

we never tap the deepest levels of power until we face something hard, where we crucially need it. No man ever gets his second wind save in a long race. It is only when we have something for which we need power that power can come. We say that Jesus had inner power with which to face the cross. Turn it around. It was the facing of the cross that called out the power. O my soul, grasp that philosophy! Make your hardships develop your resources. Make your tasks call out your reserves. Face the tragedies of life like a veritable pessimist: "In the world—tribulation." Never blink that fact. But make tribulation release the deeper levels of divine resource, so that you too may say, "Good cheer; I have overcome the world."

*Christianity's Stake in the
Social Situation*

A FEW days ago I saw a man, long unemployed, who had just received a letter calling him back to his old position. One who deals intimately with human life grows accustomed to seeing a mysterious light in the eyes of happy people,—little children when they are glad, brides and grooms, families that welcome back to life some one who has been close to death,—but accustomed as I am to seeing this, I think I never shall forget the eyes of that man with the letter in his hand, called back to work again.

That man may well symbolize for us a truth which, as much as any other, I suspect, needs now to be urged on the Christian conscience: we cannot separate the spiritual interests of individual souls from the social situation. Some seem to think we can. Recently a prominent citizen of this community asked me to recommend a minister to the pulpit of his church, but the kind of minister, he took pains to insist, who would preach what he called "the simple Gospel" and not talk about social questions. Recently, also, a clergyman in this city vehemently deplored a thoughtful statement of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ because, so he seemed to think, Christianity deals only with individual souls.

Since we shall seriously differ with laymen and clergymen who so suppose that we can separate the spiritual interests of individual souls from the social situation, let us start by doing them justice.

For one thing, if they mean that a Christian minister is often poorly equipped to handle social questions, and that when he talks about economics and international relationships he commonly displays more energy than sound sense and information, we had better agree with that. There is a good deal to be said for a shoemaker's sticking to his last

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and a clergyman's confining his remarks to areas where he has taken pains to be informed.

Or again, if they mean that when people come to church on Sunday, having lived another week in the hurly-burly of the world, their ears tired with boisterous debate, they are seeking something other than a continuance of the secular dispute, we had better agree with that. The church has lost its function which forgets how deeply men, one by one, need spiritual renewal.

Or again, if they mean that there are two major realms in public influence, the domain of persuasion and the domain of coercion, and that the church belongs in the domain of persuasion, as far away as possible from the domain of coercion, we had better agree with that. One basic trouble in the whole affair of prohibition has been that the church moved over from the realm of persuasion into the realm of coercion, using political power to enforce laws which it had not yet persuaded the people to obey. The testimony of all history is that that is about the most dangerous business in which the church ever can indulge. We had better agree with that.

Let all exponents of the social gospel in the churches, then, take notice! They do sometimes talk too much without informing themselves adequately; they do sometimes continue on Sunday the secular debate which the newspapers conduct a great deal better through the week; they do sometimes forget that when they cease to be persuasive and try to be coercive they are off their beat. Nevertheless, there is that man with the letter in his hand and the light in his eyes, his very soul saved from a hell of anxious fear by a chance to work again! Let a Christian minister, therefore, profoundly persuaded, as I am, that to talk about the Christian gospel as merely individual and not social is dangerous nonsense, speak to this point.

It is a point of first-rate importance to the minister himself. He is expected to help men, one by one, to nobler living, but constantly he finds consciences calcoused, ears deafened, souls crushed, and fine rescissions thwarted by a maladjusted

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and cruel society. That, indeed, is an ancient story. Listen to it as the Book of Exodus tells the tale of Hebrew slavery in Egypt three thousand years ago: "And Moses spake so unto the children of Israel: but they hearkened not unto Moses for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage." That story is not finished yet: messengers of God trying to persuade people to a better life, baffled and thwarted not alone by individual sin but by social situations that bring to wide areas of the people anguish of spirit and cruel bondage. Let us, then, try to clarify our thought about this inextricable entanglement of the individual spiritual life with the social situation.

In the first place, any one who begins by feeling that the initial responsibility of the Christian church is to the individual soul, must inevitably include in his thought of that matter the pride of Christianity, its converted and renovated characters. No man need stay the way he is; he can be transformed by the renewing of his mind—that is the Christian gospel. Go to, then, some one says, be about that business and let the Christian church supply us with transformed individual lives.

To be sure, if we were not doing that we should be failing utterly, but, my friends, when any one seriously works for transformation of individual character, he is led not away from social questions but straight into them. Consider, for example, that all modern hospitals have social workers—no good hospital today would be without them—who follow individual cases out of the hospital to see in what social conditions of home and neighborhood and economic security the patients live. We cannot cure men and women even physically if for anguish of spirit and cruel bondage they do not respond to what the physician does. If a hospital cannot be individualistic, how can a church be?

We are having an exciting time now with foreign missions, and I suspect we shall have a still more exciting time before we are through with this admirably frank and thorough report of the Laymen's Inquiry. Now, no more important testimony to our truth could be given than has been

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by foreign missions. The first missionaries were intensely individualistic. They went out to save souls, one by one, from hell. They did tremendously care about the individual lives of their people. See, then, what happened. They could not bring the gospel to the individual without the Bible, so they became the translators of the world; they have put the Book into over six hundred different languages. What is the use, however, of translating the Bible in countries where ninety to ninety-five per cent of the people cannot read? So the missionaries became educators and in many lands the methods of the best schools go back to the missionaries. But what is the use of educating people who needlessly die for lack of scientific medicine and sanitation? So the missionaries became physicians, and medical missions constitute one of the finest areas of human history. But what is the use of merely curing people when they must return to economic devastation and penury? At a conservative estimate, thirty million people go to bed hungry every night in India alone. So, many of the missionaries have become agriculturists, economists, engineers, trying to build a better social order. And the lesson of all this is clear: when any one anywhere starts seriously to care for the souls of people, he is compelled to go on to care about the social situation.

Can we think that the United States is so different from China and India that the case is radically altered? Too many people are unemployed and in penury in this nation now to make that plausible.

Indeed, in Russia the communists, starting out to destroy the Christian churches, issued orders that no social work should be done by them. They knew, able strategists that they have proved themselves, that if they could force the churches to be individualistic, with no social sympathy translated into action, no message of social betterment emerging from them, that would be disastrous to religion. It has been. The astonishing thing is that one still finds so many people in this country who suppose themselves to be friends of the churches—like that citizen who wanted his minister to ignore social questions—but who are doing to some of our churches

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precisely what the communists did to theirs when they wanted to destroy them. I plead instead for a church that shall be a fountainhead of a better social order. Any church that pretends to care for the souls of people but is not interested in the slums that damn them, the city government that corrupts them, the economic order that cripples them, and international relationships that, leading to peace or war, determine the spiritual destiny of innumerable souls—that kind of church, I think, would hear again the Master's withering words: "Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!"

Again, any man who begins by feeling that the central obligation of the Christian church is to individual souls, would inevitably include in that the religious training of the children. That is the function of the church, one says. Take our children, imbue them with the ideals of Jesus, open to them, one by one, the resources of spiritual power by which they can live nobly for the commonweal. To be sure, that is a plain case. If we were not doing that we should be failing. But the religious training of the children leads not away from social questions but straight into them.

For example, in the public schools of this city we teach the children civics, beautiful civics, all about democracy and the orderly processes of constitutional government as written in the law. Then the children, thus instructed in formal civics, go out into the city's real life only to discover that it is not run by democracy at all, that even when a mayor is to be chosen the reporters wait outside a doorsill behind which four bosses are deciding who it is to be; that, far from being run by constitutional processes, the city is run by a corrupt machine, not even mentioned in the constitution but in whose hands effective power is concentrated and to whose coffers flows an endless stream of graft. I can imagine a teacher of civics in the schools who takes his task as mere routine, draws his salary check, and lets the world wag, but any genuine teacher who seriously cares about his children's civic thinking and future citizenship must feel at times a very agony of soul about the futility of what he teaches, when so much of it at last will be driven out of mind, made ridiculous,

or stamped upon and dishonored, by a shameful social situation. Can any intelligent person expect that a Christian church will be interested to teach the children the ideals of Jesus and not care about the social order into which the children must go?

6 Consider international relationships, for example. At first, with their vast and complicated problems, they seem a long way from our instruction of your son in the church school in the principles of Jesus. But if we do not achieve disarmament we will have another war and your son, let us say, will go. After the last war one father was bitterly annoyed at his boy because he would not tell him what had happened over there, and the father, being thrilled about the war, wanted to know. One day, then, that son exploded: "Just one thing I will tell you. One night I was on patrol in No Man's Land, and suddenly I came face to face with a German about my own age. It was a question of his life or mine. We fought like wild beasts. When I came back that night I was covered from head to foot with the blood and brains of that German. We had nothing personally against each other. He did not want to kill me any more than I wanted to kill him. That is war. I did my duty in it, but for God's sake do not ask me to talk about it! I want to forget it." Well, that is war. Do you mean that an intelligent church can be interested in teaching children the ideals of Jesus and not care whether at the last the social order will bring them to that?

7 Or come closer home. We want our children to grow up with such respect for their own personalities that sensuality will have no part in their lives. We would like them to be continent before marriage and faithful afterwards, but, surely, one cannot mean that we are interested so to teach our children in home and church and then care nothing about the economic system. Do we know these young people, multitudes of whom have had jobs and now have lost them, multitudes of whom never have been able to get any work at all, many of them youths and maidens who love each other to the breaking of their hearts, as you and I loved when we were young, and yet who cannot marry—no! nor see any

chance of it? Sometimes I go home at night heavy at heart from having seen people on the edge of starvation. That is terrific. But sometimes I go home at night in very agony of spirit for something worse: young people who were taught right, young people who wanted to choose right, young people who had desperately tried to live right, but who now will not listen to any Moses for anguish of spirit and cruel bondage.

I do not mean that it is simply those who fall on the under side of the economic situation and are crushed into destitution who are hurt. Our economic order sometimes seems to me almost as bad for the people who profit by it as for the people who are ruined. All our lives we have been taught to sympathize with those Hebrew slaves in Egypt and to hate Pharaoh. I beg of you, spare a little sympathy for Pharaoh, also. He, too, was caught in a social system. He, too, found himself in the toils of an unjust and inhuman order, and, discovering himself by chance upon the upper side of it, he found himself driven with terrific compulsion to play the game according to the set-up which he had inherited. Any social order that involves slavery, as Lincoln said, is about as bad for the master class as it is for the slave class—"It debauches even our greatest men." Any social order that crushes anybody is bad for the character of everybody.

We do care about the spiritual lives of our children more than we care for almost anything beside, but what will happen to the spiritual lives of our children depends, more than one likes to think, upon what happens to our economic life and to our international relationships.

Once more, any one starting with the idea that the immediate, initial obligation of the Christian church is to individual spiritual life, would surely include in that the duty to persuade people about God. That is the function of the church, some one says; give people a sustaining faith in God. To be sure it is, but, as with renovated character and the religious training of children, that leads not away from social questions but straight into them. The major destroyer of faith in

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in this nation now is not atheistic argument but anguish of spirit and cruel bondage.

Did you read in the newspaper the story of that family, formerly able to support themselves but now long unemployed and destitute, who had a little child die in one of the public hospitals and only by desperate efforts succeeded in finding twenty-one cents to pay for the collect telegram that told them of it? My friends, if I were preaching in this pulpit about the goodness of God, the presence of that family in the congregation would bother me more than all the arguments of the atheists. I can answer the arguments, but what could I say to that father and mother?

It is not often that a Christian preacher feels called upon to quote Karl Marx, but Karl Marx said one thing so true that, ever since I read it, it has haunted me: "Philosophers have only interpreted the world differently, but the point is to change it." Just so! And that applies to preachers as well as to philosophers. We too often try to explain the world, harmonize its evil with our faith in God, concoct clever interpretations so that we say that its outrageous wrongs are but the shadows cast by ultimate good, and devious evasions such as that, and now by a stern situation we are being called back to another way altogether—Christ's way, mark it! He did not try mainly to explain the world. He tried to change it. When he wanted a man to believe in God he did not argue with him. He loved him, served him, lifted him out of his trouble, gave him such an exhibition, in practical experience, of the power and beauty of a divine spirit that the man had to believe, at least, in that. And around this personal service the Master lifted up a social gospel, forgetting which, the church would be irreparably doomed: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth." That does belong to the essence of the gospel and only as we are true to that will any arguments for God amount to much.

Multitudes of people in this land doubt God, want to believe in him and cannot, rise at times into a temporary faith in him and are crushed out of it by anguish of spirit and cruel bondage.

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I call you to witness that we have not talked about things on which we are ill informed, that we have not continued the newspapers' secular debate, that we have not moved over from the realm of persuasion into the realm of coercion. This thing for which we have been pleading is at the heart of the church's business. We never can separate the spiritual interests of individual souls from the social situation.

See that man with the letter in his hand and the light in his eyes, called back to work again, and remember that last night many a person in this country dreamed that that man was himself, only to awake this morning in despair to find the dream untrue.

Let no Christian dare to forget such!

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