

Society of the Sacred Mission

H.K. ON VOCATION

By Herbert Kelly SSM

(From Fr Kelly's address to the Student Christian Movement camp at Swanwick in July 1927, which he later expanded into The Gospel of God. Reprinted in our English SSM magazine in 1982 and 1998, it has lost none of its relevance in 80 years.)

Facing life, you ask 'what am I going to do?' It is a good question, but the most real question is 'What is God going to do with you?' And it is no use throwing that question back to me. I have no more idea what the answer is than you have. It lies between you and God. It may take you half a lifetime but there you will find the meaning of your question; even then you won't know the answer.

Here is the dialogue of the soul with God. You are only one of all mankind crying in the dark, and I imagine it, 'Lord, why have you made me thus?'

And the answer given to all—'Beloved, I made you for myself.'

'But why am I in the dark and in confusion?'

'Beloved, you are in the dark and in confusion because you are seeking for light and wisdom in yourself. You will not find them there.'

'But why cannot I know what you are doing?'

'Because that is part of a whole universe of meaning, and you cannot know universes. You want to be a God, a lord of the world, when you are only a little self.'

'But would you have me placid and content?'

'I made you for hope, desire, effort, progress, in order that you might learn. Would you have you content with nothing, for content, placidity, quietism, indifference, are the substance of death—except one content, and this is beatitude, content to be small.'

'Can I do nothing?'

'You can do a great many things; then you will help others. And a great many things you cannot do; then others will have to help you, though you will not like it.'

'What can I do? How am I to know?'

'That I shall not tell you. You must use your own judgement, make your own mistakes, and then go on trying. You will fail at a lot of things, and that you will like still less.'

'How can I find God?'

'Beloved, you cannot find me, but I have found you.'

'If I cannot find God, how can I come to love him?'

'Love is not a thing you do or come to. It comes to you, overcomes you. Realise this first, that your life is in my hands, not your own; accept it so, and where faith meets hope, love is born. Believe this first, that God so loved this world that he sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him, and that the cosmos through him should be saved.'

This is the Gospel which alone we can preach, how he who was in the form and of the substance of God,

For us men and for our salvation
Came down from heaven,
And was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary,
And was made—MAN.
He was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate,
He suffered and was buried.
And the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures,
He ascended into heaven,
And he sitteth on the right hand of the Father.

You may believe this story or not, but at least be clear what it is. It is a story about God, that or nothing. There are people who like saint-worship, the cult of heroes and personalities. Possibly, as a story of a great man, it may remind them how they also can make their lives sublime. It is no gospel at all to me, throws no light at all on the absurdities, futility, contradictions of my life.

Ponder it as it stands, God, through whom the worlds were made, from whom is the whole power and purpose of the universe, took to himself our littleness.

Turn next to the cross. You want to do, mean to do, big things. Stick to it! You will do a good few miracles, my beloved, if God's nice to you, but Christ did a great many. You would like to be a great teacher, but 'no man ever talked as this man'. Yet the Apostles say nothing of his miracles and hardly anything of his teaching. On the cross he himself does nothing, says next to nothing. What is done is done to him, he just suffered. What is said is said about him. Men challenge him to do something. But that is not what he is after.

I am talking of at-on-ment, of a common salvation—the same for the trolley-driver and the philosopher, the pig farmer and the artist and the saint—but, please note, the active self is not really at one with anything. It is just ME. And so is all that is born of the self. My notions, ideals, actions, are just mine. Across everything, see how busy I am writing—Ego, ME, did it and fixed it. Do these achievements want redeeming? Verily they have, are, their reward. Failure, disillusion, the contradictions and helplessness of life, suffering and death—these God chose, these God reconciled to God. And they are the common stuff. I think my incompetence will get in somewhere among them. It is no novel effort on God's part to make the best of a bad business. This is the purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus before the worlds were.

Go out into the world. Find what is best worth doing as God shall lead you. Work at it reverently and carefully. Everything, big or little, has in it the substance of eternal glory. You will do what God lets you do. I may not be what you meant to do, and you may never know what it is. You will see what God gives you to see. Don't be afraid of it, but remember that it is not all there is. You may have misunderstood, and you have a lot to learn.

If we do things, to brag out loud is bad form, but we can't help being pleased, and we brag softly to ourselves. It is silly, but don't be afraid of being silly and rather absurd. You and I are only God's little children. Only don't pretend you aren't. Learn to laugh—to laugh especially at yourself. If we could hear the angels chuckling over our solemnity, we might learn a lot, but they are very nice and don't want to hurt our feelings, so they keep it to themselves. Children are very solemn and very easily discouraged. So are we.

Fight for what God has given you, but never for a personal question. Your position, your importance, what people think of you, does not help, it only obscures, the issue.

When people think you are a great person, they will listen, and repeat what you said—and say 'Ah, how true!' But they are not really learning; they are joining up. The sooner they forget your the better. Of all human effort, that which thou sowest is not that body that shall be, but God giveth it a body and it has pleased him.

Here are two prayers. One for the beginning of your life, beloved, while you are young: 'Teach me to do the thing that pleaseth thee, for thou art my God'; and one which you will come to when nothing else is left: 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit, for thou hast redeemed me, Lord, thou God of truth.'