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THE CHURCH AND THE NEW DAY

I. FACING AND FORMULATING THE FUTURE

AUGUSTUS P. RECCORD.*

From the standpoint of the college man we are living in one of the most tragically interesting periods of the world's history. To many the war has seemed to indicate the collapse of Christianity. They cannot escape the conviction that if Europe had been really Christian, it would never have occurred; that if it were really Christian today, it would cease and men would begin to rebuild the shattered foundations of a Christian civilization. And yet, what has collapsed? Is it Christianity, or is it the vast systems of ecclesiasticism and ceremonialism which have assumed its name and usurped its function? Is it the religion of Jesus, or is it the perversion of that religion at the hands of its accredited representatives?

No religion can be said to have failed until it has been tried. The religion of Jesus has never yet been put to the test. It has been grandly exemplified by individuals, and occasionally by groups of individuals; but it has never been taken seriously by the nations as a whole. Furthermore this failure is not confined to international relations. The same principles of magnanimity and good will which will ultimately bring peace among the nations are capable of suppressing strife between the men who work for a living and the men who own the means by which they live. Brothers do not profit by preying upon one another's weaknesses and needs. They do not exploit one another in shop and factory and mine. These things are possible only when men forget the ties of brotherhood and think of one another as things, as chattels, as cogs in a machine or as pawns of the state. For such evils there can be no remedy short of the recognition of that universal brotherhood which constitutes the essence of the Christian religion.

This has led to a new recognition of the social value of religion and the church. There can be no permanently satisfactory social order which is not grounded in the belief in a righteous God. There can be no human brotherhood in its widest sense as comprehending all sorts and conditions of men which is not based upon the recognition of a divine fatherhood. The institution which keeps alive these faiths is rendering an immeasurable service to humanity.

Our colleges and universities cannot waive all responsibility for the apparent breakdown of a Christian civilization. The church may proclaim the ideal but it is only through the trained intelligence

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and consecrated will of college-bred men and women that it can be made a reality. The present day church fulfills a different function and appeals to different motives than the church of a generation or more ago. Institutions cannot adjust themselves to the new demands of the new day as rapidly as individuals, but the fact which has escaped the attention of many college graduates and some college professors is that the process of adjustment is continually going on, and that it might have been more rapid and more complete if those who first caught the social vision had not become impatient with the church and sought new fields for the expression of their religious life. For of one thing we may be certain, and that is that our colleges and universities are not irreligious or non-religious. As was pointed out by a writer in a recent number of the *Hibbert Journal*, "There is a vast amount of magnificent spiritual energy lying dormant and practically useless in the great college student body of today."

Now how are we to account for the apparent gulf between the college as the repository of this vast fund of spiritual energy and the church as the organized expression of the religious life? It is due, to the same defect in both institutions, lack of social vision, failure to recognize their responsibility for the perfection of the social order. One has worked for an individualistic culture, the other is for an individualistic salvation. Both have failed to recognize their social responsibility. The failure of the church has been so often enlarged upon that we need not emphasize it anew. Its conception of religion and the religious life has been narrow and parochial. It must broaden this conception if it is to do its part in bringing in the new social order. It must realize that unless religion is made broad enough to cover the whole of a man's life, it will not exert any lasting influence upon any part of it. It must recognize, to borrow Professor Rauschenbusch's significant phrase, that its present function is to "Christianize the Social Order," and that it can do this only as it socializes its conception of religion and the religious life.

The failure of the university has received less emphasis but it is no less apparent. The chief difficulty has been that the college man has contented himself with a purely academic interest in the world in which he lives. He has looked upon it as a field for study and research, rather than as an arena for action and achievement. With many this attitude has become so habitual that it has required four or five years to get rid of the academic habit of mind.

Today the recognition of this danger is leading to heroic efforts to overcome it. It has been borne in upon those in authority that

we are jointly and severally responsible for the well-being of society, and that college men as a class are given no exemption from this responsibility. On the contrary, because of their greater indebtedness to society, their responsibility is greater. Not long ago a political platform in Wisconsin contained these words concerning the state university: "We regard the university as the people's servant, carrying knowledge and assistance to the homes and the farms and the workshops and inspiring the youth towards individual achievement and good citizenship." The same ought to be said of every college and university in the land. Too often the college graduate has been content with individual achievement. Let him add to this, good citizenship, and the new social order will come apace.

Thus the first demand of the new social order will be a complete change of attitude toward life on the part of both college and church. And the second will be like, namely this, a more effective co-operation between the two. College men must no longer be made to feel that they may choose between an irreligious culture and an unintelligent faith. They must be convinced that both college and church stand for a complete reinterpretation of the meaning and significance of life. According to the old idea, life was a battle in which each man was a warrior. According to the new idea it is a great constructive enterprise in which each man is a partner. Then virtues were competitive; now they are co-operative. Then the race was to the swift and the battle to the strong; the weak were forced to the wall; today it is a struggle of humanity as a whole against everything in man's outward condition or inward state which will retard human progress, and in that struggle the strong have learned to put their strength at the service of the weak in such a way as to make the weak strong and the strong stronger. The worth of any stage of civilization will depend upon its actual contribution to this struggle. It will be measured, not by material possessions or creature comforts, but by the breadth of its sympathies and the efficacy of its co-operative efforts. The question which the historian of the future will ask concerning the civilization of our day will be, did it make men enemies or friends? Did it divide them into hostile camps or unite them in one great productive enterprise? Did it find its highest expression in the destructive processes of bloodshed and strife, or in the constructive processes of friendliness and good will? These are the standards by which men and nations must ultimately be judged.