

The University of Maine

DigitalCommons@UMaine

Maine History Documents

Special Collections

1855

A Sermon Delivered at the Dedication of the New Chapel of Bowdoin College, June 7, 1855

Roswell D. Hitchcock

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mainehistory>



Part of the [History Commons](#)

This Monograph is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UMaine. It has been accepted for inclusion in Maine History Documents by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UMaine. For more information, please contact um.library.technical.services@maine.edu.

Pamp
299
c.3

PROFESSOR HITCHCOCK'S
DEDICATORY SERMON.

Λ

S E R M O N

DELIVERED AT THE

DEDICATION OF THE NEW CHAPEL

OF

B O W D O I N C O L L E G E ,

THURSDAY, JUNE 7, 1855.

BY

ROSWELL D. HITCHCOCK,

COLLINS PROFESSOR OF NATURAL AND REVEALED RELIGION.

BRUNSWICK:
GEORGE T. BARRETT.
1855.

CAMBRIDGE :

ALLEN AND FARNHAM, PRINTERS.

PROFESSOR HITCHCOCK :—

Dear Sir,— The undersigned respectfully request that a copy of your eloquent and impressive Discourse, delivered at the Dedication of the New Chapel, June 7th, may be furnished for publication.

In behalf of the students,

EDWARD HAWES,
THOMAS S. ROBIE,
THOMAS K. NOBLE,
ALMARIN F. BADGER, } *Committee.*

BOWDOIN COLLEGE, June 12th.

BOWDOIN COLLEGE, June 15, 1855.

GENTLEMEN,—

Without taking time, as, on some accounts, I should be glad to do, to rewrite this Discourse, and thus render it, perhaps, more worthy of your favor, I hasten to yield the manuscript to your disposal. As it goes forth to the world, may it witness for our honored College as devoted "*Christo et Ecclesiae.*"

Yours, very truly,

ROSWELL D. HITCHCOCK.

MESSRS. EDWARD HAWES,
AND OTHERS.

S E R M O N .

"IN WHOM ARE HID ALL THE TREASURES OF WISDOM AND
KNOWLEDGE." — Colossians 2 : 3.

MAN has a twofold constitution, by virtue of which he inhabits at the same time two worlds. His body, gross and perishable, blends him with nature in its ceaseless flow, and makes him brother to the worm which crawls waiting for him in the ground. His soul, ethereal and immortal, lifts him up above nature, opens his life to God, and makes him brother to angels, myriads of whom float unseen waiting for him in the sky. He is thus an heir of Eternity, though a child of Time.

To his physical constitution pertain the familiar and homely uses of life, such as bodily vigor, food, raiment, houses, lands, money, merchandise, and the mechanic arts; which all are of the earth, earthy. Man did not bring them with him into the world, and cannot carry them away. These things, which are seen, are temporal. It is as though the globe

itself dissolves, every time a human being dies off of it.

The essential, the permanent, the grand in man, all centres in his spiritual constitution. This constitution, when we come to analyze it, is trinal; corresponding with eternal types and realities. There is that in us, by which we apprehend the Beautiful; and, for want of a better name, we have called it Taste. There is that in us, by which we apprehend the True; and we have called it Intellect. There is also that in us, by which we apprehend the Good; and we have called it the Moral Sense. These three make up the one man. They are faculties, in us by nature. Only they require development and culture. Then they bloom and bear fruit; enriching our manhood with refinement, intelligence, and virtue. Taste, Intellect, Moral Sense: These are the trinal nature. Art, Letters, Religion: These are the triple crown.

So we build, and so we justify the College. It has other foundations, and other walls, than these of brick and stone. It grows up out of the human soul, and is measured and nourished by its wants. The dominant idea of it, is not outward use, but inward culture. Uses indeed it has, manifold and great, ministering, as it must eventually, to all worthy material ends and interests; helping the farmer to better husbandry, the mechanic to better fabrics, the

merchant to better traffic, and society at large to better health, better laws, and better manners. But its immediate and chiefest end, is the culture of the man himself. This is end enough, the highest of all ends; even as soul is more than body, and Eternity than Time.

While thus we build and justify the College, we are enabled also to define its work. It must take the whole nature of man, and make the most of it. In deference to our sense of Beauty, it must honor Art. In deference to our hunger for Truth, it must honor Science. In deference to our apprehension of a Divine Presence, it must honor Religion. And neither of these by itself alone, but all in harmony. Exclusive addiction to either one of them breeds mischief. Art, unbalanced, becomes voluptuous; Learning, arrogant; and Religion, fanatical. While in a just blending of the three, there appears the fulness and symmetry of a perfect discipline. Lowest in rank, as most mixed up with material forms, stands Art. Next above it is Science, perpetually gazing and struggling upwards from facts to principles, from phenomena to laws. Highest of all is Religion, as concerning itself supremely with the infinite and the eternal. This is the order of consciousness. It is the order also of history. There is no civilization of ancient or modern times, no culture of Orient or Occident, which has not made faith and worship its

chiefest care. Greeks and Romans, Hindoos and Buddhists, Mohammedans, Jews and Christians, have been agreed in this, that Divine rites are the highest of all duties, and the knowledge of Divine things the highest of all wisdom.

Such, in part, are the sentiments which find expression in this edifice, within whose walls we are now assembled. The completion of it marks an epoch in the history of the College. Compared with our ability, compared with what stood here before, compared with any building of its kind upon the Continent, it is an imposing structure. Massive, substantial, and costly, it bids fair to stand here admired for generations to come, till age has darkened its walls, and deeply furrowed every granite door-sill. And yet most humble and common, when compared with the nobleness of the idea it seeks to realize. In its Gallery of Paintings, it proclaims the legitimacy of Art; in its Library, the worth of Knowledge; in this grave and lofty room, with its glowing windows and its starry roof, it proclaims the dignity of a rapt and reverent Communion with God. These, too, in their proper order; Prayer seeking palpable enforcement, in the very architecture of the building itself, as the central and the grandest thing. Thus we represent the trinal nature of man. Thus we represent its triple discipline. And thus, especially, do we emphasize Religion as at once

the crowning grace, and the crowning wisdom, of our culture.

But we do not stand here to-day on the ground of mere Naturalism. There is another and more commanding revelation of God, than the one he has made of himself in the soul of man. It is the Christian Revelation, the record of which is before us in the Scriptures. Commencing with man in Paradise, dimly outlined to the ancient Patriarchs, made more distinct to Judaism, but not rounded out to its completeness, nor clothed with the fulness of its power, till Prophecy was hushed by the birth of the Babe of Bethlehem, and Sacrifice expired in his death upon the Cross.

This Revelation, to which we now turn, has an historic credibility no longer fairly questionable. If we have reason to believe, that Julius Cæsar is the name of a real man, who once led Roman armies into Gaul, and died by the hand of Brutus, in the Senate House, on the Ides of March, then have we equal, if not stronger reasons for believing what is related of Jesus of Nazareth, in the narratives of the Four Evangelists. There is to-day a Christendom, and for eighteen hundred years there has been a Christendom, of which Christ himself, as a real historic personage, is the only rational solution.

And who is Christ? The Son of Mary, certainly;

but also the Son of God. Before Abraham was, he is: Angel, Shekinah, Shiloh, Messiah, Logos, all in one. God manifest in the flesh: the Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. The one only medium, through which the Absolute and Eternal Jehovah has conversed with men. And besides all this, he is also an offering for sin; saluted on Earth, and adored in Heaven, as the Lamb of God.

What, then, is Christianity? Plainly, a remedial system; presupposing the ruin, and undertaking the recovery, of a fallen race. Like the Spirit of God, which once brooded over the waters, it finds a chaos, and would make a world. And its method is, not by lessons and examples, not by visions and theophanies, which must all be feeble and transient; but by a permanent, historical incarnation of God in Christ. Or, as the Scriptures have tersely expressed it for us, "God in Christ reconciling the world unto himself." Such is the Gospel.

It is of this Christ, as revealed and working in this Gospel, rightly called the mystery of God, that the Apostle Paul is speaking in our text. Verbally, the passage is a perplexed one in the manuscripts; the older editors of the New Testament making the relative in the text refer to Christ: "in *whom* are hid;" while Tischendorf, the

most recent of the editors, makes it refer to the mystery of the gospel: "in *which* are hid." But these variant readings do not in the least disturb the prevailing sense. In either case, it is the Divine Plan of Redemption, which is set before us, whether we regard the Plan itself, or the Person of its Agent. For all practical purposes, it is allowable to say, that Christ is Christianity, and Christianity is Christ; in whom, and in which, are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. "Knowledge" here is the Greek *Γνωσις*, which denotes a full and clear perception of what is true in itself and in its relations. "Wisdom" is the Greek *Σοφία*, which is a word of far profounder meaning, denoting a deep insight into truth, with the further idea of a practical illustration and realization of it.

These are what the old teachers of philosophy promised always to their disciples: the power to discover noble truth; and the power to realize it in a noble conduct. It was this lordly promise, which had bewitched the Colossians, as thousands in our day, and in all days, have suffered a similar bewitchment. And with a similar result in all cases. Science, divorced from the great underlying ideas and principles of the Christian scheme, either fully developed or in embryo, no matter what may be its pretensions, is science falsely so called. It cannot go to the bottom of any question. It cannot

impart to society either its needed momentum, or its needed guidance. Christianity furnishes the only true knowledge; the only true wisdom. It alone can clear the tangled web of human speculation, solve our mysteries, and give us good assurance of a Millennium.

The departments of our inquiry as students are three: God, Nature, Man. It is proposed, on the present occasion, to look at each of these, for a few moments, from the stand-point of the Christian Revelation.

I. Our Doctrine of God. The idea of the Infinite, if not innate in the sense contested by Locke and his followers, is doubtless potentially present in the human mind. It slumbers there awaiting only its arousing occasion. As the mind itself is stirred and developed, this idea also is developed, as the necessary antithesis of the finite. If there be Time, there must be Eternity. If there be an Atom, there must be a Universe. If there be a Finite Man, there must be an Infinite God. And if these be not intuitions, they are at least deductions hardly less rapid and irresistible. Belief in the Divine existence has consequently been universal, or very nearly so, as even the Pagan Sages most stoutly maintained.

And yet the human mind has always reeled

under this great thought in its Atlantean vastness and weight. The sense of shrinking and littleness which is thus awakened, is well expressed in the anecdote related of Simonides, who, when asked by Hiero, tyrant of Syracuse, to tell him what God is in his being and attributes, begged a day to consider the question; at the end of which time, he desired two days more; and then four days; each time doubling the number, and giving as a reason for it, that "the more he meditated upon the subject, the more obscure it appeared to him."

It is not merely the intense holiness of God, flashing terror upon a guilty vision; it is not merely those awful scales of justice, whose beam hangs and trembles amongst the stars; there is something unspeakably appalling in the thought of sheer Spirit pervading this immeasurable Universe, with a force that nothing can resist, or weaken, striking its steady pulses, age on age, from world to world; and yet a Person, clothed with attributes as distinct and real as our own, with a heart to feel, and a mind to think, and a will to choose. Such is God; the God of reason and of conscience: an Infinite reality, overwhelming our astonished spirits. No wonder, mankind sought refuge early in idolatry. No wonder, the Persian worshipped the rising Sun. No wonder,

the Greek peopled sky and earth and sea with a regiment of gods and heroes. No wonder, the Egyptian adored his bounteous Nile. No wonder, the savage Hun said prayers to his naked scimeter. A sin it was, no doubt, and a weakness, and a shame; but most easy to be explained. It was the Adam in them all, fallen and affrighted, seeking an escape from God.

Apart from guilt, there appears to be something in the constitution of the human mind, which will not let it rest quietly in the thought of absolute unity. The Hindoo Theology, for example, began with Brahm, the Absolute Intelligence, the Essential Light; but presently gave way to Brahma, the Irradiating Light, Creator of worlds and men. Then came Vishnoo, the Preserver. And then again Siva, the Destroyer. While idols without number thronged the Pantheon. Such, at this moment, is the Religion of seventy or eighty millions of our race.

Buddhism, which also had its origin, no doubt, in Hindostan, was a rebellion against this Hindoo Trinity, with its multitude of inferior Divinities. It was a grand attempt to bring back the Oriental mind to its faith in the Unity of God. But the dark abyss of Atheism was soon found yawning at its very feet; and it started back in alarm. Presently, it invented another Trinity. Budha, the

pure Intelligence, takes Dharma, the principle of Matter, to be partner of his throne. But as the two could not work together without a Mediator, Sanga is added. And then the slope was easy down to Pantheism.

Thus have we touched the two extremes of a bald and sterile Unity on the one side, and a gorgeous Pantheism upon the other. And each has its roots within us. It cannot be driven from the mind, that God is One; nor can it be driven from the heart, that we must have him near us in his works, near us in our weakness and our sin. Finite feebleness pleads not merely for an arm of Infinite Power to bear it up; it pleads for a Father's arm. Finite apostasy pleads not merely for a Father's mercy; but pleads also for a Brother's love. Finite waywardness, sobbing over its frequent wanderings, pleads not merely for outward encouragement, but pleads also for an inward comforting and help.

Such are the cravings of our nature. And there is no response to them, but in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Herein do we learn that God is One, but a God of grace, teaching us to call him Father; revealing himself in the redeeming Christ, in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily; and now working, through the Spirit, to sanctify our hearts, and regenerate a disordered world.

Here stands our Christian Theology. It gives us, on the one hand, no stern Allah of Mohammed; nor, on the other hand, does it mock us with the Pantheistic mist of a universally diffused Intelligence; but it gives us our God in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, and each to all.

II. Our Doctrine of Nature. Here, all around us, is a material Universe apparently entirely antipodal to Spirit. Matter and Spirit seem, indeed, to stand in a sharp antagonism, dividing the Universe between them. What, now, are the relations subsisting between these two? What has God to do with Nature? Or Nature with God? These are questions, as I need not tell you, which have always perplexed the Philosophers. Did Nature beget God, or did God beget Nature? Or, still again, have they coexisted from Eternity in an eternal rivalry? To answer the first of these inquiries in the affirmative, would give us Pantheism. To answer the last in the affirmative, would give us Dualism. While it has been difficult to answer the second in the affirmative, declaring Nature to be of God, without doing some violence to our faith in the Divine Benevolence.

Natural Theology in our day, with its Bridgewater Treatises, is very confident of its ability to reason out the Existence, Power, Wisdom, and Good-

ness of God from the works of Nature. But one of its positions, which it has to take, is a virtual confession of lameness in the argument. It is not in every instance, but only in "a vast plurality of instances," that the Divine Goodness is affirmed to be clearly visible. Some evils are admitted to exist. What shall be done with them? Paley says, they have only to be voted down. The voices of gladness, it is argued, are against the voices of wailing as a hundred to one. And so we settle the question with a pencil upon our slates.

But ages ago there came this verdict from Lucretian: "I dare affirm that the present economy of things was not divinely ordered, since there is so much of evil in it." And, sweeping as it is, this conclusion of the old philosopher has yet something of reason in it. The evils complained of, are manifest and grievous; and more in number, too, than Paley is quite willing to admit. Three fourths of the surface of our globe are surrendered to the sterile, devouring sea. Swamps and deserts deform the land. Tempests and lightnings torture and tear the sky. War is the law of the animal kingdom, from the top to the bottom of the scale. Each species lives by preying upon the species next under it. Man also is subject to disease, and suffering, and death. It may be urged that happiness is in the ascendant. No doubt it is. But

why so much of misery? Why any misery at all, in a world created and managed by a Being of boundless Benevolence and Power?

It used to be said, that God at first made the world, as he made man, perfect; and that the present disordered state of it has been brought about since the Fall, and in consequence of the Fall. But modern science has utterly exploded this clumsy theory. Death was in the world, as declared by Fossil Geology, ages before man made his appearance here. Death, with all its attendant fears and sufferings. And the presumption is a very fair one, that, in every respect, the present economy of things about us in the world, is very nearly what it was in the beginning, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy. There has been, accordingly, no Fall of Nature; only a Fall of Man.

As to the disorders observed in Nature, Christianity looks down upon them with entire composure from a lofty height. The solution is simply this, that the world was left imperfect in anticipation of its moral history. It was pre-figured to its career of sin. The Drama required a fitting Theatre. Sin needed its shadows and echoes in an eclipsed and discordant economy.

But sin is not alone here. Redemption is wrestling mightily against it. The world, then,

is not a prison, but a school-room; not a graveyard, but a battle field. We are here for conflict, and for discipline. Christ is at once our Captain, and our Example. Voices from Heaven cheer us on. Angels of God whisper courage and patience. The evils and miseries appointed us, are only spurs and stimulants to virtue.

Such is our Christian Philosophy of Nature. It denies no facts, and glosses none. It admits all the jangling and friction. It bends in meekness and reverence to hear the sighs and the wailing. And still it clings to Nature as a child of God, contending for us, and contending with us, to accomplish our redemption.

III. Our Doctrine of Man. First of all, the essential character of man has been a sore puzzle to mere Philosophy. Sometimes the ground is taken, that man is altogether such as his Maker would have him to be; guilty of no sins, burdened by no depravity.

But such a position is utterly untenable. The conscience of the race is against it. All human experience is against it. All human legislation is against it.

Sometimes, on the other hand, the ground is taken, that men are not mere men, as they appear to be, but ruined angels, put here on a

new probation, to see if, perhaps, one or more in a thousand of them may not somehow be reclaimed.

And so our speculation swings and surges about, while we are seeking to know ourselves. It is only the Gospel that can give us rest. According to this, Sin is indeed acknowledged as a startling, monstrous development, but is not wholly divorced from the righteous and merciful Providence of God. It had some sort of place amongst the eternal Counsels of God. It was permitted, we are taught to say. Without excuse or palliation; wholly chargeable upon man himself; and yet permitted. This much is required by reason; for sin is certainly in the world, and the world is God's world. But this alone, though not to be denied, would only distress and stagger us. Forever should we toss our questions against the Heavens, demanding to know the meaning of this tremendous permission.

Christianity resolves the difficulty by presenting the Remedy provided. This also lay in the Counsels of God. It was promised as soon as needed; and the whole history of our race has been what Edwards so nobly described it, a History of Redemption. A man now may murmur if he will. But that will only prove him perverse. For Redemption stands over against Sin, as

Gerizim against Ebal, meeting the shouted curse with a shouted blessing.

Next arises the great question of human destiny. Out of Christ, the historic problem is a very hard one. It might most plausibly be argued, that human progress is all a fiction; that nations, like individuals, have their youth, their manhood, and their inevitable decay; and that the course of history, from the beginning, has been nothing better than the constant revolving of a wheel. Reasons might also be given for believing, that modern Society, almost everywhere, is in its decadence, and that the end is near.

But looking with an eye of faith upon the present and the past, we discern a Divine Form moving about. It is not the nations, but the Church, that God has cherished as the apple of his eye. The three great nationalities, Jewish, Greek, and Roman, that stood together over the cradle of our Religion, perished not till they had ceased to be of service to Christ. Charlemagne, Charles V., Cromwell, and Napoleon, were all soldiers of the church, whether conscious of it or not; whether willingly or not. So now. France will be humbled, or England, or Germany, or Russia, or Turkey; one, or more, or all of them together, just as may be required in order to the progress of Christian truth. Christ, we may well believe,

cares more for his little band of missionaries in Turkey, than for the pride of imperial courts, or all the commerce of the Euxine. Here we find a key to the history of other ages and nations; a thread, that will lead us out of any labyrinth of the present or the future. Towards Calvary, for thousands of years, all the lines of history converged. And now for other thousands of years, to the end of time, from Calvary will the lines diverge, till the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord, and he shall reign forever and ever.

But there remains another question of destiny, of more moment to us personally than all these problems of history. We are all sooner or later to die, laying down our worn-out bodies, as our Fathers have done before us, in the silent grave. And we revolve the question, as well we may, whether we are to live again? And where? And how? The human heart has indeed had faith always in immortality. The mother has always believed it of her dying child. Nations have believed it of their dying heroes. Men like Socrates have believed it of themselves. And yet the point is difficult to prove. Plato's famous treatise has vastly more of sweet persuasion in it, than of solid argument. He convinces only such as were convinced before.

It is the glory of the gospel, that it has accom-

plished, for the humblest and most unlettered of our race, all, and more than all, that was ever accomplished by Philosophy for her most favored votaries. Greece could boast but a single Socrates, Rome but a single Tully; while Stephen, dying for his faith, was but the first of a noble army of martyrs. And now to-day on many a lowly pillow there rest lowly heads, on whose fading sight there crowd the splendors of an opening Paradise.

Add now to this assurance of a blessed immortality the Christian doctrine of the Resurrection, in a new and glorified body, in the midst of the New Heavens and the New Earth, and the history of man is sublimely finished. Sin is cured; Death is conquered; and the ways of God are justified.

Such is the Religion of Christ our Lord. A Positive Religion, attested abundantly by most conspicuous Providences, by Miracles and Prophecies; with an immense crowd of witnesses, out of all ages and nations, gathered, and gathering, to do it reverence. For Doctrine, it lays open to us the very bosom of our God; it explains the mysteries of Nature; it unfolds the character and destiny of Man. And so it floods with heavenly light every problem of our Philosophy, every period of our majestic and endless career. While, in demon-

stration of its power, it renews our decayed affections, succors our faltering wills, and brings our feet to tread at last the golden pavements of the New Jerusalem. Then, then shall our swelling anthems rise: "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father: to him be glory and dominion forever and ever."

It is to Him, our Lord, that we consecrate this House. On its windows have we traced his name, and the emblems of his dying but triumphant love. Above us the story gleams and glows in the light of rising and of setting suns. The Alpha and the Omega, the Jesus Hominum, Savior, the Lamb of God, the Cross, the Crown, all are here, with the Open Bible to beam upon our vision as often as we cross the sacred threshold. Such is the offering we bring. Accept it, our Heavenly Father. Accept it, our dear Redeemer. Accept it, thou Sanctifying Spirit of our God. And for generations may it stand, when we all are in our graves, witnessing for Christian Truth, while it witnesses also for Christian Art, and Christian Science, leading up the mind and leading up the heart of every ingenuous and ardent scholar to the highest wisdom and the purest love.