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THE CHURCH AND SOCIAL RECONSTRUCTION

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The great war is over and the great work now begins. The object of war is destruction, and surely the destruction has been abundant and complete. The monstrous German ambition lies broken and impotent and every church in Christendom may well sing one stanza of the Magnificat:

He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their heart; he hath put down princes from their thrones and exalted them of low degree.

The great war has not yet brought us peace or happiness, but it has brought us amazing opportunity. Fused in the fires of the awful struggle, the whole world now lies plastic to the hand of faith. The foundations of the great deep are broken up, barriers are broken, boundaries are shattered, and the whole world is malleable and waiting to be shaped anew. When Charles Francis Adams calls a certain age in Massachusetts history “glacial period” we all know what he means. Human life was congealed by the New England theocracy—all truth was known, all duty expounded, and nothing allowed to change. But the era in which we live is not glacial but volcanic. All human government, institutions, and ideals are changing before our very eyes. The world is a molten mass, and before it cools Christianity may stamp upon it the image and superscription of God.

Twenty years from now it will be impossible; five years from now it will be too late. This one year will shape the thousand years that follow. As we face our tremendous task we may take either the attitude of Shakespeare’s Hamlet or that of the English poet who died on his way to the front, Rupert Brooke. The nerveless Hamlet moaned: “The time is out of joint, O cursed spite That ever I was born to set it right.”

But the militant soul of Rupert Brooke cried, as he sailed for Gallipoli: “Now God be thanked, who hath matched us with this hour!”

The Church’s Responsibility

In all the changes now going on the Christian church is vitally concerned. If it could not prevent the war it can at least prevent an ignoble and un-Christian peace. The church has immense responsibility for the social conditions which shape the individual life. It must refuse to condone or tolerate conditions which make religion impossible. This denomination represents the extreme of emphasis upon the individual. We believe that “the soul of all improvement is the improvement of the soul.” We believe that the world will never be saved by social reform, by hygiene, by soup kitchens, or by modern plumbing. It will be saved only as individuals are saved, i.e., transformed.

1 An address delivered at the Northern Baptist convention in Denver, May 21, 1919.
in purpose and allegiance and made partakers of the divine nature.

But as no man can breathe in a vacuum, no man can long remain Christian if all his surroundings are anti-Christian and his whole environment is a denial of the possibility of a Christian order on the earth. An anti-Christian society will poison and suffocate the individual Christian man. We need not only good men but good relations between men, and without such relations the isolated individual Christian will shrivel up and cease to be. Hence the Christian church has a vital concern with reconstruction of the social order. What can the church do today as it stands between the shattered world of 1914 and the Christian world that is to be? It cannot pose as an authority in sociology or economics. It should not rush in where experts fear to tread. It cannot offer competent opinions on municipal government or on taxation or social insurance or the exact number of hours a man ought to work in a day or the amount of wages he ought to receive. But of certain things the church is absolutely sure and on these it must speak in trumpet tones.

Sacredness of Personality

1. The church can and must affirm the sacredness of personality. A person is not a thing to be bought and sold, used and flung aside, exploited for another's gain. A person is not a means to anything but an end in himself. He is never a tool or a "hand," but is a spark of the divine and eternal. In three consecutive stories Jesus set forth his conception of the human being—the stories of the lost coin, the lost sheep and the lost son. The lost coin was still precious metal, the lost sheep was still dear to the shepherd, the lost son was still a son and heir to all the Father possessed.

Hence a contract for labor is wholly different from a contract for goods. The goods can be detached from the owner and shipped across the sea. Labor cannot be detached from the soul of the laborer, and his soul cannot become an article of commerce. Cotton can be baled and shipped and bought and sold, but the human beings who pick the cotton or weave it into fabrics or handle it over the counter are not in the same category. They are bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. They have a value which attaches to no property, and they have rights superior to all property rights whatever. In affirming the sacredness of persons the church is not posing as expert economist; it is uttering the first rudiments of religion.

Hence labor that degrades and stunts the personality cannot be tolerated in a Christian land. Labor cannot indeed be always agreeable. Work is not play, and religion is not afraid of hard work. Honest work is not a curse but an education. It means burden-bearing, strenuous, unremitting effort, heroic overcoming of obstacles. Let no Utopian dream, whether painted by evangelism or Bolshevism, hide from us the grim reality. Some men must dig our ditches through the rocks and mud, and mine our coal in the sunless depths of the earth, and breathe the hot air of the glass-factory, and make sulphur matches, and feed the blazing fires in the
hold of the ocean liner. Some women must scrub prosaic floors, and wash dishes, and mend torn garments, and do the daily drudgery which is the price of a home. "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread"—no mass meetings or street orators can reverse that sentence. This is not an easy world and was not meant to be.

Anti-Christian Toil

But the toil of the home need not crush out the soul of womanhood, and the toil of the farm and the factory need not crush the aspiration of manhood and womanhood. Toil that undermines health, that permanently saps nervous energy, toil that is aimless and hopeless because it sees no outcome, toil that has no satisfaction in the process and no share in the result—that is anti-Christian toil and must not be allowed in a Christian land. From the standpoint of mere production that kind of work is wasteful, since it means lessened output reluctantly yielded by sullen workers. But from the standpoint of religion that kind of work is condemned as dwarving to the souls of men.

The church has a stake in creating such conditions that men may not only become Christian but may stay Christian. What is the use of adding a thousand converts to our churches if we must turn them loose in a world where the Christian life is practically impossible? What is the use of getting them to walk a "sawdust trail" if the next day and the next ten years they must walk streets filled with saloons and prostitutes and vampires? What do they gain in accepting religion on Sunday night, if on Monday they must accept a civilization which scouts the Nazarene and is built on the principle of each man for himself and the devil take the hindmost? If the church in the presence of such conditions is silent or evasive, then the moral passion of our time will throb through other channels and the lovers of men will seek unconsecrated pulpits for their message.

Democracy

2. The church must affirm democracy; i.e., equal opportunity for all persons to develop their highest powers. Of course, all men are not born equal—that is the flashing phrase found in the Declaration of Independence, nowhere found in the New Testament. Persons are not equal in capacity or attainment and never can be. Men are no more alike in their ability to imagine, administer, and create than they are in the color of their eyes and hair. Men are not bricks in a row, each one eight inches by two by four; they are members in a social body. But each member must participate in the life of the whole body, and if shut out of that life it will make trouble for all the rest. A little finger left to fester in pain will send pain through every limb and at length still the beating of the central heart. The whole body is crippled when a single member is left to suffer and to die.

If the church be truly democratic it will not indorse the social domination of any class, whether it be a class of radicals and revolutionists or a class of Bourbons and reactionaries. Russia today is the most undemocratic land in the world. Professing lofty sentiments of brotherhood, it is given over to das-
tardly deeds intended to enthrone in power a single class. Russia was ruled for centuries by a class of royal tyrants and now it is ruled by a proletariat, and one kind of rule is as dangerous as the other. On the whole, I would prefer the tyranny of a single autocrat to the tyranny of the hydra-headed mob.

Germany has been ruled for fifty years by a Junker class which determined on world-power or downfall and which has obtained downfall forever. But if the power of the Junkers is merely transferred to another class—the men who work with their hands—nothing will be gained for freedom or for Christian faith. Class rule is always blind and hateful. Christianity knows no class and will submit to none. Barbarian and Scythian, Gentile and Jew, Orient and Occident, employer and employed, brain-worker and hand-worker—all are human beings bound by the same law, needing the same gospel, called to stand at last before the same inflexible tribunal.

The remedy for the rule of the tyrant and the rule of the mob is to be found in the simple, far-reaching principles of Christian democracy. That democracy must prevail in the church, in political life, in business life, and in the entire social order. Democracy does not mean that one man is as good as another, but that all men are good enough to have a voice in choosing the best. It does not mean that all are equally wise, but that all are wise enough to help in discovering the wisest and letting him lead the way. Democracy is clumsy but Christian. Autocracy is smooth-running, but sure in the end to run upon the rocks. Someone has said that autocracy is like a swift ship, beautiful to see until it strikes and founders on a ledge; while democracy is like sailing on a raft—your feet are always uncomfortably wet, but your craft cannot sink. But whether comfortable or not, democracy is the only social order that is compatible with the fundamental teachings of the Christian faith.

**Law of Love Supreme**

3. *The church must affirm that the law of love is a law of nature as well as a law of God,* and is not to be subordinated to any so-called laws of biology or economics. The great war has made some long-hidden truths to stand out sharp and clear as invisible ink when brought near the fire. It has shown us side by side in deadly parallels the Germanic and the Christian theory of life. Germany has for two generations been nominally Christian; at heart she has worshiped Odin and Thor, canonized the Vikings, and bowed at the shrine of physical force. She has employed her philosophers and preachers to buttress and sanctify her pagan ambition; and they have performed their task so thoroughly that the whole world can now see the amazing contrast between a materialistic, or pagan, and a human and Christian order of society.

Kaiserism says the fundamental law of the world is competition. Christianity says the fundamental law is is co-operation. Kaiserism says war is a biological necessity; Christianity says brotherhood is a necessity for the survival of men and tribes and nations. Kaiserism declares the state is the source of law and whatever it commands is right; Christianity affirms that the
state is subject to the law whose seat is in the bosom of God, and only what is right may the state command. Nietzsche declares that “life is in its essence injury, the overpowering of whatever is foreign to us.” Christianity declares that whosoever wills to save his life shall lose it. In von Moltke we read: “Perpetual peace is a dream and it is not even a beautiful dream. War is a part of the eternal order instituted by God.” In the New Testament we read that the peacemakers are the true children of God.

We in America have never yet consciously put biological law above ethical obligation. But we are in constant danger of fatalistic surrender to supposed economic laws formulated by thinkers long since dead. We sometimes say: “There is no escape from the iron law of supply and demand,” when as a matter of fact one of our chief tasks in life is to prevent the mechanical play of blind economic forces. We say: “Men can always be depended on to act selfishly,” and as we say it the men in khaki go marching down the street to disprove our pagan theory. We say: “Strong men must triumph and the weak must always go to the wall,” but every Christian orphanage and hospital and school is built to combat our assertion. We say: “Salaries and wages go up and down according to the number of men standing idle,” and every combination of capital or of labor is designed to defeat that automatic process.

A Toppling Pyramid

Christianity cannot recognize industrial war as the future basis of society. That kind of war is today advocated by two classes: those that have desperately failed and gone under in the social struggle and so think any change must be for the better, and those who have completely succeeded in the struggle and who will welcome no change in a social order which has made them prosperous. But a society built on industrial antagonism is a pyramid standing on its apex already toppling into ruin. The laboring man who regards all employers as his natural foes is blind to the facts as they are, is a poor helper in any enterprise, and is himself the foe of industrial peace. The employer who regards all laboring men with suspicion and fear is not fitted to function in a Christian society and is a menace to the state. A society built up of two classes—one trying to get much labor for little money and the other trying to give little labor for much money—such a non-co-operative and inhuman society carries in itself a slumbering revolution and cannot long endure. When those two classes engage in public brawls it is the great community around them, the millions of innocent men and women, which suffers most.

Is the industry of today really based on fear rather than on faith? Is not the employer in constant dread of secret organizations, of new demands, of “soldiering” on the job, of strike and desertion? And is not the employee in constant fear of losing his place, of losing his home through eviction, of losing all opportunity in a crowded mass of struggling men? And can a civilization built on mutual fear be successful in producing either goods or men?

The church does not know enough to serve as arbitrator in specific troubles.
But it does know and must say that until the motive of suspicion is replaced by mutual confidence, until industry is based not on fear but on faith and respect, there is no peace and no progress. Fear is weakening and demoralizing, and every industry which uses fear of poverty or sickness or social stigma or any kind of fear as its main motive will prove financially disappointing and socially dangerous. That leads us to our fourth principle:

The Partnership of Enterprise

4. The church must affirm that all honest enterprise is a partnership in which all men should work with common purpose, common responsibility, and common share in the result. Seventy-five years ago private business was usually and obviously such a partnership. The shoemaker sat in his little old-fashioned shop with his apprentice beside him and together they made a pair of shoes for the neighbor who bought them. The whole process was shot through with personal regard and friendly service. Now the shoemaker employs a thousand “hands” and sits behind a glass door—and glass is a non-conductor. Neither side knows how the other half thinks and does not try to know. Yet until each side knows what the other thinks and why it thinks so we shall have not honorable partnership but dishonorable and impoverishing warfare.

This modern impersonal mechanical relation must be swept away by the incoming of a genuine desire for partnership and a resolute determination by all parties to establish it. We had that partnership in war. Our millions of soldiers fired with a common purpose, and they realized that the officers shared their purpose with them. If millions could organize so effectively for destruction in war, can they not do it for construction in peace? If they could combine to annihilate the farm and the factory and the cathedral, can they not combine to till the farm and operate the factory and make the house of God the gate of heaven? They can—they will! All we need is eyes to see the absolute necessity for doing it, and united resolve that it shall be done.

We must Christianize the process as well as the product of industry. We must give fuller, freer, finer life to all who work beside us, on whichever side of the glass door they sit. We must give that fuller life not out of benevolence but out of justice; not as “welfare work” but as one of the costs of production. We must lift up the standards of housing, schooling, living. We must prevent the depletion of health, the exhaustion of energy, the strain and tension of fear, and must make the health and happiness of the workers the first charge upon all productive industry.

Is This Utopian?

Does that seem mere Utopian idealism? Is it so visionary that we can easily put it aside, as we put aside the Sermon on the Mount when we leave the church on Sunday noon? Listen then to the utterance of one who can hardly be called a visionary, Mr. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. In his notable pamphlet called Representation in Industry he writes:

The soundest industrial policy is that which has constantly in mind the welfare of
employees as well as the making of profits and which, when human considerations demand it, subordinates profits to welfare. Industrial relations are essentially human relations.

The day has passed when the conception of industry as chiefly a revenue-producing process can be maintained. To cling to such conceptions is only to arouse antagonism and to court trouble. In the light of the present, every thoughtful man must concede that the purpose of industry is quite as much the advancement of social well-being as the accumulation of wealth.

**A New Day Dawns**

Closely associated with Mr. Rockefeller is W. L. MacKenzie King, former minister of labor in Canada, who in his remarkable book *Industry and Humanity* declares: “Whenever in social or industrial relations the claims of humanity and industry are opposed, those of industry must make way.” When experienced, hard-headed leaders of business talk in such accents surely a new day is dawning. Surely fear shall give way to faith, antagonism to co-operation, and the warfare that now cripples the work of the world shall give way to a partnership that will not only increase our output but ennoble every worker with hand or brain. Suspicious employers and sullen workers will conduct our nation into Bolshevism. Loyal co-operation by men who believe their daily task is helping to make America a finer land to live in may yet transform the place of merchandise into the Father’s house.

If we agree on the four fundamental principles thus laid down, what shall we do about them? Shall the church proceed to indorse a multitude of specific measures? Shall we advocate social insurance, or profit sharing, or a minimum wage, or an eight-hour day for every worker in shop and store and household service? Frankly, I do not believe the church knows enough to outline a detailed and rigid program and lay down the rails on which the world must run. I am dubious about all get-the-millennium-quick schemes and all ironclad programs for the future. If we keep open minds and warm hearts we shall see the next step to take and then the next, and so we shall walk together into God’s great tomorrow. Let us cling to fundamental Christian principles, and through mutual conference and co-operation work them out. We do not know enough to be as dogmatic in industry as we have been in theology.

But we do know and must affirm that in a Christian land women and children cannot be sacrificed to any alleged necessities of trade. We do know that no unsanitary tenements can be allowed to exist for the enrichment of absenteeers. We do know that no occupational disease must go without a remedy. We do know that no preacher can rightly speak to us of golden streets if he has no care for the streets and alleys of his own city, and no church can be allowed to substitute a picture of “the sweet bye and bye” for an honest grappling with the human problems of now and here.

**What Harvest?**

Great changes are coming either through the church or in spite of it. We live in a moving world, and Christian men are not afraid to have it move. Either by the orderly processes of
growth, by the give and take of reasonable men, by negotiation and concession in the presence of a common need, or else by volcanic eruption and upheaval changes must come. Alas for those—whether demagogues or Bourbons—who cry "Peace, peace!" while they sow the dragon's teeth and ignore the sure crop of armed men. America has no sympathy with anarchy. Revolution is foreign to our temperament and not to be endured in a free land which floats the stars and stripes. But we must not imagine either that the "old-time religion" is good enough or that the social status quo is the Kingdom of Heaven. The things that are wrong have got to be righted by Christian men or they will be righted by anti-Christian forces. The open mind must come before the helping hand. The rigid stand-pat attitude of the House of Have and the walking-delegate attitude of the House of Want are equally dangerous to Christian democracy. We are members one of another. The fact of membership exists whether we have the feeling of it or not. The method of the New Testament is not volcanic but evolutionary. Every Christian accepts Christ's fundamental law of the kingdom—"first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn on the ear." Let every man make his own heart Christian, his own home, his own shop, his own corporation, and before we know it we shall have a Christian America, fair as the sun, clear as the moon, and more glorious than an army with banners.

International Relations

We have no time, perhaps no need, to show how this social reconstruction must affect international relations. The world is now so woven together that no nation can reorganize its life alone. Diseases, physical or social, will not stay in bounds. "Spanish influenza" quickly spreads to American shores, and fantastic Russian theories are preached in American parlors. International relations must undergo reconstruction, and the process is going on before our eyes. Narrow, superheated nationalism—quite unknown in the Roman Empire or in the Middle Ages—which has developed so fiercely in the last half-century, the determination that one's own land shall dominate all other lands, is a Germanic doctrine drawn from the Old Testament and quite foreign to the New Testament.

It is easy to be provincial in a large country. In Switzerland one cannot travel 300 miles in any direction without meeting a new language and a new culture. Here we can travel 3,000 miles and find men dressed in the same garb, speaking in the same accents, and thinking the same thoughts. But the Christian church was international in its original conception, and our great task is to make the original horizon of the church to become the horizon of the state.

A league of nations? Yes, but what sort of nations? No league of purely selfish nations can endure. If each nation wants the shelter of the league in order to secure international sanction for nationalistic pillage, or to protect its imperialistic ambitions, the league is dead before it is born. Only the give and take of honorable peoples, only the honest desire to help the struggling masses of humanity, white and black
and yellow—only these Christian purposes can give permanence to any league. No machinery will do it. No exchange of documents can pledge a people to do a thing they unitedly desire not to do. There is no promise of peace on earth except to men of good-will. Christianity can furnish the good-will, the dynamic behind the league, and so change the treaty from a scrap of paper into an instrument of the Kingdom of God. We want not merely peace but co-operation; not cessation of struggle but united struggle against tyranny and ignorance, and poverty and sickness and despair. We want not a false internationalism which would wipe out all boundaries and destroy all local allegiance; we want the true internationalism which binds north and south and east and west in ceaseless endeavor to make the whole world free from terror and joyous in the co-operative tasks of the new day. Science cannot do this—it can create engines of torture as easily as tools of labor. It brings men’s bodies together but cannot unite their souls. Diplomacy cannot do this—it has been more Machiavellian than Christian. Treaties cannot do this unless behind them is the confidence of faith.

When the Son of Man cometh does he find faith in the earth? Surely he has come again in the last five years. “He is sifting out the nations before his judgment seat. Our God is marching on.” Are we ready to march with him. Are we merely mourning over a vanished yesterday, merely apprehensive over an unknown tomorrow? Let Marshal Foch, who knows both how to fight and how to pray, be our teacher at this hour. He has said:

Victories are won by science, but also by faith. It was our admirable soldiers that did it. I have but one merit—that of never despairing.

RADICALISM IN RELIGION, BY A CONSERVATIVE

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In a recent issue of one of the organs of a great Protestant denomination there appeared an article which suggested to the conservative writer of this sketch the title which appears above. The article referred to was from the pen of Dr. George P. Mains and was printed in the columns of the California Christian Advocate, the Advocate being one of the official periodicals published by the Methodist Episcopal church. The caption of Dr. Mains’s article was in the form of the following question: Are These Books Vicious? The books under