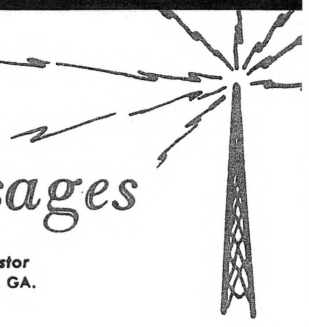


# Baptist hour messages



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## VULGAR RELIGION

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Few will doubt the fact that religion today is enjoying a wave of unprecedented popularity. It finds its way in street corner conversation. It is among the best sellers, is given credence in radio and television productions, and is shown a bit of deference even by the non-religious. God is not a means to man's ends. He is not the "noblesse creation of man." Nor is He a handyman to have around or a good chum who endorses human whims and moods. Modern religion (much of it) has led us to believe these foolish things about God. It stands to reason that the tame, grandfatherly God portrayed by much of modern religion would be vastly popular. But is it true?

As I see it, there are three types of religion that are being promoted as the real

thing. Each of them (when understood) is a counterfeit. I have chosen to call them "vulgar religions." (Vulgar, in the classic sense of the word.)

### BANDSTAND RELIGION

One such type of vulgar religion is what has been called "bandstand religion." It says, "Hip, hip, hurrah" to certain people, movements, and thoughts — provided they are tilted in our direction. . . . A hurrah faith that beats the drums for our favorite charities, our peculiar prejudices, and our particular sects and groups. What I am trying to say is so easily seen in the external deference shown religion: the many prayer breakfasts, flag salutings, invocations at various types of athletic contests, ecclesiastical mottos on coins and stamps — all of which have some place, I suppose, but perhaps in the long reach of values will have to be consigned to the province of bandstand plays.

Listen to the loud proclamations of people who are willing to say a hearty "Amen" for our side — that is, our national side. When a nation can honestly invoke the blessings of God on its people, then such invocation is timely indeed. But when the invocation includes a bid for God's taking sides against any other people, such a prayer becomes mockery. The simple and embarrassing truth to ardent nationalism is that God does not take sides. All of His people are on the same side whether they be Occidental or Oriental, Greek or Jew. The first half of this twentieth cen-

**Baptist Hour Sermon Topics for April**

April 6—"Were You There?"  
 April 13—"Our Father"  
 April 20—Salvation Without Guesswork  
 April 27—"Thy Neighbor As Thyself"

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 Read them in  
 THE BEAM**

ture will be recorded by wise historians as the decades of double-dealing, false representation, and the delusion that right is exclusively the possession of any one people.

#### "HURRAH" FOR OUR SIDE

Too, it is easy to say "Hurrah" for our side religiously. Now, to be convinced that your side is the right side is a matter of urgent necessity if you are to be worthwhile to your side. But just suppose such a conviction does not square with the facts in truth? What then? Will your loyalty to the group outweigh your facing of the facts? Tragically enough, most times it does!

God must be amused at our little tight, errant sects and groups that have a way of trying to divide God up into little divinities. Such efforts look much like the salty puddles of sea water that get caught in the sand dunes when the tide goes out to sea — each little puddle, all to itself. Then the tide returns and engulfs them in the surge of the mighty sea.

God's absolute truth, like that ocean tide, should engulf all these divisive handfuls of good people who are not good enough to agree on the nature of divine truth. The worst of blindness is that which contends for any denomination a monopoly of divine grace or revelation. If everything worthwhile that is taught about God in all the denominations were poured into one hopper of truth, it would still represent far too meager a knowledge of the infinite.

Peter Ainsley so aptly points out that the scandal of Christianity is that half of the Christians are not on speaking terms with the other half. And whatever else can be said for such a condition, never let it be said that it is Christlike. Hurrah for our side — whether right or wrong! That, I contend is vulgar religion.

Today, millions are saying "Amen" for our side provided it is all the same color. Is God a colored God? Or a white God? Or a yellow God? Which? The stark fact is that He is neither, and all the drum beating in the universe that would canalize Him into one color camp will fall flat in defeat. Today one hears on every hand, "I like people of this or that race as long as they stay in their place." A Christian

always is alert to ask, "What is a person's place? Who determines that place?" Then hear the answer from the Bible: The place of all men is on their knees in repentance. Their place is selfless service toward all mankind regardless of the color of his skin. His place is that of freedom and fearlessness without the scalding wine of Cain. This is his place. No, God is no ally to man's ignorance — now, or ever!

#### JUKE-BOX RELIGION

Another type of vulgar religion (in addition to bandstand faith) is juke-box religion, that type which makes the feet beat faster than the heart. The nomenclature belongs to Dennis Borgan quoted by Roy Eckhardt. What is meant by the term is easily seen: religion a la juke-box — play it when you like it; turn it on or off at will; listen to its corny lines with the emotional reaction of rock and roll. This vulgar type has written a theology all its own. Listen to some of its so-called music: "The Man Upstairs," "Love Rock," "How Important Can It Be?," "We'll All Have a Wonderful Time Up There," and many, many others. There is just enough seasoning here and there of religion in it to accentuate the sacrilege.

Much of what is called "Gospel music" knows nothing about music and less about the Gospel. If the commercial trappings were taken off much of this vulgarity, there would be nothing left at all to recommend it. What is wrong with it? It overlooks the sublime fact that one cannot mouth His name in corny music without coming under the judgment of God any more than one can be profane in his swearing. Reverence is an unknown facet to most of the loud and rowdy get-togethers in the name of religion. Actually they are more nearly represented by a carnival air — emotional releases under the guise of true worship!

A worse indictment is that such vulgarity ignores the real truth of the Gospel. The popular song, "We'll All Have a Wonderful Time Up There," is a case in point. No, we won't all have a happy time up there for the simple reason that we will not all get there. "The soul that sinneth shall surely die" — any myth to the contrary, notwithstanding, whether that myth

is strummed out to the strains of an old guitar or mouthed by the slick rhetoric of some universalist.

### SUCCESS RELIGION

The other type of vulgarity is what I shall call "success religion." It says in unapologetic declaration, "Come to Jesus, sign a decision card, and you shall live happily ever after as a great big success." It doesn't say it quite like that but leaves that impression with multi-millions. Salvation is offered as a panacea for all human problems, a type of hocus-pocus in the name of Jesus. Hence, the advertisements and the blasphemously false contentions about faith healings, prayer cloths, and the disgusting light in which God is made to stand. Prayer is promoted as a conduit by which a devout person can gain access to anything he wants.

All he needs to do is to have faith enough, and he can believe any literalism and get whatsoever his carnal heart desires. That simply is not so! Faith cannot do some things any more than prayer cannot change the purpose of God for one's life. No, not if the person stayed on his knees

the rest of his life. This is not to underrate the power of prayer nor the force of faith; instead, it is an effort to understand them both.

Some are even led to believe that if they tithe their income, somehow or other, they are bound to wind up as millionaires. Jesus said no such thing. The way of the Cross may be a harder way than living in one's sin. Then, why the way of the Cross? For the pure reason that it alone leads home!

By the standards of the world, who would say that Jesus was a success? Yet, He lived and died that your life and mine may gain access to the only truth that abides forever. There they are then: three types of vulgar religion: bandstand, jukebox, and success religion. When placed alongside the real faith, they pale into puny oblivion.

"The tumult and the shouting dies,  
The captains and the kings depart,  
Still stands thy ancient sacrifice,  
An humble and a contrite heart."

<sup>1</sup>Rudyard Kipling; "Recessional"; Hill; *The World's Great Religious Poetry*; The Macmillan Company; New York; 1938.

## 'TO BE OR NOT TO BE'

March 9, 1958

No facet of life is any stranger than that which would destroy itself. Sooner or later most human beings come to that point of Hamlet's dilemma, "To be or not to be: that is the question." Is it worthwhile to keep on bucking the sea of life with its tempestuous waves, or is it better to give in to the sea and give up?

Each day in America sixty-seven people take their own lives, and in some European countries that rate is twice as many. More folks commit suicide in May and June than in any other months — and that, while the flowers are blooming and the birds are singing their brightest melodies.

### THE MIND OF MAN

Since this sermon is a phase of Christianity and mental health, we first need to take a brief look at the human mind. It is in

the brain of man that the decisions to live or not to live are made. In a quick glance at the mind's makeup, one first would see the *conscious* self. In it, current thought occurs; decisions are made; rational activity that involves one's hour by hour routine takes place. But in the *preconscious* makeup, memories and thoughts are stored. This division is much like a library of reference: old experience, yesterday's activities are there to be recalled at will. The difficulty of recalling one's name is but a poor filing system on the shelves of the *preconscious* self.

The third section is the one that is most difficult to understand, the *subconscious* self. In a sense it is the basement of the mind. The best furniture of the house is not put in the basement. And like one's dwelling, the subconscious catches all the unsightly wrappings and trappings of life's