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RELIGIOUS INSPIRATION AND RELIGIOUS DOGMA IN CIVIC PROGRESS

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HOW CAN THE CHURCH, THROUGH MEN'S ORGANIZATIONS, GIVE MORAL DIRECTION TO THE LIFE OF A COMMUNITY?

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Moral direction means intelligent direction. Before there can be a proper guidance of the moral forces of a community, there must be a knowledge of the needs and an understanding of the necessary methods of meeting the needs. The men's organization of any church must from the beginning give itself to study.

Everywhere we have become familiar with mission study classes. The young people have them, the women believe in them, and even among the men they are regarded as necessary. Mission study generally means nothing less than an investigation of the social and moral needs of some missionary district, home or foreign, with the presentation of an adequate policy. Just such a study must the men's organization give to its own community. There are many general courses such as those offered by the American Institute for Social Service, but these must all be supplemented by a study of the local field.

Omitting in this paper a consideration of the rural field, both for the sake of clearness and because in general the investigation of the rural and urban fields will be somewhat similar, the following questions should be answered:

- What is the extent of the community?
- What is the character of the population?
- What are the social dangers?
- What are the social agencies?
- What is the condition of public health?
- What societies are engaged in reducing mortality?
- What are the labor conditions?
- What are the conditions of child welfare?
- What is the scope and character of public education?
- What is the alignment of religious and moral organizations?
- What overlapping of parishes and what neglect of territory?

And to these must be added many other questions of moral import.

Expert direction for this investigation and consequent action may be found in the pamphlet, "A Social Service Program for the Parish," published by the Joint Commission on Social Service of the Protestant Episcopal Church. Such a study in reality includes, at

least, a survey if not a canvas of the community. The centers of evil should be catalogued, the institutions of good marked, the tendencies of the community noted, the expression of the recreational spirit and the character of the industrial life described.

The parish system outlines the scope of activity for a men's club. President James McCosh once said that the parochial system of Scotland was a most powerful means of sustaining and diffusing religion in the country. The congregational system cannot possibly serve all the purposes of the parochial. It leaves gaps. We need in fact a federation of churches so strong that each church may without competition adequately serve a particular neighborhood. However, until an adequate parish system can be devised, the men's club of any church can assume some larger boundaries in which it may attempt to direct the moral life of a given parish.

The investigation of actual conditions should be followed by the construction of an ideal. What would be the moral life of a given community if all the wrong were righted and the life become normal? What could the community do and be with an adequate guidance? The importance of this ideal consists not only in giving a goal, but in enabling the men's club to select that particular task which by an intelligent comparison of needs is for the time being the most important and the most practicable.

Then comes the formation of a program of action. What, in view of the resources of the club and the comparison of needs, is the most feasible task for the given season or year? Too much cannot be undertaken in any one period. The possible reaction of the community must be considered as well as the possible discouragement of the men's organization itself. A definite and specific moral impress upon community life is worth more than many vague suggestions.

A single illustration may suffice. What in a given community is the exact status of Sunday moving picture shows, if there are such? What is the character of the pictures? What the number of people who attend? What the character of the people? What is the state law and the city ordinance under which they run? Under what municipal supervision are they placed? What can be done in the way of changing the city ordinance or enforcing the present ordinance, or exercising supervision? Who can be enlisted to help exert favorable influence? If any men's club can in a season achieve definite results in the supervision of moving picture shows, it has made a worthy contribution to community life.

Nothing is more potent in civic progress than a healthy public

opinion. It is a subtle thing, partly ethical and partly neutral and partly detrimental, but it is a force to be used. Any men's organization in either a specific or general campaign must seek both to educate and to utilize public opinion.

One of the greatest agencies in the formation of public opinion is the public press. The church on the whole uses the public press but sparingly. Nor is the public press to blame for this. To be sure the press is not ravenous for sermons that could have been preached as well a year ago as to-day. But it does want news, and there is practically no end to church news providing time and brains are put into its presentation. It is generally easy to secure publication of the results of investigations and of real achievements on the part of a brotherhood.

In the set of books published as a result of the Conservation Congress there is one that deals with the Press. In it we are told that in Detroit the churches themselves have established a permanent publicity bureau to be in charge of a capable newspaper man, whose duty it will be to keep in touch constantly with all the religious organizations of the city and co-operate with the publicity men of the regular churches in furthering an interest in religious matters. The periodical religious material sent out with the signature of "The Religious Rambler" is a tremendous source of popular education. Such articles of real information the local press will gladly publish.

Publicity may further be secured by introducing laymen into the pulpit. The men of the church can easily co-operate with the pastor in outlining a course of Sunday evening services and often the request of some business or professional men is more effective than that of the pastor in obtaining the presence of a representative of some moral movement in the community or an expert on some far-reaching social interest. Experience leads me to suggest that usually it is not best to have an outside speaker occupy the whole of the sermon period. Better have the pastor use the second half of it. If the outside speaker, though fully informed, is not fluent, the customary audience will not be disappointed. If he is an orator, they will be pleased that they have heard him, at least, the half time. In either case, the pastor can give continuity to a campaign and closely connect the moral endeavor with the spiritual motive and ideal.

Oftentimes a series of lectures has proved a means of community instruction. This can best be planned by a men's club and may either be run upon a financial or philanthropic basis. There is no difficulty in securing proper speakers. Conferences called by the

men's club for discussion of some theme of community interest have been successfully managed. One author has suggested that these conferences might follow a shortened Sunday evening service.

Literature bearing upon topics of city improvement can be circulated. One committee of a men's club keeps a table at the rear of the church supplied with pamphlets of a social service nature. They may be sent out by mail to members of the church and congregation, or they may in emergency be distributed directly to the homes.

Publicity, as important as it is, must be connected with definite tasks. The chart based on the statistics of the Men and Religion Forward Movement canvass shows that only 38 per cent of the men of the churches are in Bible classes. Men cannot always be gotten together for the study of doctrine, but service appeals to them. Most of the movements of community betterment lack leadership and the men's organization can well furnish men who shall give the initiative and secure action in any reform. There are city budgets to be considered, and the men's club can secure attendance at certain hearings when items pertaining to social welfare are likely to suffer in comparison with business interests. There are city ordinances to be passed, and a campaign of letters can be made effective. There is only a small number of citizens who actually make their wants known either to councilman or legislator, and the inflow of appeals is effective.

No organization in the church is better able to utilize the church building than the Men's Club. The wise use of the church property is one of the most efficient means of giving direction to the moral life of the community. The very origin of the Young Men's Christian Association is to be found in the influence of a proper meeting place on the life of young men. The fellow clerks of George Williams worked from eight in the morning to nine or ten in the evening, and slept in quarters that were small and unhealthful. The mere addition of a proper place of meeting was a transformation of life. If the school buildings should be open evenings, so should the church buildings. The Young Men's Christian Association cannot meet the direct need of any city. It may indeed direct the larger undertakings demanding co-operation, but the local church must still be a gathering place for the community.

The healthful influence of athletics is not overestimated. Games in a church building fulfil a greater function than to keep young men under Christian influences. They are themselves producers of character by cultivating courage and endurance and other manly

qualities and by eradicating the fatigue which, as Gulick says, reduces will-power. A gymnasium is a school of ethics for the community, and no other organization of the church can better manage such expressions of the social life of the church than the Men's Club. Dr. Geo. J. Fisher remarks in a recent number of the Association Men that in earlier years they feared lest the gymnasium should secularize the Association; but now they know that the Association has spiritualized the gymnasium.

So far the limited work of a single parish has been discussed. But the best service cannot be done in any community without a larger co-operation. Most problems are entirely too large for a single brotherhood to meet. In many lines of work this larger co-operation does not need the creation of a new organization. Work for the immigrants may be conducted by co-operating with the North American Civic League for Immigrants, in its local city work; the work for health, with the Anti-Tuberculosis Society, the Board of Health, the hospitals and other health agencies; the work for temperance, with the Anti-Saloon League or other like organizations; the work for the poor, with the Charity Organization Society.

However, there is an abundance of tasks that needs a central city organization. The work of such a city organization, conducted partly through committees and partly through the local brotherhoods, must be similar in character to the work of the local brotherhood. The facts of the community must be known, the needs stated and a program outlined. There are many subjects that are so broad that they cannot be treated well by the local brotherhood; such, for example, as the theatres, the bill-boards and display advertising, the hospitals, dance halls, playgrounds, saloons, the social evil.

Co-operation can always be sought in the philanthropic and reform organizations of the community. There is neither need nor economy for a church men's society to work independently when the machinery is already available in other organizations. Thus the Civic League may be sustained, visitors furnished the Charity Organization Society, teachers and leaders sent to settlements, assistance given to Sabbath and other associations.

Never has Christian America awakened more unitedly to the need of social service than during the Men and Religion Forward Movement. In all of the cities where the institutes were held a social service department composed of the social service committees of the co-operating churches was formed and actual work begun. But the field was so new that most of those union committees had only

time to see what could be done and to begin the work before the national movement went out of existence. The momentum of the movements, however, continued and the local need was so apparent that in many cities there resulted a form of permanent organization. These organizations should be examined to discover what can be done by the local men's organizations in the way of co-operation.

Of the cities that have formed more or less successful Men's Federations are Spokane, Washington; Springfield, Missouri; Pasadena, California; Stamford, Connecticut; Centralia, Washington; Gloucester, Massachusetts; Cedar Rapids, Iowa; Chicago, West Side; Chicago, Hyde Park; Charleston, West Virginia; Louisville, Kentucky; Minneapolis, Minnesota.

The Men's Federation of Charleston, West Virginia, sprang out of the Men and Religion Forward Movement and its mission is "that of expressing the common consciousness of the churches upon matters of mutual and public interest." The object includes, among other things, "to safeguard the welfare of children; to encourage the feeling of mutual helpfulness among all parts of society, especially of industry; to protect the interests of the Sabbath, temperance, good citizenship, social purity and law and order, and to secure other objects of local betterment."

The Men's Federation of Louisville claim to represent approximately 12,000 men over 16 years of age belonging to the evangelical churches of the city. Its object is "to unite the men of the churches for the improvement of the moral and physical condition of the people, to promulgate a movement for social service and to do such other work of a similar kind as can and should be done in the name of Jesus Christ." Among its committees are a Labor Committee, a Playgrounds Committee, a Big Brother Committee, a Juvenile Court Committee, a Boy's Work Committee, a Legislation Committee, an Education Committee, a Housing and Tenement Committee, a Committee on Civics, a Finance Committee, a Community Extension Committee and a Missions Committee. As a means of public education they have published and distributed widely a pamphlet of existing city laws pertaining to morals.

The report of the Council of the Federation of Men's Clubs of Minneapolis is particularly interesting. Over a year ago the Social Service Committee was instructed:

1. To secure the creation of a Public Morals Commission.
2. To induce the Civic and Commerce Association to make a social survey of Minneapolis.

3. To secure the passage of an effective dance hall ordinance.
4. To secure the passage of an ordinance for the regulation of hotels and rooming houses.

The first was accomplished after consultation with various public organizations and leaders, the committee drafting the ordinance. It also gave service toward the other objects. It drafted an ordinance containing certain provisions regulating saloons, which was also passed. It also secured a mass meeting for last October for the purpose of hearing the three candidates for mayor state their attitude on certain specific questions that were submitted to them by the committee.

In spite of the effective service performed by the Federation of Men's Clubs, there is a serious objection to their form of co-operation, that is, it does not represent the churches as churches. The local brotherhood represented in the Federation may or may not include most of the men of the church, certainly does not control as an organization the financial interests of the church and does not represent by direct vote the women of the church. It seems wiser, therefore, that the local men's clubs should co-operate in the larger community service through that organization which officially represents the churches, namely, the City Federation of Churches.

The model constitution put out by the Commission on State and Local Federation of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America states that the local council "shall be composed of the pastor of each church of the Federation, and a lay member thereof, duly chosen to serve during its pleasure and being, if possible, connected with a Men's Society in such church. By this measure the men's society of the local church secures representation. The various committees of the Federation, such as the Sabbath Observance Committee, the Temperance Committee, the Social Purity Committee, the Social Service Committee and others, form ample opportunity for giving moral direction to the community.