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The Testimony of Toil and Suffering - Exertion and Danger - A Christian Argument Applied

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CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TESTIMONY OF TOIL AND SUFFERING—EXERTION AND DANGER—A CHRISTIAN ARGUMENT APPLIED.

Archdeacon Paley in his work, "The evidences of Christianity," says: "There is satisfactory evidence that many, pretending to be original witnesses of the Christian miracles, passed their lives in labors, dangers, and sufferings, voluntarily undertaken and undergone in attestation of the accounts which they delivered, and solely in consequence of their belief of the truth of those accounts."

The learned archdeacon deducts from this fact a strong argument in support of the truth of Christianity. In order to display his confidence in the strength of his argument, he says:

"If the Reformers in the time of Wicliffe, or of Luther; or those of England, in the time of Henry the Eighth, or of Queen Mary; or the founders of our religious sects since, such as were Mr. Whitefield and Mr. Wesley in our times—had undergone the life of toil and exertion, of danger and suffering, which we know that many of them did undergo, *for* a miraculous story; that is to say, if they had founded their public ministry upon the allegation of miracles wrought within their knowledge, and upon narratives which could not be resolved into delusion or mistake; and if it had appeared that their conduct really had its origin in these accounts, *I should have believed them.*"^a

Mr. Paley's argument is this: The early Christians came to the world with a miraculous story; their public ministry was founded upon the allegation of miracles wrought within

^a Paley's View of the Evidences of Christianity, Proposition II, chap. i.

their own knowledge, and upon narratives which could not be resolved into delusion or mistake; their conduct really had its origin in these miraculous accounts; and in support of their declarations they endured lives of toil, poverty, persecution, danger and suffering; and for these reasons Mr. Paley concludes that the religion they advocated "must be true." "These men," he says, "could not be deceivers. By only *not* bearing testimony they might have avoided all these sufferings and have lived quietly. Would men in such circumstances pretend to have seen what they never saw; assert facts which they had no knowledge of; go about lying, to teach virtue; and though not only convinced of Christ's being an imposter, but having seen the success of his imposture in his crucifixion, yet persist in carrying it on; and so persist as to bring upon themselves, for nothing, and with a full knowledge of the consequences, enmity and hatred, danger and death?"^b

The world, at least that part of it called Christian, accept as conclusive the argument of the archdeacon; and even unbelievers in the Christian story recognize the force of his reasoning. It is my intention to apply his argument to the new dispensation of the gospel introduced by Joseph Smith; for if the argument tends to prove the divinity of the mission of the ancient apostles of the church, it ought also to have tendency to prove the divinity of the mission of the apostles of the New Dispensation, provided, of course, that the same conditions exist in the latter as in the former case. Those conditions exist in the New Dispensation, as in the Old, men come to the world with a miraculous story—a story that relates the personal appearing of God the Father, and His Son Jesus Christ; bringing to light the record of an ancient people and translating it by miraculous means into the English

^b Paley's Evidences, Proposition I, ch. x.

language; and the visitation of angels to restore divine authority. The public ministry of Joseph Smith and his associates was founded upon the allegation of these miracles wrought within their own knowledge, and which are of a character, as I have already said, that they can not be resolved into delusion or mistake; their conduct really had its origin in these miraculous accounts; and in support of their declarations they endured lives of toil, poverty, persecution, danger and suffering. The reader has the proof of all these statements in the preceding pages of this work, except in regard to the last, and it is now my purpose to furnish him proof of that.

It has already been stated how the story of the appearance of the Father and the Son to Joseph Smith brought upon his youthful head the wrath of the ministers of the locality where he lived; how his own name and that of his parents were loaded with opprobrium for no other reason than because he asserted he had seen a vision.

Persecution and annoyance increased when it was noised abroad that he had the plates from which he translated the Book of Mormon.

Soon after the church was organized there were a number of vexatious law suits growing out of charges against him for setting the country in an uproar by preaching the Book of Mormon.

In March, 1832, the Prophet's house was broken into in the night. He was dragged from his bed into an adjacent field, where the mob beat him in the most inhuman and brutal manner. His body was bruised and lacerated from head to foot. He was be-smearred all over with tar and covered with feathers. At the same time Sidney Rigdon, who was now connected with him in the ministry, was similarly treated. During the night the friends of the Prophet removed the tar

and cleansed his body, and the next day (Sunday), scarred and bruised as he was, he preached to the people and baptized three persons.

By the year 1833 a large number of Saints had settled in Jackson County, in the western part of Missouri, that place being pointed out by revelation as the location of a great city to be called Zion. In November of the year above named the inhabitants of Jackson County rose against the church in that land and drove some twelve hundred men, women and children from their homes into the wilderness, where they lay exposed in the inclemency of the season, which in that latitude is very severe. In the course of the troubles a number of the Saints were killed, and others died from exposure. Two hundred and three houses and one grist mill were burned down. A printing press was destroyed, a store owned by members of the church looted, and much other property destroyed. These troubles arose from the fact of the Saints accepting the testimony of Joseph Smith concerning the miraculous events by which the New Dispensation of the gospel was introduced.^c

When Joseph Smith learned of the expulsion of his followers from Missouri he immediately organized a company and gathered together clothing and provisions to go to their relief; and, if possible, restore them to the lands from which they had been driven. This company in Mormon his-

^c Wight's Affidavit, "Times and Seasons" for 1843, p. 26. The writer, for want of space cannot introduce the testimony to support these several statements, nor indeed is it necessary; for the injustice and cruelty of the conduct of the people of Missouri and Illinois against the Latter-day Saints are universally conceded; as is also the fact that these cruelties grew out of the prejudice existing against the religion professed by the Saints. Those desiring information on the subject may consult the writer's "History of the Missouri Persecutions" and the "Rise and Fall of Nauvoo; also his exhaustive "History of the Church," published in "Americana," 1909-1911. N. Y.

tory is known as Zion's camp. During that journey from Ohio to Western Missouri many dangers were braved, many hardships encountered, much toil and sickness experienced. As the only assurance of assistance which could be obtained from the governor of Missouri was of a nature to invite more bloodshed,^d the company called Zion's camp disbanded.

The exiled Saints subsequently settled some fifty or sixty miles north of Jackson County, and organized Caldwell County, where they were joined by large numbers of their co-religionists from the East. Joseph Smith also settled with them. The religious intolerance of their neighbors, however, gave them no peace, and in the fall and winter of 1838 the whole state of Missouri arose against the church and expelled some twelve thousand peaceful and law-abiding United States citizens from their homes on account of their religious views. Joseph Smith, under circumstances of great cruelty, was torn from his family and friends, and with a number of his prominent brethren was thrust into prison where they remained about six months awaiting trial, while their families and the church in the midst of great suffering—hunger, cold and nakedness—the greater part of their property destroyed—were driven from the state. Recognizing their inability to prove aught against the Prophet and his fellow-prisoners, after six months' incarceration, moving them from one part of the state to another, their guards, evidently through an understanding with the judges—connived at their escape. After enduring many

^d The governor recognized the right of the people to be returned to their lands, and agreed to call out the militia to accomplish that object; but held that he had no authority to keep a force in Jackson County to protect them from the mob. As to go back to their lands under such circumstances would only be inviting another expulsion—the Saints not being sufficiently strong to hold their possessions against the invasions of the mob—the attempt to reinstate the exiles was abandoned.

hardships the Prophet rejoined his family and the church in Illinois, where the Saints were then settling.

During his residence in Illinois the Prophet's life was one continual course of toil, excitement, sickness, and danger. Old foes and false friends were well-nigh constantly seeking to entrap him. New schemes were constantly hatching to destroy him. During his career some fifty times he was dragged before the tribunals of his country and as many times were the judges compelled to dismiss him. While living in Illinois three separate attempts were made to kidnap him and take him to Missouri among his old enemies. In the midst of these persecutions he was constantly preaching, translating, or completing the organization of the church—setting in order the various quorums of the Priesthood and instructing them in their duties. He endured poverty and hardship throughout the greater part of his career and scarcely knew what it was to enjoy peace—save that God-given peace that comes from within; and which, however great the tempest from without may be, gives serenity and joy unspeakable to the servants and prophets of God.

At last, after a life of continual warfare with error: after enduring untold toil and persecution, illegal prosecutions and mob violence, hardships and suffering—wicked men conspired against him, and while in the charge of the officers of the State of Illinois, with the honor of the great state pledged through the governor for his protection, he was murdered in cold blood for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus, in the thirty-ninth year of his age.

Counting from the time that he received his first vision, when a lad of fourteen years, he stood a witness for God a little less than a quarter of a century; but in that short time he suffered more and accomplished more than has fallen to the lot of any other man to suffer and accomplish

since the Son of God expired on the summit of Golgotha.

Not only did Joseph Smith thus endure a life of toil, poverty, persecution, danger and suffering in support of the miraculous accounts in which his public ministry had its origin; but many of his followers (some of them also witnesses of the miraculous events which brought into existence the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) spent their lives in the same way. The first Elders of the church shared Joseph Smith's toils, mobbings, imprisonment, poverty, danger and exile; and some, while engaged in the ministry, even in later years have suffered death by violence^e for testifying to the truth of the miraculous story in which the church had its origin. The servants of God have traveled in nearly all the nations of Europe; through the states of North America; and among the peoples of the Pacific Islands. They have usually gone without purse or scrip, and always without remuneration. They have sacrificed their business and professional interests, together with the associations of home and family that they might preach the gospel newly restored to the earth, through the ministration of angels to Joseph Smith. In telling the miraculous story in which the New Dispensation had its birth, they have "found leopards and lions in the path," and "have made abundant acquaintance with the hungry wolf, that with privy paw devoured apace and nothing said;" but they have kept right on in the work God called them to perform; and have endured toils and privations which even those of the ancient apostles do not surpass. Amid the ridicule of the learned, the indifference of the rich and the great, and the violence of the rab-

^e As late as August, 1884, two Elders, while in the act of beginning religious service, on Sunday, in the state of Tennessee, were murdered by a mob; two young men, members of the Church, were also killed, and an aged woman, a member of the Church, savagely wounded.

ble they have faithfully borne witness to the truth of the miraculous restoration of the gospel in these last days, until the whole world is acquainted with the story; and in their ministry they have given as much evidence of the divinity of the message they proclaim to the world as ever the apostles and elders of the ancient Christian church did by their lives of self-denial, of toil, exertion, danger and suffering.

These labors they continued after the death of their prophet leader; and I may say of them what Mr. Paley says of the first Christian ministers—only slightly paraphrasing his words: These men could not be deceivers. By only *not* bearing testimony they might have avoided all these sufferings and have lived quietly. Would men in such circumstances pretend to have seen what they never saw; assert facts which they had no knowledge of; go about lying, to teach virtue; and though not only convinced of Joseph Smith's being an impostor but having seen the success of his imposture in his martyrdom, yet persist in carrying it on; and so persist, as to bring upon their own heads, for nothing, and with a full knowledge of the consequences, enmity and hatred, danger and death?

The conditions demanded in Mr. Paley's argument all exist in the experience of the ministry of the New Dispensation of the gospel, and if the same weight be given the argument in the case of this dispensation as is accorded to it when employed to prove the truth of the Christian story as told by the ancient apostles and elders, the divinity of the mission of Joseph Smith is proven beyond all controversy.

Mr. Paley, continuing his argument under the head I have been discussing, says that his belief in the miraculous story told by men who had on account of it endured lives of toil and exertion, of danger and suffering, would be very much increased—

“If the subject of the mission were of importance to the conduct and happiness of human life; if it testified of anything which it behooved mankind to know from such authority; if the nature of what was delivered, required the sort of proof which it alleged; if the occasion was adequate to the interposition, the end worthy of the means. In the last case my faith would be much confirmed, if the effects of the transaction remained; more especially, if a change had been wrought, at the time in the opinion and conduct of such members, as to lay the foundation of an institution, and of a system of doctrines, which had since overspread the greatest part of the civilized world.”

In the New Dispensation of the gospel all these additional circumstances which Mr. Paley finds in the old dispensation of Christianity, exist; so that there is nothing wanting to justify the complete appropriation of this time-honored Christian argument to the divinity of Joseph Smith’s mission. Let me point this out:

First: *The subject of the mission must be of importance to the conduct and happiness of human life.* This is true of the message with which Joseph Smith came to the world, since it cries repentance to all men, warns them of the approaching judgments of God, and calls upon them to worship God who created heaven and earth. If such a message is not a subject of importance “to the conduct and happiness of human life” what message could be? This message was surely of such importance since the acceptance or rejection of it would affect the condition of men in time and in eternity.

Second, *it must testify of that which it behooves mankind to know from such authority.* This the message brought to the world by Joseph Smith does, for it proclaims first, that the gospel together with the divine authority to administer its ordinances had been taken from among men; and second, that

f Paley’s Evidences, Proposition II, ch. i.

this same gospel and divine authority had been restored by a new revelation, the only way it could be re-established when once taken from the earth. I take it that it behooves mankind to know of such a great transaction as this from "such authority"—that is, divine authority.

Third, *the nature of what is delivered must require the sort of proof which is alleged.* This the New Dispensation does; for claiming to be a revelation from God it requires just the same kind of testimony that the old Christian dispensation did—the testimony of suffering and toil on the part of those who receive it, and especially upon the part of those who enter its ministry. It may be remarked in passing that the New Dispensation is just as worthy of such testimony as the old Christian dispensation.

Fourth, *the occasion must be adequate to the divine interposition—the end worthy of the means.* This is true of the New Dispensation since restoring the gospel to the earth after its absence for many centuries, is not only an occasion worthy of the interposition but the only way in which the plan of salvation could be restored. To make such a restoration to the human race was surely an end worthy of such means—that is, worthy of a revelation.

Fifth, *the effects of the original transaction must remain.* This is true of the New Dispensation as the religious faith at the first promulgated by Joseph Smith and his associates is still in the earth, and the circle of its influence is constantly widening.

Sixth, *a change must be brought at the time of the transaction in the opinion and conduct of such members as to lay the foundation of an institution, and of a system of doctrines which have since overspread the greatest part of the civilized world.* This condition also the New Dispensation fulfills. That is, a change was wrought at the time, and by the means

of the introduction of the New Dispensation in the opinions and conduct of a sufficient number to lay the foundation of an institution, and of a system of doctrines which has since spread throughout the greater part of the civilized world. I do not mean to say by the last part of the statement that the New Dispensation has been accepted as true throughout the greater part of the civilized world; but I do mean to say that a knowledge of it has since overspread civilized nations; and that it has drawn to itself as great a number of disciples as Christianity did in the first eighty years of its existence.^z The change wrought in the opinions of those who have accepted the testimony of Joseph Smith is quite as radical as that which came to those who accepted the gospel in the first century of Christianity. From believing that the volume of scripture was completed and closed, and that the Bible contained all that had been revealed to man, they turned to the belief that it contained but a few fragments of the revelations of God and accepted a new volume of scripture received and preserved by the people of the Western Hemisphere. From believing that the ministrations of angels had forever ceased, they turned to the belief that a number of angels had ministered to Joseph Smith, and that in the future the visitation of angels to men would be still more frequent. From believing that the spiritual graces and gifts of the gospel were no more to be expected, they turned to the belief that these blessings so abundantly enjoyed in the primitive Christian church could also be possessed by them. They consequently sought for and according to a volume of testimony that cannot be rejected, they enjoyed the spiritual gifts of healing the sick, speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, discernment of spirits, prophecy, revelation, etc.;

^z This brings us from the organization of the church, in 1830, to the year 1910.

and sought a closer walk with God, and read and practiced the moral law of the gospel more strictly.

Thus, as in the testimony of toil and suffering on the part of those who came with the new faith—or the old faith renewed—there is nothing wanting in these supplemental conditions which, in Archdeacon Paley's opinion, adds to the weight of the testimony of toil and suffering. Every condition in his argument for the truth of the old dispensation of Christianity is met in the circumstance in the midst of which the New Dispensation of Christianity came into existence, of course limiting the time for comparison to the first eighty years of both dispensations; so limited, I then claim for the latter all the force that has been demanded for this argument when applied to the former. The argument is the Archdeacon's, not mine; but finding the conditions existing in the New Dispensation that Mr. Paley claims existed when the old was brought forth, I merely apply the argument to the new; and throw the weight of Mr. Paley's reputation for logic and force of statement into the support of the divinity of Joseph Smith's mission.