge of every kind becomes the active element in his progress; yet the Divine Word must be the guide, the story of the Divine Life must be the inspiration, and, in spite of the growing love of the world and its enticing pleasures, faithful devotion to the vital truths of heavenly life is essential to any progress in human development.

We are living in the day of new truth both natural and spiritual. Vast new

realms of life are being opened up to us. The words "nunc licet" - now it is permitted - imply that it was once not lawful to reason about spiritual things. There was such a time - before the Last Judgment - because then there was danger in such reasoning, the danger of profanation and confusion. There were certain truths about the Word, about the Lord, and about the spiritual world and its relation to the natural world that were not known. But now the revelation of these facts and of the principles deduced from them enable us to understand what true Christianity is. Without this new knowledge the attempt to explain any of the Christian doctrines leads to endless contradictions and absurdities such as have broken the first Christian Church into many conflicting sects and have led many to give up all belief in the teachings of the Christian Church. Because blind faith is contrary to the spirit of the new age there is the tendency among some of the laity to reject the teachings of the church, and a resultant effort among some of the clergy to discourage freedom of thought on matters of faith.

The purpose of truth is not merely to satisfy the inquiring intellect of man, but to free him from bondage. "Man," said Rousseau, "was born to freedom, but is everywhere in chains." This is true, although not in the sense in which Rousseau meant it. The chains that bind men are his self-centered tendencies. Man has no good of his own, for all good comes from God, and he needs to acquire truth in his understanding that the Lord may form in him a new will. Such is the need and the power of truth. It is the indispensable means by which we can become reformed. Man needs a power beyond himself, and a fuller measure of truth has been given for his deliverance and salvation. It is revealed truth, truth revealed by the Lord, truth that we cannot find out by ourselves. In the recognition of the need for the disclosure of those things which are past man's finding out, and in the acknowledgment of a Divine power without which evil cannot be overcome lies all hope for the betterment of mankind.

It is by Christian truths that the possibilities and the true ideals of life are opened up. There is the struggle with the loves self and of the world which no one can escape without giving up all care for the heavenly life, for the heavenly life, if attained, must be freely chosen.

As we daily read the Divine Word, we are given light and strength, and each day brings us nearer to the time when we shall be thankful for the harder experiences of life which open to us the knowledge of ourselves and of our dependence upon the Divine love and care.

"All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies."

Amen