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### THE MORAL INFLUENCE OF THE CHURCH

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the average village than in the city. It should and can take the place of the Y. M. C. A., settlement work, furnishing reading rooms, games, gymnasium, baths, etc. This would be constructive work supplementing the training of the homes rather than supplanting them.

#### THE CHURCH FOR THE FUTURE.

It has been said by all who have studied the country church even in a cursory way that the secret of final success depends upon the leadership. And if the interest in the country church becomes a general one, there is need for the special preparation of the rising ministry. The regular channels of training the ministers are the college and seminaries. We must get in touch with the specialist of the Agricultural College. There has been an increasing and ever growing interest in the study of general sociology for the past few years. The seminaries have not kept pace with this popular demand by their courses in "Christian Sociology." Many pastors have heralded with delight the announcement, from a few of the leading seminaries, of courses looking to a more general study of the field, including country districts. A special course of lectures might be given in the seminaries by some of the professors of the Agricultural Schools who have scientifically studied the resources of the country, who are constantly teaching young men to honor rural life, and who are in sympathy with the church in its aggressive work.

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#### THE MORAL INFLUENCE OF THE CHURCH.

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As a matter of fact the Church's slowness of adjustment depresses one. The trouble often is, too, that it is only adjustment, belated adaptation and not conspicuous leadership that characterizes the Church. Of course there are churches and churches and one should not generalize, neither should we assume, for a moment, that the outside world is always right and normal and that the Church alone is to blame for unchurched masses and general apathy. However the Church does sadly remind us of

the children of Israel as they repeatedly said to Moses, "Let us alone!"

The Church always stands for the established order. She is not the champion of change in theological thought or economic conditions. Her perennial task is conservation. Whether tied with a papal halter or hobbled by protestant traditionalism she tends to remain in about the same spot; at least so long as there is sufficient nibbling to sustain life. With her, as with the owner of the poor tenement, reconstruction is a last resort; a sort of bitter substitute for death, a major operation which seems death's equivalent. There is something pathetic in this proverbial conservatism, this distrust of man and God, this crooning over the now empty garments which formerly adorned her living treasure, this brave defense of forts from which soldiers and munitions long since made their advance, positions that are no longer strategic in the vast and confident movement of modern thought. Too often she is found in our midst like the squatter whom twenty years of city growth has surrounded with urban conditions making the water from the old well in his yard dangerous and his flickering lantern unnecessary. Other means of supplying water from the great lakes and light for his premises from the humming dynamos have been instituted.

Specific hindrances to clear moral leadership in social amelioration are not hard to find. In the first place the influential laymen and supporters of the Church are the natural and interested champions of the present economic order, and you cannot expect Demetrius to support Paul, the Bethelites to endow a lectureship for Amos or the Gadarenes to subsidize the work of Jesus. No more will you find any such leaders expecting similar support. For the true religious leader knows that his real advance upon ecclesiasticism and static social morality will probably measure alike his religious value and his personal danger. It looks foolhardy to saw off the branch you are sitting on; and considerations of personal comfort, family welfare, ministerial standing, as also the private goodness and kindness of lay authorities—who must oppose a gospel of social justice—all argue mightily for "discretion" and against prophecy. It is not always easy either to get upon another branch and so be free, for modern ministerial training does not usually supply proficiency in

carpentering, vinedressing, or tentmaking. Moreover the religious freedom of the unmarried minister is not welcomed by protestantism nor deemed necessary in any present exigency.

A second hindrance to such adjustment as will give leadership to the Church is the weakness which has resulted from sectarianism. I am sure that we all believe most heartily in the closing remarks of the preceding speaker. An organism with sufficient vitality will make the necessary adjustments. But our strength has been so dissipated in division and unholy competition that we lack both the surplus of strength and the organic unity which guarantee ready adjustment. A widely diffused and chronic invalidism reigns. Thousands of churches make the unblushing avowal by word and act that their sole object now is self-preservation. They are in retreat from the places of greatest need and on the defensive against society.

One might mention also the commercialization of the Church with the accompanying sense of proprietorship in pew, in choir and in minister. It is a terrible thing to be hired especially under the tacit agreement to provide so much "religious" entertainment for a given stipend. That produces adjustment downward and never leadership. Further there is the presence in the religious field of capable and aggressive substitutes which rival the Church and enjoy the confidence of the public. Consider the Y. M. C. A., the Y. W. C. A. and other organizations which have shown the power and rapidity of adjustment sufficient for leadership. Then too, there are the public schools which we have hardly begun to reckon with yet, and which are bound to become great and congenial centres of social and moral power. They will surely assume a phase of the religious function for society which will appeal mightily to the popular mind.

Now, on the other hand, there are some promising features. The lay movement with its enthusiasm, its common sense and the application of business principles to church promotion, promises well. Undoubtedly mistakes will be made because the layman is a little out of his special field, but on the whole vitality and consequent adjustment will be the result especially in the large city churches. Another favorable element is the growth of federation and union sentiment, for beyond doubt, federation and working union must precede the most effective adjustment to

present day conditions. From this point of view it may be that a third factor of hope is the scarcity of ministerial students. Please do not misunderstand me. A little reflection will discover the possible benefit of a condition which is so generally deplored. The fact is that we have too many ministers now. We know too that in the process of adjustment of institutions death plays a role not less important than life. At present there is hardly a town or village in the United States nor a "churchable" community that is not overchurched. It is no uncommon thing for a place of two thousand people to have half a dozen churches. The interests become petty, the struggle for self-preservation pathetic, the call of the Home Mission Boards hysterical, and the scope of the work unworthy of the life energies of a real man. The young men of today are seeing it and prefer something else to unnecessarily duplicating and dividing the work of fellow Christians. So long as we have enough ministers to keep up this petty business there will be too many men in the ministry, and we may believe that it will be a good day for the kingdom of God when these churches decrease in number. It is at this point that the ministerial shortage, which is due to the sound judgment of our young college men, may help us in the problem of adjustment. Thus, hard economic necessity is going to aid in the solution of a problem which, because of denominational bias, becomes very difficult for boards and conventions.

Another indication of effective adjustment is to be seen in the adoption of institutional methods. You may as well be preaching in Mars if your message does not reach the people whom you wish to win. Institutional methods present a reasonable social sanction and tell the Good News in deed. Proof is given of the Church's disposition and a process of adjustment is begun which will change the Church within and influence favorably the constituency without. But, we stand greatly in need of a crusading spirit which amounts to a passion, which drives us forth where the people are and has the all-sufficient inventiveness of a great love; and we need too, acceptable religious symbols which will measurably satisfy the intellect and awaken the sympathies of the modern man.