

# SEND THEM AWAY, LORD

by

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Christianity is alone!

And her garrisons are asleep

like the tame geese

Kirkegaard called us,

roosting wing to wing

in long rows on

roosts,

upholstered roosts!

Alone and Asleep!

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# SEND THEM AWAY, LORD

*Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from  
the dead and Christ shall  
shine upon thee!*

What a day this is to be awake!

And what a day to sleep!

Preaching for today's world is largely a business of awakening the sleeping giants in the churches.

Yet, this awakening must never be done *too brusquely*, for in the *Upanishads* of Ancient India is it not taught for all the faithful that when a man sleeps his soul leaves him?

Therefore it is a rule:

*"Let no one wake a man suddenly,  
for it is a matter difficult of cure  
if his soul find not its way back to him."*

So: As gently as possible,

(to run no risk of inciting soul-less giants to further soul-less and fruit-less activity)

yet: As firmly as necessary,

(to run no risk of remaining asleep and hence disunited and witless, in the face of danger)

let me insist that

*The most appalling task facing any group on earth is  
that task now facing the Christian Churches.*

*Christianity must now stand alone.*

In a snidely clever remark, Bertrand Russell meant to sting when he said,

"A great majority of the human race have religious convictions different from our own, and therefore groundless . . . ."

Let me show you why he speaks the truth.

The thirteen hundred years from 650 B. C. to 650 A. D. literally flamed with religious promise! In that comparatively

compact package of time came to flower all the currently  
"well-heard-of" religions:

That of

Buddha,

Confucius,

The Christ;

Mani,

Mohammed,

Zoroaster;

the Mystery Cults,

the best of Greek Philosophy,

and Christianized Neo-Platonism:

Judaism.

Jainism.

Taoism;

Shintoism,

and largely,

Hinduism.

And these, for the most part, remain. How now can it be  
claimed that

*Christianity stands alone?*<sup>1</sup>

It has been:

500 years since Buddhism advanced internally or externally.  
Neither creatively nor geographically can it be made to go  
forward. It is finished! For 1000 years Buddhism has been  
a declining power in China;

750 years since *Confucianism* produced its last outstanding  
figure *Chu Hsi* and his attempt to combine *Taoism*, *Buddh-*  
*ism*, and *Confucianism* never really came off. For the  
mother-matrix, *Confucianism*, needed the Chinese Imperial  
system to feed upon. When it died, *Confucianism* lost its  
oxygen supply.

*Manichaeism* has disappeared.

*Mohammedanism* has not passed the peak it reached 900  
years ago.

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<sup>1</sup> See Dr. Kenneth Scott Latourette's brilliant analysis in *The  
Christian Outlook*, pp. 1-19.

*Zoroastrianism's Mazda* is now an electric light-globe  
and her god of evil then spelled *Abriman* now appears  
in Persian eyes to be the great American negotiator,  
*Harriman*.

The Mystery Cults have been dead for 1400 years!  
Even their vocabulary is gone  
except to

a Frenchman named Cumont,  
a few old texts in Ecclesiastical History,  
and the ritual writers of secret fraternal orders.  
Not even the members know the words they use.

*Neo-Platonism* died 1700 years ago, except for the resurrec-  
tion of some of its claims in modern Christian-Science.

For 1000 years, *Judaism* has produced no towering figure  
nor any major stimulus.

*Taoism* has been a minor religion 1500 years . . . .

The Fires are all Dead!

The glow from the ashes is gone!

Christianity is alone!

And her garrisons are asleep  
like the tame geese  
Kirkegaard called us,  
roosting wing to wing  
in long rows on  
roosts,  
upholstered roosts!

Alone and Asleep!

And alone, Christianity must now face some terribly  
powerful forces:

revolutions,  
new ideologies,  
the grasping state-power,  
the "scientific" approach to life,  
non-theistic humanisms,  
ever-rising new secularisms,

vast shifts in populations,  
dislocations of standards,  
new wars.

We live now in a "fulness of the time."

Amidst sweeping revolutions an old world labors to let a new world live. The child of her travail has inborn new and radical ideas about many things:

the universe,  
society,  
Man.

Mixed in the blood-stream of the new world, shifting and changing, tormenting and questioning, denying and affirming, forcing her to seek new kinds of food by the hungers built up, is a set of genes,  
a heterogeneous collation of globules,  
drawn from the spinal fluid  
under the brains  
of

Karl Marx,  
Freidrich Nietzsche,  
Sigmund Freud  
Charles Darwin,  
Albert Einstein,  
and  
John Dewey

Enough to make the blood of this new-world green!  
Further,

*We live in an age:*

In which the state reasserts itself as a New-old menace . . . .

In which our new tools have already become vicious masters . . . .

In which our great blasphemy is that we make ourselves gods and our God the tool of the party in power . . . .

In which our great danger lies in our great popularity and our strength becomes but a guard to protect the extant order.

We live in an age of unparalleled numerical growth

accompanied by an  
    *unparalleled*  
        *spiritual*  
                *illiteracy,*  
complicated by  
    our *numerical neuroses*  
    and  
        *organized superficialities.*

An age of  
    grasping competitions,  
    biased convictions,  
    rival theories,  
    clashing ideologies,  
    matter-mad human bugs,  
                                activism, preoccupation,  
    and thrusting disregard for human values.

Through such a welter must the churches wade, even in our town, along with

*Certain specific challengers which face this church like hungry children face a bewildered parent:*

Twenty six pages, foolscap size, with names packed from edge to edge, representing the several thousand unhelped Baptist University students alone;

the deracinated hordes of the unwon who have established almost no community ties of any kind, who live out existences of work and amusement without assuming any responsibility whatever for this community and its spirit;

at least six more major areas of our city, in addition to Montopolis, Northwest, Allandale, and Wilshire Wood needing churches, pastors, and Sunday Schools;

the claims of our needy sister churches in the face of whose burden we already have given an arm of credit \$160,000.00 strong;

the great schools which we uphold;

our own missions in Argentina and China;

orphans, indigents, dependents;

the \$90,000 per year in Missions we are  
already pledged to meet;

more than 500 homes on our own rolls  
where our work has made little appeal;  
more than 1000 of our own children needing  
understanding example, instruction, undergirding;  
the 400 loyal teachers and helpers who need tools,  
encouragement, heightened vision;  
the 100 young married couples new to us these months  
whose homes need a pastor and a church and many friends;  
the scores of aged and faithful who deserve a special ministry;  
the silently suffering ones we do not know are hurting;  
the triteness of our own institutional approaches;  
our outworn concepts and prejudices, our numerical  
neurosis that insists we must count so many more  
noses than last year to stay in business:  
our spiritual lethargy, our wasted  
energy and duplicated effort.

The claims of a Capital City.

The claims of a lost city.

The claims of a cultural center .

*and the paradox:*

Though responsible for all  
*we can never take all.*

Though wanting all  
*we are ever unfulfilled*  
till He comes!

Forever seeking—  
forever unsatisfied  
with what we find!

It is too much!

The Church cannot do it!

Send Them Away, Lord!

That is our age-old answer.

It is too much! The day is far passed! Night is falling!  
Send them away!

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Even in the New Testament this answer was used. Word that John, the Baptist, had died brought to Jesus an urgent desire to be away from it all. Sorely he needed rest and prayer. Part of himself had died in the beloved forerunner and his bloody death brought the Master's cross very close for a while. But there was no escape from the pressing of the people. Not yet. They even followed along the shore when he attempted to travel by boat.

Multitudes followed the little ship, seeking, seeking,  
more of this new thing,  
or more healing,  
or just a glimpse of Beyond.

Mark tells us how compassion for them at last pulled Jesus into shore at a desert place where he taught them through the day.

But day's end came, and in that wild desert setting a strange unrest possessed the multitude:

the cry of unfed babies,  
the petulant wailing of exhausted children,  
the complaints of spent mothers,  
the mutterings of tired, sullen fathers;  
aimlessly milling,  
milling,  
like cattle ready for stampede.

The situation was out of hand!

The job was too big for the Church!

Something had to be done—

but it was too big!

*Send Them Away, Lord!* The disciples cried.

*Pronounce the Benediction and let's go home!*

*It's too late! The Day is far along!*

*Dismiss them with a word of prayer, Lord!*

*Pronounce a little blessing!*

*Church is Out!*

But the Church of Jesus is constantly up against things too big to be handled even as now.

Historically, and too often, our only action has been to call for the benediction and go home.

Send Them Away, Lord!

We did it! *It's too big*, we cried!

While slavery of human beings was splitting us open;  
while land-grabbers legislated a noble red race out of  
existence;

while crime and vice were becoming major business;  
when war was declared by a newspaper publisher;  
and a generation later,

when narrow minds in high places barred us from  
a real seat with the League of Nations and killed  
a crusader named Wilson,

we did it again!

But why speak of a generation gone?

We are doing it now!

Send them away, Lord!

The day is far passed!

Pronounce the benediction and send us home!

The Church can't deal with it!

It's too big!

The matter of still-subjugated races,  
the matter of legalized corruption,  
the matter of almost complete moral defection,  
the secularization of all that is spiritual,

the matter of mass drunkenness,

mass dope addiction,

mass pandering,

mass legal pilfering,

mass rule by minority pressure,

mass murder by auto.

mass suicide by gluttony,

mass insanity by alcoholism,

mass prostitution for peanuts,

mass strangulation on patented pills,

plus,

the little matters of our own

venerated hates,

spiritual dishonesty,  
squeezing acquisitiveness,  
backyard prejudices and  
sectional provincialism;  
plus our own little  
bigotries,  
shallowness,  
high tempers,  
lack of pity,  
lack of mercy, and  
lack of gentleness.

But Listen! Listen!

*The Church of Jesus has stood in many desert places!*

When Jerusalem was plunged into a basin of blood by Titus;  
when the Vandals hammered in all of North Africa's gates;  
when the wolves and the Magyars owned all France;  
when Turks and Crusaders made Eurasia slippery  
with shed blood;  
when priests despoiled their own altar cloths;  
when 100,000 believers died in a day at Vespers;  
when eighteen out of thirty million Germans  
died in that useless thirty years war;  
in plague-ridden Moscow when 250,000  
died, and in Lenin-ridden Russia where  
18,000,000 starved; in quake-shaken  
Japan, and in German-raped  
Belgium.

*The Church has stood in many desert places!*

And all too often, in the face of its task, has the cry been  
raised in despair . . . .

The task is too big,  
"From the fury of the Northmen,  
Good Lord, Deliver us!"

Send them away, Lord,  
This is a desert place,  
and the day is far spent!

Indeed! It is a desert place . . . this avenue to a new age.  
Indeed! The task that confronts us is larger than we are.  
Indeed! The temptation is to cry:

Send them away!

The stability of our own future is questionable!

We've scarcely what we want for our own!

We have other commitments!

We have heard enough of need,

conflict,  
danger,  
crisis,  
challenge,  
and obligation!

Send them away, Lord.

It is toward evening,

It is getting dark!

What the whole Christian world has forgotten is that, in response to the need of that milling multitude, and in the face of the disciples plea for a benediction that would relieve them of their responsibility, Jesus had

*an express command*

in answer.

*Give ye them to eat!*

(My Father wants them fed!)

And the disciples are aghast. "You play with us, Lord!"  
"You jest."

"You know it's too big!"

"How could we feed them?"

"The Lord is not in earnest."

"He wouldn't require such of us."

"Why, Lord, it would take all our money!"

"Two hundred days work worth wouldn't do it!"

"It would break us up!"

"If God wants them fed *where is Heaven's manna?*"

"If God wants them fed *where are Heaven's ravens?*"

"If God wants this world *where are Heaven's armies?*"

"*You are Heaven's raven with meat in your pinions.*"

"You are Heaven's manna falling in showers of life."

"You are the armies of Heaven!"

But Lord!

We

have

so little!

"Only five small loaves,  
and two little fish,"

says Andrew,

and adds, with failing faith,

what are they

among

so

many!

*Give me what you have!*

and it is a trumpet-sound

more felt than heard.

Give me your loaves

and the fish.

Under my control, it is enough!

The Christian world has forgotten . . . .

He asks for **nothing** we do not already have!

The Christian world has forgotten . . . .

Anything we still have

is left over

from our own needs!

Give Him what you have!

We have forgotten that under his control—

it is enough.

We have forgotten that Old Isaiah said the day would come when we would have our chance, that Yahweh—Worship would be all that remained. We have forgotten that the Gospel is eternal—never needing any defence. We have forgotten that only forms of Christianity can die—

The Gospel never.

Only Christianity's dwellings can be in danger.

Only Christianity's institutions are perishable.

Only the habiliments are inflammable.

The Gospel has no bulwark or bastion—  
it is never on defence  
and we have forgotten it!

around us corpses—  
dead and half-dead earthly forms.

*Eastern Orthodoxy* progressively reflects an era gone.  
*The Roman Communion* restricted its Papal chair to men  
of Italy now four centuries ago and that day hastened  
its death.

*The State Churches of Europe* choke on their admission  
of multitudes by virtue of having been born once only.

*The Protestant Communions* exhaust their spiritual energy  
building one more great refuge for defense, in spite of  
the preachment that it is a base for attack.

And our own?

smothering under our claims of "big numbers,"  
"winning the world" through the front door, and  
passing it out the back to make room inside,  
glossing over our failures with braggado,  
flashing shields of brass that once were gold,  
riding our crest of popularity at home and  
gloating over our unbrotherliness abroad,  
defiantly clamant for the "seat on his right-hand"—  
sinning like James and John

in asking for it  
before we are  
"Able."

Dissipating our strength in hasty expansion—

our future in unbrotherly provincialism—

our honor in boorish assumptions—

our heritage for a mess of pottage.

Building barns, stores, for perishable products,

erecting defenses when we were born for assault,

enrolling without winning,

counting without converting,

penning up without feeding the flock,

washing without water,  
teaching without vision.

Harsh?

No.

Honest!

*What confession we need!*

Who ever told us it was our fight alone?

Who ever said the church was hemmed in, besieged?

We are not a surrounded city,  
we are a besieging army!

An army of many divisions  
against which the gates of  
the place of the abandoned  
cannot stand.

Who ever said it was our business to survive.

or to remain unchanged,

or to count and compare,

or to huddle up in refuges for defense?

Who gave us permission to try to bind the fresh ferment  
of the Gospel in the wineskins of the dead past?

Who ever released us to wrap our Gospel in grave  
clothes for safe-keeping?

We have forgotten our Commander never defends!

We have forgotten our Gospel cannot be smothered.

We have forgotten the Gospel will always split any force  
that confines it, until it threatens to split us!

We have forgotten that Jesus is with us.

We have mistaken our plan for His own.

We have assumed the regency!

But He is here!

He needs our only soldiership, not our generalship.

We have forgotten it!

He wants only what we have!

Under His control,

the Gospel does its own multiplying!  
Under His control,  
it is enough!

And then, in view of the thousands,  
surrounded by a knot of disciples agape,  
in the presence of God's Gospel,  
then,

The very air grew conscious of a God  
as,

with five loaves and two fish,

He *multiplied*

to meet the need around Him.

Awake, thou that sleepest!

He asks only for what you already have!

Under His control, it is enough!

“Sing louder yet, why must I still behold  
The wan white face of that deserted Christ,  
Whose bleeding hands my hands did once enfold,  
Whose smitten lips my lips so oft have kissed,  
And now in mute and marble misery  
Sit in His lone deserted house and weeps,  
perchance for me?”

Is it because I have not yet given Him what I have.

Under His control

*It is enough*

and

He feeds them with our fish.