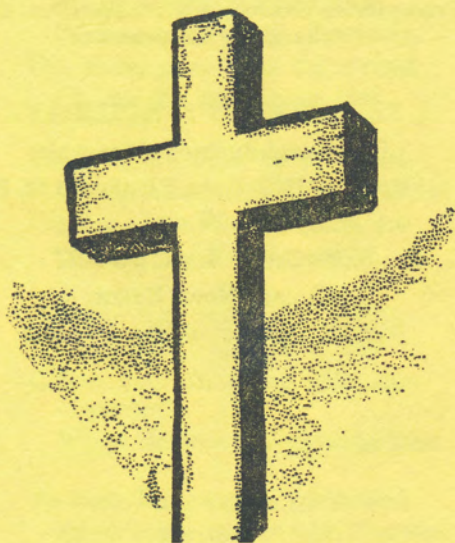


REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN

Advocate



Volume 93, Number 3

March, 1959

REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN ADVOCATE

Volume 93, Number 3

March, 1959

The Resurrection

By Gordon H. Clark

The preaching of Christ's resurrection from the dead is not always attended with success, if success be measured by the number of converts. When Paul preached to the Stoics and Epicureans, they were willing to give him polite and curious attention so long as he discussed the merits of monotheism in opposition to idolatry. The idea of a universal God, in whom we live and move and have our being, interested and even appealed to them. But when Paul began to tell them about Christ's rising from the dead, some mocked, and others said, we will listen to you later, perhaps.

Since the days of Paul philosophers have frequently had difficulty with the resurrection and with other particular historic events of the Christian gospel. Not very many preachers enjoy the opportunity of preaching to philosophers. Paul did not often preach to them, mainly because they form such a small proportion of the population. But highly educated persons, though few in number, have a wide influence. Even if they are relatively unknown during their life time, their ideas become the accepted principles of a later generation. They teach their students, who soon become the teachers of larger numbers; their ideas permeate the school system, and so it happens that philosophers come to control the thinking of a nation.

In the seventeenth century the philosopher Spinoza published an attack on the Bible and propounded a mechanistic philosophy. A century later his ideas had become very popular, at least in Germany. Today his influence has waned, yet one of his criticisms of Christianity is still widely accepted. The character-

istics of Spinoza's philosophy were such that he could not admit that religion has anything to do with particular events of history, such as the resurrection. Religion in his opinion consists entirely of abstract, universal truths. He might have been willing to say that God is love, but not that God called Abraham individually, or that the death of Christ has any religious significance. For Spinoza history and religion cannot mix.

In the nineteenth century Soren Kierkegaard, a Danish philosopher and theologian, though he differed from Spinoza in many ways, also taught that all temporal, local, historical elements should be removed from religion. God is eternal and cannot act in time. The life of Christ, his birth, death, and resurrection took place in time and as such cannot give us the presence of God.

Later disciples of Kierkegaard give this theme a modern twist. These men were disturbed by the results of the higher critical approach to the Bible. Destructive criticism had denied the accuracy of much of the Old Testament, and had even failed to produce a reliable account of the life of Jesus. The trouble was not that these men, now usually called neo-orthodox, were reluctant to abandon the trustworthiness of the Bible. Indeed, they had no desire to defend the Virgin Birth, the details of Christ's ministry, or his divine claims, and still less desire to defend the Old Testament. What bothered them was the idea of a religion that had to change its principles with every new critical theory. The critics at one time pictured Jesus as a good ethical teacher, and such a view satisfied Renan and the modernists.

But after a time it proved insipid. Then other critics said that Jesus started out as an ethical teacher, but that later in his life he came to believe that he was the Messiah. Or, again, that he often talked in terms of Messiahship, but he did not really mean it; it was only a pedagogical device to put his message across to the Jews in terms they could understand. So the theories came and went. But how could any satisfactory religion be based on the ever changing results of historical criticism. The thing to do therefore is to divorce religion from history. In this way the Bible can be completely false; it makes no difference what theory of history one holds; and still "Christianity" remains untouched — so they thought. Indeed, so they still think.

Yet there are some paragraphs of history too well attested to be comfortably denied. No one dare deny that the Christian movement began in the first century. No one dare deny that it suffered persecution first at the hands of the Jews and then at the hands of the Romans. Then too no one dare deny that the early Christians and particularly their leaders were Jews and on the whole were ordinary men. What is it then that explains the power these fishermen exerted against the political organizations of the day. Where did they get their message and what gave them their courage?

The critics conclude that something must have happened. In tones of false piety they solemnly say that something very unusual must have happened. Only, of course, we have no idea of what it could have been.

There is good reason why unbelievers today hesitate to say exactly what happened. In the past several attempts had been made. Some said that the body of Jesus was stolen from the tomb by the disciples. Others said that the disciples experienced an hallucination. But all these attempts, upon analysis, have failed to explain the rise of Christianity. Hallucinations do not explain the empty tomb, and Roman soldiers would not have allowed the disciples to steal the body. Today therefore the unbelieving critics have adopted the wiser policy of saying that something must have happened, but that we have no idea what it

was. In this way history will not disturb their religion.

History, however, should disturb their religion. Like the Stoics and Epicureans they may brush aside historical questions; but unlike the ancient philosophers men of our day have two thousand years of Christianity to explain. There has been a continuous observance of the death of Christ in the Lord's Supper, and an equally continuous observance of the resurrection, not merely once a year at Easter, but more importantly on the first day of every week. These observances go straight back to the disciples themselves. Certainly something must have happened.

And we know very well what it was. The historic documents, i.e. the New Testament books, make it very plain and unambiguous. Jesus died on the cross. His body was laid in the tomb. On the first day of the week he became alive again, walked out of the tomb, and continued to teach his disciples for forty days.

If Christ be not raised, our faith is vain. But now is Christ risen from the dead. The strife is o'er, the battle done; the victory of life is won; the song of triumph has begun. Alleluia!

MUST LIVE AMONG THORNS

Lilies of the valley love to grow in clusters, and saints love holy company, and yet in some cases it must not be; they must live among thorns—grace struggling in loneliness is very choice in God's esteem. If man sees thee not, O believer, thou mayest nevertheless sing, "Thou, God, seest me." The flower that blooms for God alone has a special honour put upon it, and so hath the saint whose quiet life is all for Jesus. If you are unappreciated by those around you, do not therefore be distressed, for you are honourable in the sight of God. The lily should rejoice that it is a lily and not a thorn, and when it is wounded, it should consider it a matter of course and bloom on.—C. H. Spurgeon.

The only time some people call upon God is when they feel the Devil is getting the best of them.