

The Proper Attitude of Young Ministers toward
Issues of the Day.

INAUGURAL ADDRESS,

DELIVERED BY

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THE PROPER ATTITUDE OF YOUNG MINISTERS
TOWARD ISSUES OF THE DAY.

My only plea in bringing this subject to your attention is its immense importance. My theme will no doubt attract to itself and fix the attention of many young ministers, who if they have not already taken a stand, will at an early day be called upon to define their position with regard to certain great moral issues. Nor is the subject void of interest to the general religious public, many of whom sit under the ministrations of young men.

Of course the principles which aid us in determining the proper attitude of *young* ministers towards the great issues of our time, will to a considerable extent apply to older ministers equally as well. But I have preferred to make my appeal to young men, because I have not felt equal to the task of giving advice to the "fathers" and "elders." It is my part rather to sit at their feet and attend to the words of wisdom that fall from their lips, and I could wish that even now I might surrender my place and theme to a man of large experience and ripe wisdom, from whom the subject might receive a treatment better corresponding to its importance. Yet the subject has for me as a youthful instructor, a pressing practical interest, and hence I have given to it an earnest attention. It seems fitting, therefore, that with becoming modesty I should present to my young brethren for their consideration some suggestions as to our proper attitude towards certain great theological and social issues of our day.

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I. INVESTIGATION AND STUDY.

One of the first questions that suggests itself to our minds is this: shall we give to the questions of the day our constant attention? Shall we investigate them, or would it be better to pass them by unnoticed, except when they are thrust upon us in practical life as real and present issues? Now it is hardly to be expected that young men will turn over to their older brethren entirely the work of studying the living problems of the day. For the pursuit of such studies *young* men have some special qualifications. As a rule, they are willing to accept new truth. They are not wedded to any system of ideas, but are willing to adopt whatever has the stamp of truth upon it. Moreover, they display great ardor in the prosecution of whatever has for them a practical interest. While dead issues do not kindle their enthusiasm and fan it into a flame, yet the living questions which clamor for solution find in young men earnest and diligent students. To the investigation of such questions we bring our best energies.

Special *dangers* also beset the pathway of the young minister who desires to study the problems of his day. He is liable through ignorance and inexperience to fall into errors from which an older man would escape. We are continually in danger of encountering and accepting views that have already been exploded. In addition to this, we are often led astray by our conceit, which impels us to forsake the leading of wise guides and strike out for ourselves in a dense forest of speculation. It is not surprising that we should lose our way.

In the realm of thought it is well for young ministers to recognize the great superiority of the "fathers" and elder brethren. It may not be pleasing to our vanity in this age when our services are in great demand even in the most important pulpits, to recognize our dependence upon the men who have grown gray in the service of Christ. When we are desirous of becoming teachers, it may not be pleasing to remember that we ought to remain for many years the pupils of older men. That the public is willing to grant to enthusiastic young ministers a fair hearing, is a gratifying fact, but it should be borne in mind that we must draw largely from the resources of older heads, if we would give to our audiences strong food for mind and heart.

Many of us are truly grateful that a kind Providence has placed us in such relations to men of great learning and large experience, that our youthful feet have been guided by the lamp of their wisdom. Let not the promptings of a false and hurtful ambition bear us away from the leadership of the strong conservative teachers and preachers through whom we have received the gospel.

The *benefits* of a careful study of the leading questions of our day are too many to be stated upon this occasion.

1. The mental faculties will be strengthened by the effort to grasp the principles which underlie these questions. The problems of real life, which enlist all the faculties of the mind and heart, are superior in point of mental exercise to those found in text-books.

The college debating society has aided in the training of the logical powers of many great men, but the debates in congress and religious controversies have done far more towards strengthening man's noblest intellectual faculty.

An honest, diligent effort to get at the principles upon which a school of criticism or a moral reform is founded will develop the power of analysis, and the attempt to sift error from truth with which it is associated will increase one's ability to discriminate sharply. It is my decided opinion that an investigation of any great practical issue, if pursued with cautious independence, will develop the self-reliance and add to the mental grasp of the young preacher. It may be safer for the present moment to accept without independent thought the opinions commonly advanced by the pulpit and the religious press, but no one can deny that a cautious independent study of any great issue will develop the mental powers of the young preacher. When he is following the line of thought mapped out by a perfectly safe leader, there is danger that he will quietly accede to the statements of truth without fusing them in the furnace of his own earnest thinking. It is an advantage to have an opponent with whom questions may be debated. There is a sharpening of the intellect in controversy which cannot be obtained so readily by any other course of training. Would it not be well, therefore, for young ministers, particularly theological students, to imitate the practice of Robert Hall and Sir James Mackintosh, who, when

they were students in Aberdeen, debated with each other questions of Metaphysics and Theology with great intensity. Both men in after life thought that they were greatly helped by these friendly encounters.

2. Participation in the great *moral* struggles of our times develops in a young minister the element of moral courage. It is not an easy thing to condemn the practices of good people, and squarely take issue with them upon important subjects. The moral courage and intellectual independence of the young preacher are often severely tried by the efforts of others to dislodge him from his brave position.

3. It has been asserted a thousand times, and is just as true now as when first announced, that the minister should be in sympathy with the thought and the thinkers of his generation. It is not necessary, however, that he adopt the views that are popular; he may be said to be in sympathy with the thought of his times, if he understands what the trend of that thought is, though he may be striving continually to give it new and better shape. The pulpit must know what the pew is thinking about, and it is the duty of the pulpit so to guide the thought of the pew upon all moral and religious subjects as to bring it to sound views of doctrine and duty. In order to attain this end the pulpit must lean not alone upon *piety*, which is of course indispensable, but also upon intelligence and sound judgment. If the minister would not lose his influence, he must be better informed than the great mass of his hearers. When the young men in the ministry fail to understand and meet the demands of the hour upon them, we shall certainly see a marked decline of pulpit power. In order to preserve the sincere respect as well as the confidence of the people, we must do a great deal of their thinking for them, and be leaders, so far as may be practicable, in every movement for the advancement of knowledge and the betterment of the people.

But there are *limitations* which should be placed upon the study of great issues, and one of the first that suggests itself to our minds is the fact that many of us are by nature not fitted for the investigation of difficult speculative questions, requiring long and patient work; and that we are equally unable to make ourselves felt in great moral and social conflicts. Perhaps we can "tell of Jesus"; we may be able to

expound and enforce the simple doctrines of God's Word, and lead souls to a saving knowledge of the Redeemer. While it would be folly for such men to attempt to lead in thought or action, yet in the practical lessons of the gospel they may be well instructed, and there is for such a large and inviting field. Many faithful laborers of this class will dwell near the Son of God in glory. It would be well for them not to attempt to handle the leading issues of the day for themselves, but quietly to preach the established facts and doctrines of the Scriptures. Just here perhaps some one is thinking that such a course would be admirable for all preachers. To preach Christ and him crucified is sufficient, he would say, and there is no need of troubling one's self about the New Theology, Higher Criticism, Socialism and Prohibition. There are those who think that Christians, like Masons, should pass by all assaults upon their teachings and practices as coming from persons who are ignorant of their real nature. Now, of course, there should be a great deal of plain, straightforward preaching of Christian doctrine which takes no notice of doubts and objections. It should be accompanied, however, with an able presentation of the evidences of Christianity and a refutation of heresies, whenever circumstances seem to call for such a defense of God's truth.

It may be objected to the study of great moral and religious questions that the young minister has no time for such investigation. If he is a pastor, the duties of his office in private and public will make such demands upon his time and energy that he cannot, in justice to himself and his people, undertake to keep abreast of the times in thought. The regular ministrations of the pulpit and the lecture room, it is said, make a heavy and continual drain upon the pastor's resources, so that he must in all his reading have the sermon and lecture in view. Besides, in our day of specialists and specialties, it is not expected that the preacher shall know everything. He has a well defined mission, a specific object towards which he should be constantly laboring. He must save the souls of the people through the preaching of the Word.

There is a great deal of force in this objection. Yet I am persuaded that the preacher will lose nothing in his sermons by a systematic study

of the problems which press upon thinking men of every station. Time spent in this kind of study cannot be wasted. Yet we may bear in mind that a young minister may be very useful without giving much attention to the class of subjects which we are now considering.

II. PUBLIC DISCUSSION.

Having set forth the qualifications of young ministers for pursuing the study of great moral and theological questions, the benefits accruing to them from such study, and the limitations which may properly be assigned to it, permit me now to present a few suggestions as to the *discussion* of these topics in the pulpit.

Many *dangers* lie in the path of the young pastor when he comes to treat these subjects in his public discourses. He is in danger of bringing with him *crude* opinions which have not had time to form themselves into a harmonious system. He commits himself to a certain side and throws himself into the contest with great energy, before he has had time and opportunity to make a thorough study of the subject in all its bearings.

It is dangerous for some ministers to give themselves to the study of any important moral issue because of their fondness for riding hobbies. When once such a subject has taken possession of their minds, it shows its head in every sermon and every conversation. Thus the preacher of the gospel dwindles into nothing more than a *moral reformer*. The spiritual element in his thinking and speaking is crowded out by the moral and social, and the souls of his people must starve. The church is converted into a town-hall and all classes press into it not to hear of the Lord Jesus, but to listen to scathing denunciations of some great evil, such as intemperance or gambling.

And this suggests another danger which lurks near the public discussion of current social and moral issues,—the danger of becoming partisans. The fire of youth is stirred in debating them, and the methods of the hustings are dragged into the pulpit. Bitter partisanship manifests itself in the servant of Christ and mars his usefulness as a minister. Personal abuse is heaped upon him, and is often returned by him. Thus the cause of our blessed Master is injured by the conduct of his followers.

But I must not content myself with such mere general statements of the principles which should guide investigation and control pulpit discussion of current questions. It will be well to take up certain examples.

1. The so-called Higher Criticism of the Old Testament.

So far as the New Testament is concerned, the advance of the destructive criticism has been decidedly checked, and the army of critics have mainly turned their batteries upon the defenses of the Old Testament. All that human learning can do towards unsettling the commonly received views as to the composition and structure of the Old Testament is now zealously attempted. Nor is the issue between advanced and conservative critics merely a dispute over the date and authorship of the various books of the Bible. It is a controversy in which the inspiration of the Scriptures, the doctrine of special providence and even the divinity of Jesus are involved. The supernatural, wherever it appears, is by many critics rejected, and the record so modified as to seem perfectly *natural* and therefore credible. Criticism of this kind flourishes best in Germany, and until recently was not much studied in this country outside of theological seminaries, but it is making itself felt now as a factor in Bible study even among some intelligent Sunday School teachers. True, it does not meet with much favor from the great body of pastors and teachers, but its results are publicly proclaimed in influential journals like the Sunday School Times. The battles that have been fought in Germany must be fought over in America. The theories of the radical school are publicly proclaimed as the results of the *scientific criticism* of the Word of God. The scientific exegesis of Kuenen, adopted by some Scotch and American writers, sets aside the authority of Jesus as an interpreter of the Old Testament, on the ground that he followed the free and easy habits of the teachers of his day. His interpretation of the Old Testament is corrected by them, so as to be in accord with the "scientific exegesis" of our enlightened age. An eminent biblical scholar of America says in his work on Quotations in the New Testament: "We must judge the New Testament writers by the strictest rules of grammatical and historical exposition. Nor can we pursue any other method

with the Scriptural citations of him whose words are most sacred,—Jesus himself, the essence of whose life and utterance is truth. He who seized on the spiritual germ of the Old Testament thought, and gave it living energy, who touched the core of man's religious life, whose teaching was the pure reflection of his sustained communion with God,—does he also follow the hermeneutical principles and share the hermeneutical opinions of his day? It is a question that can be answered only by an examination of his references to the Old Testament, in so far as we may suppose that he is correctly reported in the Gospels. We must compare them with the original passages interpreted according to what we hold to be the best canons of hermeneutical science. The comparison must be made with all caution, humility, and reverence; but the science of hermeneutics must be the final authority, if it should seem to us to come in conflict with him." Here we have a candid statement of the spirit of the Higher Criticism. Even the authority of our Lord as the interpreter of the scriptures which spake before of his person and work, is openly called in question, and his views are rejected, if they fail to accord with the results attained by the application of what certain scholars hold to be the best canons of hermeneutical science. We may well hesitate to follow the methods and accept the results of a school of criticism which would take from us a great part of God's Word, persuade us to surrender our belief in the special interposition of God on behalf of his people, and worse than all else, rob us of our faith in the divinity of our Saviour.

It is by no means necessary that a pastor should be well acquainted with all the theories of erratic and brilliant critics. He has little time for the pursuit of such studies, and only the lover of learning has any taste for such investigations. To do any independent work in this field both time and learning would be required, and the results achieved would not, in the case of a busy pastor, justify the expenditure of time and energy requisite to a mastery of the subject. There are perhaps a few pastors whose taste for such work and skill in dealing with its problems point to this field as one which will repay cultivation.

The average pastor ought to be content, it seems to me, with a fair knowledge of the views of conservative critics, as they generally con-

cede all that is really established and proved by the destructive school. Of course there may be special reasons for the pursuit of this study on the part of certain young preachers. Thus if one has been shaken in his faith on any point, let him be brave enough to face the difficulty squarely and seek light promptly and with unbiased mind. We need not be afraid to turn on the light, and the failure to encourage investigation where there is enervating scepticism is a confession of weakness. If, for example, something read or heard should awaken in you doubts as to the canonicity of a certain book, do not hesitate to seek for the evidence in favor of its presence in the sacred canon. As far as may be possible, let us clear up our doubts, that we may take up God's book with strong faith in its inspiration and may proclaim its precious doctrines with the accent of strong conviction.

We need not fear the loss of our intellectual independence when we consent to follow the guidance of wise and conservative teachers. A young man is apt to think that he is very independent when he breaks away from the views of his brethren and begins to announce his scepticism with regard to the Bible. As a matter of fact, he has only forsaken one teacher to follow another. If you are at the pains to read the books or articles in which he airs his scepticism you will learn that he has simply deserted the ranks of conservative scholarship to serve under Kuenen or Wellhausen. He is still a pupil with a master, whether he is quite conscious of the fact or not. You may have noticed that when a young man once commits himself to the results of the advanced school, he almost invariably drifts entirely away from orthodox positions. How important, then, that we should watch the beginnings of our departure from an acceptance of the Scriptures as the inspired word of God, and not make haste to proclaim the crude results of very partial investigation.

2. The New Theology.

Just as there is a destructive biblical criticism, so there has of late sprung up in some parts of our country a destructive theology. It prefers to call itself the New Theology. It makes a place for itself by first destroying the Old, or rather by reconstructing it, leaving out much that was formerly believed and adding all that the *progress* of

thought, from its point of view, seems to demand. It endeavors to put "Old Faiths in New Light"; to free faith from the traditional beliefs that burden it; and to bring Christianity nearer to the life of our times. The New Theology is on terms of intimacy with the destructive criticism of Germany and looks to it for assistance in the work of freeing men from the bondage of tradition. But the preachers of this new system of doctrine are not so dogmatic as the teachers of the destructive criticism. They have not departed quite so far from orthodox views, though it is possible that they will slide still further away from the conservative position. There is much to be commended in some of their books, because they still cling to many scripture doctrines; there is also a great deal to be condemned, for they have given up or perverted much valuable truth.

The New Theology appeals to the Christian consciousness, along with the Word of God, as a guide to faith and duty. Its advocates assert that human nature teaches much truth and that the Bible is not without imperfection. The doctrine of a possible Probation after death for all who have not heard of Christ in this life is taught by the Andover school; and the work of our Saviour, usually regarded as a vicarious endurance of punishment for the guilty, is held by them to be a mere representative penitent act, through the suffering connected with which men are led to a condition of penitence. A good deal of freedom is allowed in the faith of this movement; so that one need not have clearly defined views in order to become identified with it, — in fact clearness and consistency of doctrinal statement are regarded as of little value. There is a manifest indifference to the letter of Scripture, its history and miracle, but it is still regarded as the source of high moral and spiritual instruction.

The weakness of this New Theology, it seems to me, lies in the fact that, as compared with the old and generally accepted system, it is chiefly negative. It proposes to give up entirely much that belongs to the faith of the past without substituting other doctrines in the place of these which are cast aside. I cannot impeach the leaders of the movement in words stronger than those which fell from the lips of one of its ablest advocates: "But your denier, your man with only a nega-

tive proposition, whether he stand alone or within a church, denying the Trinity, denying future punishment, denying the validity of the sacraments,—such a teacher finds himself surrounded by a lean and hungry flock that may, for a time, look up expecting to be fed, but at last fall away, some straying back into pasture and others into the wilderness. He who gives himself up to denials and negations reduces himself to their level, and becomes himself a negation, a silence when men are calling for a voice, a darkness when they are crying for a light.”

I do not believe that this New Theology will ever displace the old, nor does it seem likely to modify it to any considerable extent. The athlete who from the days of Paul down to the present has vanquished every foe is not likely to be overcome by a dude of the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

The views of the New Theology as to Future Punishment are largely dependent upon some unwise forms of statement which have prevailed among the orthodox, and may teach us to avoid giving unnecessary offence to the tendencies and tastes of our time, while yet solemnly proclaiming the essential teaching of Scripture.

3. Socialism.

Whatever else they may be, it is evident that few young preachers can rightly claim to be political philosophers. The social theories of our times, whenever they happen to gain entrance into our minds, remain, as a rule, in the nebulous state. We may read the literature of scientific Socialism and weigh the arguments of the various schools without coming to any definite conclusion as to the remedies which they propose for social ills. It may therefore with a good deal of force be argued that the young preacher ought not to puzzle his brain with the speculations of Socialistic writers. The minister of the gospel as such sustains no relation to the movement. “Let the cobbler stick to his last.”

On the other hand, it may be argued that morality and religion are assailed by the leaders of the radical wing of the Socialists. By these marriage is denounced, Communism in all the relations of life is advocated, and Atheism is publicly proclaimed. The representatives of

Christianity cannot afford to ignore the progress of such base and degrading theories of life and government. Society as it now exists has a right to expect the support of the Christian ministry in the extermination of such political and moral heresy. Thus there is a marked difference of opinion among Christian people as to the duty of ministers in regard to this subject. The tendency at present seems to favor an extension of the range of the preacher's topics, so that even some conservative pulpits are becoming platforms for the discussion of all social and political issues that relate to the moral elevation of society.

✓ Now if the young pastor feels impelled to address his congregation on social problems, let him first of all be sure that he understands the situation and that he has thoughts which will prove helpful to his people. There are certain general rules relating to our attitude towards Socialism and the strained relations between employers and employes, that may be laid down with emphasis.

The young pastor must keep in sympathy with the poor. He cannot claim to be a follower of the lowly Nazarene, unless he ministers to the destitute and needy. Our Lord not only preached the gospel to them, but lifted up the disgraced and fallen among both men and women. He was himself a poor man; his twelve disciples were called from humble tasks to follow him upon his mission to the lost and perishing; and it is a singular fact that even in our own time the vast majority of Christ's ministers spring from what are known as the working classes. There is no good reason, then, why the preachers of the gospel should fail to understand the needs of workmen and minister to their necessities. Nor have Protestant ministers lost their hold upon the affection and respect of native American laborers. The indigent classes which have poured into our country from Europe have not been brought under the influence of the Christian pulpit. How to subdue these restless, turbulent classes to a life of faith and quiet labor, is one of the difficult problems before the Christians of our land. We cannot hope *at once* to reach them from the pulpit, though we denounce them ever so roundly in a series of sermons on Socialism, for they do not come to us for light and guidance: but young ministers who earnestly desire to aid in the happy solution of this intricate problem,

have an avenue through which they can reach the turbulent elements of our civilization. The gospel of Christ is the remedy for their dangerous theories, and it must be carried into the midst of them by brave young men who are willing to devote themselves for life to the conversion and education of the heathen who throng our great cities. Such work as that of Dr. Edward Judson in lower New York, though blocked-up by many almost insuperable difficulties, is doing more to rid our country of social dangers than all the sermons on Anarchy and Socialism delivered in our beautiful churches. He is preaching the gospel to the masses of the people, whether native or foreign born, whether rich or poor.

It is also important that the minister should not criticize too sharply the plans which working men have devised for their relief. The Labor Unions have made many mistakes, have often been in the hands of wicked men who were preying upon their more industrious fellows, and yet they have accomplished good results in not a few instances.

Nor must the young pastor fail to remember that the rich have rights as well as the poor, and he should keep in sympathy with them. The wealthy who are hated, as well as the poor who are oppressed, should receive the kind sympathy and aid of the minister of Christ. The young pastor should ever be on the alert to discover and encourage any honest effort on the part of employers to give their employ es more room for advancement in business. Co-operative distribution by which the employ e shares in the profits of his employer, may be safely recommended, wherever it is possible to encourage it without seeming to be an intruder in other men's business. How important, too, that the rights of capitalists should be clearly and forcibly expounded from the pulpit. The risks which drive sleep from the pillow of the employer; the losses which befall him at the hands of thieves, fires and dishonest debtors; the fluctuations in values which sometimes drives him to the verge of bankruptcy,—all these perplexing elements that go to form the daily life of most employers, ought the minister to bear in mind and by timely allusions to such accompaniments of wealth he should seek to arouse the sympathies of the employed for their employers. And it is equally as important that the mutual respect of

workmen and capitalist for each other should be carefully and continually cultivated by him who is the exponent of Christianity in the community.

Before passing from the subject of Socialism, let me be set down, now and always, as recommending a commonplace remedy: the gospel is the only cure of selfish hoarding on the part of the rich and selfish grabbing and pillage on the part of the poor. The last great issue to which we shall make allusion is

4. The Temperance Movement.

No other reform in our country is being pushed with so much determination and enthusiasm as the crusade against intemperance. All classes of men and women are interested in the result, and all classes are taking part in the contest. It is scarcely possible that a minister of the gospel should escape from the contest, even if he should desire to do so. Whether he is brave or cowardly, as the case may be, the preacher must do battle on one side or the other. If he attempts to preserve neutrality, it is necessarily an *armed* neutrality. The enemies of intemperance of every rank from those who believe in moral suasion up to the strongest advocate of National Prohibition, expect to find in the minister of Christ a friend and ally. There are two extremes to which ministers are in danger of going in regard to intemperance. The first that I shall name is specially recommended by the friends of the liquor business. The minister is told that the sanctity of his office is too great to admit of his discussing such a subject. It is urged that he will mar his influence over the souls of men, if he lifts up his voice too earnestly against the evils of the whiskey business. It is enough, they argue, for the preacher to make his sermons, visit the sick and bury the dead, without attempting to take part in the great political questions of the day, even if these questions do lie in the province of morality. The other extreme is advocated by some ardent friends of the political remedy for intemperance. They hold that Prohibition must be carried at any cost, and the minister of the gospel must, by virtue of his position in the community, be a *leader* in the movement. The preacher is persuaded to leave his pulpit for the stump as an advocate of Prohibition. Perhaps he is induced

to join in a third party movement and to favor it publicly. Mass meetings are held in the church in the interest of Prohibition, and fiery speeches are made by the pastor and other persons, some of them, mayhap, not even professing Christians. Denunciation is freely indulged in, and radical measures are urged to the exclusion of all other remedies.

Somewhere between these extremes, it seems to me, there must be a middle ground of safety and wisdom. In this day of radical remedies and intolerant views upon the subject of intemperance, I still believe that the minister has a right to preach Bible Temperance; nay more, that his duty as Christ's ambassador is fully met and discharged when he announces the New Testament principles and motives that bear directly or indirectly upon the sale and use of intoxicating drinks. He should appeal to men to abstain, for the sake of others, from all use of such liquors as a beverage. He ought also to point out the danger that lurks in moderate drinking: "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." He ought to make an earnest appeal to the saloon keeper to give up his business because of the great evils that flow from it. A great deal may be achieved,—has in fact already been accomplished,—by this quiet method of removing this blighting curse from our land; and such work is never harmful. The Saviour of men who made excellent wine for a wedding feast, found moral suasion a great power in winning men away from sin.

As a citizen the young preacher ought to favor all wise legislation for the suppression of intemperance, and when he cannot secure the full measure of his desire for the prohibition of the liquor traffic, he should not refuse to favor other measures which to some extent check the great evil. Everywhere by precept and example we should, in the spirit of our Master, try to win men from their sins, and aid, as far as may be practicable, in the removal of temptation out of their path.

In conclusion, permit me to remind my young brethren that upon the issues which have been referred to, the last word has not been spoken. If to the solution of these and other great questions we bring the best effort of which we are capable, we ourselves may contribute to the thought and achievement of our times much that is really valuable to the cause of humanity and the kingdom of Christ.