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## **Review of *The Social Teaching of Phillips Brooks***

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## Review Article

### The Social Teaching of Phillips Brooks

ROBERT B. SLOCUM\*

#### *Historical Background and Recent Studies of Brooks*

Phillips Brooks (December 13, 1835–January 23, 1893) is widely recognized to be one of the great preachers in American church history. Indeed, Sydney Ahlstrom describes Brooks and Henry Ward Beecher of Plymouth Congregational Church in Brooklyn as “the princes of the pulpit” and “in a class by themselves” in nineteenth-century American Christianity.<sup>1</sup> After serving two pastorates in Philadelphia, Church of the Advent (1859–1862) and Holy Trinity Church (1862–1869), Brooks was rector of Trinity Church, Boston, from 1869 until he was consecrated Bishop of Massachusetts in 1891. He died in Boston less than eighteen months after becoming Bishop of Massachusetts. Brooks is widely remembered as the author of the Christmas carol, “O Little Town of Bethlehem” (Hymns 78–79 in *The Hymnal* 1982), which he wrote after a visit to the Holy Land in 1865.<sup>2</sup>

Brooks was prominent in the Broad Church Movement in the Episcopal Church. One commentator noted that Brooks “sought to make Christian truth relevant to the changing conditions of the modern world” and that his sermons “carry on the great tradition of evangelical conviction and Christian humanism which are the hallmarks of his church.”<sup>3</sup> He is commemorated with a “lesser feast” in the Calendar of the Episcopal Church on January 23. The tribute to Brooks in *Lesser Feasts and Fasts* notes that the new building

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<sup>1</sup> Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), pp. 738–740. See David B. Chesebrough, *Phillips Brooks, Pulpit Eloquence* (Westport, Conn. and London: Greenwood Press, 2001) (Great American Orators, Number 30), p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Carol A. Doran and Alan Luff, “78 O little town of Bethlehem,” in *The Hymnal 1982 Companion, Volume Three A, Hymns 1 to 384*, Raymond F. Glover, ed. (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1994), pp. 147–148. Brooks’s visit to the Holy Land included participation in the Christmas Eve service at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.

<sup>3</sup> Jerome F. Politzer, “Theological Ideas in the Preaching of Phillips Brooks,” *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 33 (June, 1964), pp. 157–169.

for Trinity Church, Boston—built under Brooks's leadership as rector after the previous building was destroyed by fire—was a "daring architectural enterprise for its day" and "a fitting setting for the greatest preacher of the century."

In recent years scholarly attention has been given to the meaning of Brooks's contribution and witness. This has meant a qualitative change in the kinds of material available concerning Brooks. For example, Gillis J. Harp notes that Brooks's "few biographers have rarely attempted to place his thought or career in their social or intellectual contexts."<sup>4</sup> He adds that "most older studies of Brooks have been remarkably uncritical."<sup>5</sup>

Harp does not understand Brooks in strictly evangelical terms. Brooks was "very unhappy" at Virginia Theological Seminary, which was a center of Low Church Evangelicalism when Brooks was in Alexandria for seminary between 1856 and 1859.<sup>6</sup> Harp sees in the response of the young Brooks to VTS "a movement away from core elements of the traditional evangelical position" and the emergence of "a Romanticized and moralistic form of Christian belief that was underwritten by an exceedingly pragmatic view of dogma."<sup>7</sup>

Much of the moralism in Brooks's preaching was drawn from Romantic literature and Romanticized evangelicals. The young Brooks's spirituality "owed more to the literary or poetic than to the narrowly biblical or theological," and he was appreciative of Carlyle, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning.<sup>8</sup> Brooks's private writings during and shortly after his seminary days reveal "very few references" to evangelical themes such as the Cross, the role of faith for an individual believer, or religious conversion.<sup>9</sup> Chesebrough notes that Brooks was "basically indifferent to systematic theology," although he believed that preaching doctrine was necessary for powerful preaching. But for Brooks the test of a doctrine "was its influence on life."<sup>10</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Gillis J. Harp, "The Young Phillips Brooks: A Reassessment," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 49 (4) (October, 1998), pp. 652–667.

<sup>5</sup> Harp, "The Young Phillips Brooks: A Reassessment," p. 652, n. 2. The "older studies" of Brooks include William Lawrence, *Phillips Brooks: A Study* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1903); Lewis O. Brastow, *Representative Modern Preachers* (London and New York: Hodder & Stoughton and Doran, 1904), pp. 195–251; Alexander V. G. Allen, *Phillips Brooks, 1835–1893, Memories of his Life with Extracts from his Letters and Note-Books* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1907); William Lawrence, *Life of Phillips Brooks* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1930); and Raymond W. Albright, *Focus on Infinity: a Life of Phillips Brooks* (New York: Macmillan, 1961).

<sup>6</sup> Harp, "The Young Phillips Brooks: A Reassessment," p. 656.

<sup>7</sup> Harp, "The Young Phillips Brooks: A Reassessment," p. 653.

<sup>8</sup> Harp, "The Young Phillips Brooks: A Reassessment," pp. 658, 663.

<sup>9</sup> Harp, "The Young Phillips Brooks: A Reassessment," pp. 663–664.

<sup>10</sup> Chesebrough, *Phillips Brooks, Pulpit Eloquence*, p. 6.

Harp notes that Brooks's "critique of dogmatic systems naturally led to a new emphasis on moral behaviour over and above right belief."<sup>11</sup> Harp also concludes that not enough scholars "recognise how little appeal evangelicalism held for Brooks even at the start," and he describes as "misleading" the position of Alexander V. G. Allen that Brooks freely accepted the leading evangelical truths by the end of his seminary training.<sup>12</sup> Harp urges that an understanding of Brooks as an example should "inspire a further rethinking of the conventional Whiggish story of the progressive translation of Evangelicals into Broad Churchmen within the Episcopal Church."<sup>13</sup>

One recent study of Brooks that Harp does commend is John Woolverton's *The Education of Phillips Brooks*,<sup>14</sup> which he describes as a "welcome departure" from the approach of the older studies of Brooks and "by far the most satisfying," although "Woolverton does share some of the interpretative assumptions of the earlier works."<sup>15</sup> Woolverton identifies the two strands of tradition that influenced and nurtured Brooks to be "New England (Puritan/Reformed) theology and nineteenth-century Romanticism, which, taken together, are arguably the two principal sources of American Victorian culture."<sup>16</sup>

Woolverton describes in detail Brooks's characteristics as a great preacher, including his clear thinking, freedom from apathy, breadth of reading in the classics and contemporary literature, energy, discipline, sincerity, commitment, and other attributes. Woolverton notes Brooks's assumption that the Gospel of Christ "stood on its own merits" with "its own intention, consistency, and way of speaking." In this context, Woolverton states his position that "it was not so much that Brooks rejected the doctrines of evangelicalism as he refused to argue or state them as doctrines."<sup>17</sup> However, Woolverton's assessment of Brooks is no mere hagiography concerning a great preacher. Woolverton's "final theological word" is "quite critical." He states that "the claims of such Romantics as Brooks about the powers of human consciousness appear naïve" and that the individual self placed at the center of their attention "has come to be seen as having no inherent truth within it to disclose."<sup>18</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Harp, "The Young Phillips Brooks: A Reassessment," p. 662.

<sup>12</sup> Harp, "The Young Phillips Brooks: A Reassessment," pp. 665–666. See Allen, *Life and Letters*, 1, pp. 315–316.

<sup>13</sup> Harp, "The Young Phillips Brooks: A Reassessment," p. 667.

<sup>14</sup> Urbana, Illinois, and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995 (Studies in Anglican History Series).

<sup>15</sup> Harp, "The Young Phillips Brooks: A Reassessment," p. 652, n. 2.

<sup>16</sup> Woolverton, *The Education of Phillips Brooks*, p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> Woolverton, *The Education of Phillips Brooks*, p. 108.

<sup>18</sup> Woolverton, *The Education of Phillips Brooks*, p. 112.

Another recent historical study of Brooks is David B. Chesebrough's *Phillips Brooks, Pulpit Eloquence*. Chesebrough characterizes Brooks as "a Broad Churchman who tended to stress the oneness with other denominations rather than the differences" and "a liberal who was open to various theological perspectives." In this regard, Chesebrough notes, Brooks encountered "some problems and disputes with the more conservative elements of the Episcopal Church." However, Chesebrough concludes, if the opposition to Brooks was "sometimes loud, it was never great in quantity" and largely ignored by Brooks.<sup>19</sup>

Chesebrough's position is corroborated by Woolverton, who states that Brooks's election as Bishop of Massachusetts in 1891 prompted a negative response from George F. Seymour, Bishop of Springfield (Illinois) and a former Dean of the General Theological Seminary. Seymour believed that "Satan has now insinuated himself into the very strongholds of Christianity, and sought to enter into a truce with its leaders and militant hosts." Woolverton notes that this harsh judgement against Brooks was prompted by his participation in an interdenominational Good Friday service in a Congregational Church, and at the installation of Lyman Abbot at the Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, and the fact that Brooks "*habitually*" permitted Unitarians 'to receive the Holy Communion at his hands . . . [while] Rector of Trinity Church.'<sup>20</sup>

Chesebrough describes Brooks as "a Christian humanist," noting that "optimism and hopefulness permeated Brooks's view of humanity and the world," and that he "challenged the current wave of pessimism regarding human nature."<sup>21</sup> The dark side of this optimism was an indifference to certain needs and difficulties of others. Chesebrough states that Brooks "met the social problems spawned by the Industrial Revolution by ignoring them."<sup>22</sup> Woolverton recalls Martin E. Marty's assessment that Brooks "underestimated the number and plight of America's poor and suggested that the 'rich could be charitable and the poor could do much more to lift themselves by their bootstraps if they only followed the gospel which taught that wealth was a sign of divine favor,'" and Ahlstrom's view that Brooks was "an optimistic

<sup>19</sup> Chesebrough, *Phillips Brooks, Pulpit Eloquence*, p. xx.

<sup>20</sup> Woolverton, *The Education of Phillips Brooks*, p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> Chesebrough, *Phillips Brooks, Pulpit Eloquence*, pp. 5, 9. Brooks's theology was labeled "Christian Humanism" by Lewis Brastow. See Lewis O. Brastow, *Representative Modern Preachers* (1904; reprint, Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1968), p. 205.

<sup>22</sup> Chesebrough, *Phillips Brooks, Pulpit Eloquence*, p. 9. Chesebrough cites Sydney Ahlstrom's statement that Brooks's optimism "kept him untroubled by the inequalities of American life" and that he "believed that suffering caused by poverty and injustice was for the most part deserved, but that they were in any event only temporary problems which the natural harmony of God's purposes would certainly dispel." See Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, pp. 739-740.

nationalist whose views kept him 'untroubled by the inequities of American life.'<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, this optimism for Brooks did mean a confidence that "there could be no limits for the individual or society" when "people understood their kinship with God."<sup>24</sup>

Preaching was at the heart of Brooks's ministry, and descriptions of Brooks's preaching are central to presentations concerning him. He must have been an imposing figure. Brooks stood six feet four inches tall, and usually weighed about 250 pounds. He "spoke rapidly, at the rate of over two hundred words per minute, whether reading a manuscript or speaking extemporaneously."<sup>25</sup> He had "piercing black eyes."<sup>26</sup> The event of Brooks's preaching was a demanding experience for those present.<sup>27</sup>

Woolverton notes that Brooks's preaching was rooted in his belief in the Incarnation, and Brooks's understanding that the truths of faith must be given living expression through the preacher's words. Woolverton states that in applying Christology to preaching, "Brooks argued that if only an *incarnate* God can speak of and convince another of the power of God, then only when that word is incarnate in preaching can God's word be spoken anew."<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Chesebrough states that "in almost every sermon Phillips Brooks called men to look at Christ, to hear Christ, to emulate Christ."<sup>29</sup> Brooks emphasized the personal and persuasive rather than the didactic.<sup>30</sup> The preacher's artistry, the preacher's words, the preacher's very self could be the medium and occasion for changing lives and making God present. Indeed, Brooks "wanted to become the poet-preacher."<sup>31</sup> Brooks's preaching was dramatic yet simple, impressive but unpretentious, skillful yet obviously sincere.<sup>32</sup> With respect to Brooks, Chesebrough wisely concludes, "as with all great orators, however, it was not just what he said, but how he said it."<sup>33</sup>

### *Themes of Brooks's Social Teaching*

It is impossible to recapture the event of Brooks's preaching—the sound of his voice, the energy of his presentation, the response of the listen-

<sup>23</sup> Woolverton, *The Education of Phillips Brooks*, p. 6. See Martin E. Marty, *Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in America* (New York: Dial Press, 1970), pp. 191, 149; Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, p. 739.

<sup>24</sup> Chesebrough, *Phillips Brooks, Pulpit Eloquence*, p. 9.

<sup>25</sup> Chesebrough, *Phillips Brooks, Pulpit Eloquence*, p. xx.

<sup>26</sup> Woolverton, *The Education of Phillips Brooks*, p. 5.

<sup>27</sup> Woolverton, *The Education of Phillips Brooks*, pp. 4–5.

<sup>28</sup> Woolverton, *The Education of Phillips Brooks*, p. 100.

<sup>29</sup> Chesebrough, *Phillips Brooks, Pulpit Eloquence*, p. 8.

<sup>30</sup> Woolverton, *The Education of Phillips Brooks*, p. 107.

<sup>31</sup> Woolverton, *The Education of Phillips Brooks*, p. 89.

<sup>32</sup> Woolverton, *The Education of Phillips Brooks*, pp. 37, 87.

<sup>33</sup> Chesebrough, *Phillips Brooks, Pulpit Eloquence*, p. 9.

ing congregation. But it is possible to recall and consider the content of what Brooks said in his sermons that have been published.<sup>34</sup> This article will focus on Brooks's social teaching from the pulpit. I should emphasize that by "social teaching" I do not mean his support or opposition concerning any particular cause or issue. Instead, I will seek to identify major themes for Brooks in terms of how we should best live in relation to others as an expression of living in saving relationship with God. Brooks's sermons are optimistic and encouraging, but they are also personal, practical and specific in their guidance for those who listen. The following short topical presentations are representative of Brooks's social teaching, but certainly not exhaustive of his many themes.

*Human Participation in God's Work of Redemption and Salvation.* God uses us to save others, and we can find God actively present in the situations and contexts of our lives. God "works through human means" and "brings in all the machinery of social life and folds it around the special soul which He wants to rescue, and bids it help, and delight in helping, the unfortunate and lost."<sup>35</sup> A person who helps a friend who has fallen into vice will discover in his or her heart "that old familiar consciousness which has been in such multitudes of hearts, that it is not really you but God who has saved him. It is God using you." Then we may share in the divine joy over finding the sheep that was lost.<sup>36</sup> In the sermon "The Joy with God," Brooks states that when our

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<sup>34</sup> Collections of Brooks's sermons include a ten-volume series: *The Purpose and Use of Comfort and Other Sermons* (First Series) (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1878); *The Candle of the Lord and Other Sermons* (Second Series) (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1881); *Sermons Preached in English Churches and Other Sermons* (Third Series) (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1883); *Twenty Sermons* (Fourth Series) (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1886); *The Light of the World and Other Sermons* (Fifth Series) (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1891); *The Battle of Life and Other Sermons* (Sixth Series) (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1893); *Sermons for the Principal Festivals and Fasts of the Church Year* (Seventh Series), edited by John Cotton Brooks (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1895); *New Starts in Life and Other Sermons* (Eighth Series) (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1896); *The Law of Growth and Other Sermons* (Ninth Series) (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1902); *Seeking Life and Other Sermons* (Tenth Series) (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1904). Brooks's Lyman Beecher Lectures on Preaching at the Yale Divinity School in 1877 have been published in various editions. See, e.g., Phillips Brooks, *The Joy of Preaching* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1989). Another major publication by Brooks was *Essays and Addresses: Religious, Literary and Social*, edited by John Cotton Brooks (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1895). Chesebrough provides a bibliography including works by Phillips Brooks in *Phillips Brooks, Pulpit Eloquence*, pp. 179–180. This volume also reprints Brooks's sermons "Abraham Lincoln," "The Candle of the Lord," and "Help from the Hills."

<sup>35</sup> Brooks, "The Joy with God," in *The Light of the World and Other Sermons*, p. 330.

<sup>36</sup> Brooks, "The Joy with God," in *The Light of the World and Other Sermons*, p. 331. See Matthew 18:12–14.

duty is "struck for an instant by the certainty that it was God's wish," then it may blaze "into sudden beauty as a diamond blazes when it is smitten by the sun," as we hear God's call, "'Come, rejoice with Me!'"<sup>37</sup>

*Divine Motivation for our Best Efforts.* When a person is truly converted, a "strange helpfulness" comes into his or her life. This does not reflect a new truth or a new natural capacity, but "the unlighted nature . . . has been lifted up and lighted at the life of God, and now burns with Him."<sup>38</sup> In "New Starts in Life," Brooks provides the analogy of an arrow propelled by a bowstring into the center of a target, with the arrow given direction and motive force by the bowstring. He states, "you question it as it goes flying past you, and ask it why it takes that track, and its reply is not 'Because the target stands this way,' but 'Because this way the bow-string sent me.'" Similarly, Brooks later explains that "if the task's attractiveness is felt it is as an accidental pleasure, not as the main motive. The main motive is the Father's will. . . . We are God's arrows."<sup>39</sup>

If we are not alight in obedience to the divine activity in us, if we reverence no wisdom greater than our own, then we will be "as dark as a row of silver lamps, all chased and wrought with wondrous skill, all filled with rarest oil, but all untouched with fire." This is the darkness of "a long row of cultivated men, set up along the corridors of some age of history, around the halls of some wise university, or in the pulpits of some stately church, to whom there has come no fire of devotion."<sup>40</sup> But "whenever any man believes that God has given him a work to do that belief becomes the great motive of his labor."<sup>41</sup>

*The Eschatological Fulfillment of Humanity in Christ.* Brooks emphasizes that the eschatological end is not separate from the fulfillment of humanity in Christ. In "The Great Attainment," he admits that he does not know "what the actual visible phenomenon will be—what glories of the opened heavens, what gathering of the angelic hosts,—but this I am sure of, that there is no perfection of humanity possible which shall not be the entrance into and the occupation of humanity by Jesus Christ, the bringing of the Son of man to be the real spirit and standard of this earth!" The vision of Christ's returning glory "which our eyes are looking for in the heavens, and the new improved life which our souls are longing for in the government, the learning, and the social life of the world, belong together. They are not two

<sup>37</sup> Brooks, "The Joy with God," in *The Light of the World and Other Sermons*, p. 338.

<sup>38</sup> Brooks, "The Candle of the Lord," in *The Candle of the Lord and Other Sermons*, pp. 10–11.

<sup>39</sup> Brooks, "New Starts in Life," in *New Starts in Life and Other Sermons*, p. 8.

<sup>40</sup> Brooks, "The Candle of the Lord," in *The Candle of the Lord and Other Sermons*, p. 10.

<sup>41</sup> Brooks, "New Starts in Life," in *New Starts in Life and Other Sermons*, p. 7.



and different; they are one and the same."<sup>42</sup> This understanding of "the coming of the Son of man" in the world also informs how we live in the world today. In light of the expected and hoped for coming of Christ, we are "to have such a character, to live such a life, that when His asserted and established dominion comes, those lives and characters shall blend with it, help it, and be helped by it, and not be swept away as something hostile or useless, something which has no further place or right now that the complete condition of the world has come."<sup>43</sup>

*The Importance of Moral Courage.* Brooks states that "physical cowardice is rarer than we think," noting the physical courage that is often seen in times such as war or shipwreck. But moral courage "is another thing." It is "rare indeed" to "dare to do just what we know we ought to do, without being in the least hindered or distorted by the presence of men who we know will either hate or despise or ridicule us for what we are doing."<sup>44</sup> In "The Curse of Meroz," Brooks urges that it makes no sense for a person to fear contemptible people and the contemptible things "which in all probability they will never care enough about him to do at all." But this realization does not tend to be freeing. "Almost never is a man made independent and brave by having it proved to him that it is a foolish thing to be afraid." The true escape from such cowardice is "the inflow of a larger consecration which oversweeps and drowns" the cowardice and puts it "out of the way forever." Moral courage must be rooted in faith. "Nothing but the knowledge of God's love, taking such possession of a man that his one wish and thought in life is to glorify and serve God, can liberate him from, because it makes him totally forget, his fear of man."<sup>45</sup> This topic in Brooks's preaching has added significance and interest in light of the opposition he faced at the time of his election as Bishop of Massachusetts.

*Gifts Better than Money.* Brooks's parishioners obviously included those who could afford to be generous in giving money. While not dismissing the possible good of cash gifts, he calls for much more significant forms of generosity. In "The Gifts of God," Brooks states, "prominent as money stands in all our thoughts of charity we owe more to-day to those who have never given us, perhaps who never could have given us a penny, but who have given us something that is far more valuable than money—the Peters and the Johns who in some need have said to us as we looked up to them, 'Silver and gold

<sup>42</sup> Brooks, "The Great Attainment," in *New Starts in Life and Other Sermons*, pp. 296–297.

<sup>43</sup> Brooks, "The Great Attainment," in *New Starts in Life and Other Sermons*, p. 297.

<sup>44</sup> Brooks, "The Curse of Meroz," in *The Candle of the Lord and Other Sermons*, p. 294.

<sup>45</sup> Brooks, "The Curse of Meroz," in *The Candle of the Lord and Other Sermons*, pp. 296–297.

have I none, but such as I have I give unto thee,' and who then have touched some dead and withered part of our nature and by their strong character given it back its strength."<sup>46</sup> While honoring the influence of money, Brooks urges that "there are higher things to give than money, and any man who really wants to give something may find something to give, though his purse be as empty as the purses of the two apostles."<sup>47</sup>

It is better to give a needy person an idea than to give that person a dollar, "unless he is starving and needs something to eat upon the spot." By sharing an idea, it is possible to "become the centre of a little green spot of intelligence in the midst of this arid wilderness which we call society, as a live tree gathers the moisture and keeps off the sun for a little circle of grass that grows bright and rich under its branches." Such generosity is better than silver and gold, because "the dollar is spent and the man again is hungry, but the idea is implanted, the intelligence is stirred, and the man is richer and happier forever."<sup>48</sup> This is the generosity that changes lives. Brooks states that "ignorant, spiritless, wretched, Christless lives are all about us," and that "we do not need to be rich" to help them. Everywhere there is a need for "intelligence, inspiration, comfort, religion." Brooks admits that it is "terrible" for a rich man to go through life without helping a poor man once out of his plenty, "but it is far more terrible for a Christian to die without having brought any other soul to Christ."<sup>49</sup>

*Self-Offering, Sacrifice, and Duty.* Brooks upholds a strong sense of Christian duty. The power of duty prevents the soul "in its exaltations from flying wildly off into vague rhapsodies and dreams," and the same power of duty likewise "preserves the soul in its depression from despair."<sup>50</sup> It is only by "entrance into some higher servitude" that we gain freedom from any slavery in this world.<sup>51</sup> We are to move from selfishness and anxious self-concern to self-offering that is rooted in Christ's love. Brooks urges that "not by studying himself, but by forgetting himself in the desire to serve his Lord, does a man exchange the false humility which crushes for the true humility which inspires." What moves a "gentle scholar" to become a "Boanerges of the truth"? What moves a "timid shrinking woman" to go "unmoved through the hooting of a rabble to the stake"? They both "have lost themselves in their Lord. Both have learned the love of Christ till that become the one fact of

<sup>46</sup> Brooks, "The Gifts of God," in *New Starts in Life and Other Sermons*, p. 126. See Acts 3:1-10.

<sup>47</sup> Brooks, "The Gifts of God," in *New Starts in Life and Other Sermons*, p. 127.

<sup>48</sup> Brooks, "The Gifts of God," in *New Starts in Life and Other Sermons*, p. 128.

<sup>49</sup> Brooks, "The Gifts of God," in *New Starts in Life and Other Sermons*, p. 133.

<sup>50</sup> Brooks, "How to be Abased," in *The Light of the World and Other Sermons*, p. 174.

<sup>51</sup> Brooks, "The Marks of the Lord Jesus," in *The Candle of the Lord and Other Sermons*, p. 363.

their existence; and then the call of Him who loved them has drawn the soul out of all self-consciousness."<sup>52</sup>

Self-sacrifice is "the necessary condition of joy in this human life," as it is "also inevitably associated with suffering and pain."<sup>53</sup> Our completion in Christ is to be found along the path of self-offering, self-sacrifice, and duty. Brooks expresses the "deep certainty" that the "best souls" have always come to in every age, "that only in unselfishness, only in forgetfulness of themselves and service of their brethren, could men come to their own best completion."<sup>54</sup> In "The Joy of Self-Sacrifice," Brooks states that self-sacrifice for others is the answer for "the problem of hundreds of unhappy lives," including "rich men who with all their wealth are weary and wretched; learned men whose learning only makes them querulous and jealous; believing men whose faith is always souring into bigotry and envy." What they all need is "just something which shall make them let themselves go out into the open ocean of a complete self-sacrifice. They are rubbing and fretting and chafing themselves against the wooden wharves of their own interests to which they are tied."<sup>55</sup>

*Discerning God in Daily Life.* The presence of God is available to us in all the moments of our life, including our daily decisions and our work. Brooks states that "no man does anything well who does not feel the unknown surrounding and pressing upon the known, and who is not therefore aware all the time that what he does has deeper sources and more distant issues than he can comprehend."<sup>56</sup> Our work provides context for revelation and growth. No one "has a right to be anything unless he carries already in his heart such a sense of the magnitude and the capacity of his occupation as makes him teachable by experience for all that his occupation has to make known to him."<sup>57</sup>

If we experience a moment of great enlightenment in life, we should not say, "I never knew what Christ was till then. All my Christian life before that was worthless, and goes for nothing." This attitude by Christians will accompany experiences that are "all spasmodic, full of jerks and starts." In-

<sup>52</sup> Brooks, "The Curse of Meroz," in *The Candle of the Lord and Other Sermons*, p. 300. Jesus named James and John "Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder." Mark 3:17.

<sup>53</sup> Brooks, "The Joy of Self-Sacrifice," in *The Candle of the Lord and Other Sermons*, p. 30.

<sup>54</sup> Brooks, "The Great Attainment," in *New Starts in Life and Other Sermons*, p. 294.

<sup>55</sup> Brooks, "The Joy of Self-Sacrifice," in *The Candle of the Lord and Other Sermons*, pp. 28–29.

<sup>56</sup> Brooks, "The Wings of the Seraphim," in *The Light of the World and Other Sermons*, p. 255.

<sup>57</sup> Brooks, "How to Abound," in *The Light of the World and Other Sermons*, p. 143.

stead, Brooks states, "the probability is that God led you up to that enlightenment by all that went before," including the "dark and quiet places" of life.<sup>58</sup>

God's presence and our understanding of growth in Christ provide a basis for daily discernment in terms of decision-making. We may know that Christ bids us to do something if we are convinced "first, that it is right, that it is in harmony with that great, constant goodness which fills the world and comes from God; second, that that man in Palestine would have done it if it had offered itself to Him there as it offers itself to me here; and third, that if I do it now, my own soul will be fed and strengthened."<sup>59</sup>

*Sharing our Gifts and Knowing God.* There is a larger purpose for all the gifts we have received. Brooks states, "the object of God's giving us any gift is not that we may possess the gift, but that through the possession of the gift we may possess Him." The gifts that God gives us assure us of God's presence and love. They are given "only as they are required" and "day by day, so that each day the day's gift might make the giver real and so all life be filled with Him."<sup>60</sup> In preaching to a congregation that was "very largely people of privilege," Brooks urges that "if you are rich you must frankly own your wealth and take the position which it gives with all the duties that belong to it."<sup>61</sup> Brooks disdains the misuse of gifts by people who "behave like children to whom have been given jewels that might glorify and enrich the world but who hide them under a child's awkward bushel made of pride and shame or use them only to deck out their foolish baby-houses."<sup>62</sup> Our gifts, privileges, and advantages are not fulfilled until they are turned to service. Brooks warns: "Understand that your wealth or your education, or your religious light is not thoroughly made your own till you have begun to use it for other people."<sup>63</sup>

It is important to understand that Brooks's social teaching is rooted in his faith and theology of Christ active in the world. In "The Gifts of God," Brooks recalls the legend of the Holy Grail. A knight who sought in vain for Christ's Passover cup finally returns home "old and haggard" and encounters a beggar, "and then as the knight breaks his single crust and fills his wooden bowl out of the frozen stream and gives the beggar food and drink, the blessing comes to him; the holy Grail, which is Christ's Passover cup, is found, is

<sup>58</sup> Brooks, "New Experiences" in *The Light of the World and Other Sermons*, pp. 302-303.

<sup>59</sup> Brooks, "The Illumination of Obedience," in *The Light of the World and Other Sermons*, pp. 355-356.

<sup>60</sup> Brooks, "New Starts in Life," in *New Starts in Life and Other Sermons*, p. 18.

<sup>61</sup> Brooks, "The Duties of Privilege," in *New Starts in Life and Other Sermons*, p. 103.

<sup>62</sup> Brooks, "The Duties of Privilege," in *New Starts in Life and Other Sermons*, p. 104. See Mark 4:21.

<sup>63</sup> Brooks, "The Duties of Privilege," in *New Starts in Life and Other Sermons*, p. 104.

the true act of charity, and the leper speaking with the voice of Christ . . . says, 'Who gives himself with his gift feeds three, himself, his hungering neighbor and me.'<sup>64</sup> We find God and discover our truest selves in service for others.

Surrendering our barriers, comforts, and defenses for others is the way of our fullest life. It is the way of Christ's life, which we may share. Brooks notes that "wherever any man leaves his own self-contained life to go forth into the life of others, wherever any saint leaves his closet to go and tell the story of the Saviour, instead of merely pondering its sweetness by himself, wherever any scholar lets his self-culture go that he may lift a corner of the cloud of ignorance off of some benighted soul, wherever the missionary makes himself homeless that he may gather some of the Father's children into the eternal home—there is the soul and spirit of the Incarnation."<sup>65</sup> Just as Jesus' divinity "was not lost by His entrance into humanity," we do not in truth surrender our self-culture and happiness when we enter the ignorance and misery of others. Brooks urges that in this service for others "your own soul gathers a ripeness which it could not have had abiding alone, and the joy that you seemed to surrender is multiplied tenfold when you begin to seek not yourself but other men."<sup>66</sup> Our gifts are meant to be shared, and God is meant to be known in the offering of our lives for others.

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<sup>64</sup> Brooks, "The Gifts of God," in *New Starts in Life and Other Sermons*, pp. 134–135. See Matthew 25:45, in which Jesus says relative to giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, and visiting those in prison, "Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

<sup>65</sup> Brooks, "The Gifts of God," in *New Starts in Life and Other Sermons*, p. 138.

<sup>66</sup> Brooks, "The Gifts of God," in *New Starts in Life and Other Sermons*, p. 139.