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The work of the pastor in the present church conditions

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THE WORK OF THE PASTOR
IN THE PRESENT CHURCH CONDITIONS,
A GRADUATING THESIS

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Contrasted with former times, we are in the presence of an age of such rapid movements that the contrast suggests the limited Rail-road train speeding away from the plodding ox. And because of the speed of the times we are compelled to abandon as unproven any data concerning epochs or crises which appear to be discovered exclusively in historical setting. Such data may be only an historical mirage. To compare today with another day in history, say a hundred or a thousand years ago, is to compare a well controlled locomotive with a well-broken-in ox.

The present condition in Church work is not brought fully to view by the noting of certain conditions which existed in the day of Augustine or Luther as compared with kindred conditions in the same realm of life today. The religious condition of today is as distinctive an affair as is a financial or commercial crisis. The latter may be precipitated like a bolt of lightning from a clear sky, its only premonitor being the nervousness of the people. But the interlacing of interests in agriculture, manufacture, mining, fishing, monetary values, transportation, and communication, together with the moral and im-

moral quality of the contract-making of business men doubtless does affect greatly that "confidence" or "want of confidence", "lost confidence" or "restored confidence", which evidently holds in its hand prosperity or adversity, success or failure, so firmly that, if confidence is gone, the panic has arrived.

And an age is usually aware of its crisis. The literature of the eighteenth century abounds in the opinions of intelligent observers, both of France and America, that history was then at one of its turning points. In the same way the men of our own day are growing increasingly alive to the fact that we are facing remarkable social changes in the immediate future. In fact, when one recalls the rapidity with which events are moving, it is apparent that those changes are already taking place. The old order is indeed changing and yielding its place to the new. The Church of today is face to face with formative influences which are making tomorrow. By the division of labor born of social history it has become only one of the many directive forces in society. Scholarship, business, socialism, popularized philosophy, amusements, national aggrandizement, are only a few of the agencies which are co-operating to make tomorrow very different from today. To an extent that escapes the superficial observer, the Church is itself being affected by these forces; but far more important than this fact is the other that today, as at so many times in the past, the Church must face the vital decision as to what part it shall have in producing the new world.

As never before, there is need of a sturdy insistence upon

the sinfulness of sin. One of the greatest dangers that beset the Church is that in some way it shall adopt a "worldly" attitude in moral matters; that it shall lose its sensitiveness to evil and look with too large tolerance upon moral lapses. The Pastor has partly abandoned attempts to arouse moral discontent in the human soul and has given prominence to congratulatory descriptions of men as the sons of God. Society needs to be convinced afresh of the elemental distinction between evil and good as redefined by the changing condition of our ever more complex life. A social order devoted to knowledge or virtue must be steadied by ideals that are drawn from the fundamentals of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The relation of the Church to the various intellectual, religious, and social phases of the condition is a matter of life and death for both the Church and the present social order. Christianity is not a dying faith. It is splendidly vital. It faces dangers, but they are born of its strength quite as much as of its weakness. It is not as completely in touch with its age as it should be, but it can be brought into closer union with the other forces that are making our new social order. Shall it be brought into such union?

In the present day the question of modern scholarship concerns the Church. Scholarship is determining the method of thought by which the Church must formulate its own convictions. The Pastor cannot ignore the intellectual environment in which he lives; he may disapprove it and combat it, or he may approve it and exploit it.

The Church of today is living in the midst of the most extra-

ordinary intellectual transition that the world has ever seen. The Pastor of today can stand aloof from the advance of the new science and philosophy only by standing apart from the world itself. He must be abreast the time in intelligence. Many a High school pupil who, in his text-book of geology, is taught that the world is the outcome of processes extending across millions of years is taught in the Sunday School that he must take it on faith, that the world was created by the successive acts of God in six days. The biologist who is devoting his days to finding the secret of life is taught by his Pastor that a spirit was breathed into a man miraculously made of clay.

The student of comparative religion who has watched the slow accumulation of the sacred literature of the nations is told that the literature of the Hebrews was written under such dictation of the Holy Spirit as to be infallible and authoritative, not only in religion but in science, history, and literary criticism. It is little wonder that the world of scholarship finds itself out of sympathy with the Church as the representative of such teaching. A young man comes into the atmosphere of a university where these questions are at issue. He has been taught by his parents and Pastor and Sunday School teacher that the Bible is the inerrant, authoritative word of God. He has never seriously questioned the basis for such an affirmation. His entire religious thought has been grounded upon authority. In his Freshman year he hears echoes of discussions in the upper classes which he does not understand, but which, in a general sort of way, is incompatible with Christianity as he has known it. By the time he reaches his Junior

year he begins to feel the effect of the investigation if not the specific atmosphere of scholarship. Many of his teachers are interested in religious life, but in too many cases the men whose scholarship he most respects are unsympathetic with the Church or are merely conventionally religious. He is set to reading books in which religion is handled as a matter for investigation, or in which the idea of nature and of natural law apparently leaves no room for God and divine love. He begins to grow investigative. As a result his religious life becomes unsettled. If he seeks advice it often is from some member of the Faculty or a more advanced student who may be unsettled also; and he resolves into a state of doubt. So we would see the need of the Pastor being alert, and should be trained in the arts and current thought so that he can master them before his congregation, so that which is weak will not be turned aside.

The work of the Pastor in preaching the Gospel; first, positively with a contagious conviction. To appreciate the evangelic significance of the life and teaching of Jesus Christ it is necessary to concentrate one's attention steadily upon his individuality as affected by historical environment, upon his own Messianic estimate, and upon the Messianic interpretation given him by his followers. The terminology of these estimates helps us to appreciate the real personality that compelled the Messianic valuation. Any theology that is unaffected by a conviction of the reality of the risen Christ is not evangelical in the strictly New Testament sense. He should believe it himself, or he cannot convince others of the belief. In the Pastor's

loyalty to the Gospel lies the hope of the Church. There is a magnificent future for that preaching which brings the data of the Gospel of Jesus. This is the evangelical message for which the Church, whether conservative or liberal, friendly or critical, can stand and must stand.

Then the Pastor should emphasize the Brotherhood of Man. It is not only his work to prepare men for heaven but to prepare them for society, and to bring them up on a common brotherhood. Democracy was never more in need of guidance. Social classes were never more sensitive to each other's prerogatives. The interests of the individual are not yet always those of society; the Church has not yet brought about the Kingdom of God.

Religion has to do with powers and instincts that are not acquired, but are elemental and common to all men; and Christianity, if true to the Gospel of Jesus, makes men incapable of isolated life. It is the expression of an elemental common, and the unifying factor of human life. And to unite men, emphasis must be laid upon interests that are not mere accidents or accomplishments, but are common to all. There is a wall of separation between the habits and customs of the man of poverty and the man of wealth.

The great elemental things of life are, always have been, and always must be, the basis of united social action; for example, the passion for food. A nation rises or dies as one man if starvation is upon it. The passion for fighting will link men together almost as nothing else. Then there is the bond of acquiring property. This rises higher than the others; but these named are not the only elements of

human life. Besides them and above them there is such a thing as faith, a trust in some power outside of oneself, the instinct to pray, the belief that in some way the world was not the result of a toss up of chance, and that, once made by a God, it has not been abandoned by its Creator. Religious instincts are as elemental as the lust for blood. But as the call to war leads men away from the accidents of life, the differences of business and the culture of station, and binds millionaire and pauper, club man and cow-boy, into a regiment, so Christianity, if only it is true to religion, can call men from business and daily routine and lead them into the invisible Kingdom of God. To make men trust God better is to make them ready to trust men better. To make them resemble God in universality of interest is to make them more companionable, eager to do good, less eager to succeed through oppression, less isolated and self-centered, more intent upon performing duties than upon demanding rights. A selfish man cannot be religious. To the Christian, religion is the Godward expression of an equality of life that is fraternal in its manward expression. Genuine religion is not an affair of a community, but of the individuals of a community. Hence to build up the brotherhood of society is to teach the brotherhood of Christ, and where Christ is there is unity. The Church must take up the Master's work, and, while it teaches men to be kind and helpful, it must also insist that they can believe in a God that still loves and reigns; who in the last analysis is the basis of social law; the One who will give men the kingdom of brotherliness. It is true that today we are in a stage of discontent both in the

social world and in the Church. Questions which have never been before the Church and the Pastor are before us today. Never before has there been such a difference between the rich and the poor as now. The poor have never been reconciled to rich reveling in luxury, while they were starving for necessities; and out of this dissatisfaction have come several organizations, among which is the "Labor Union". It is impossible for the Minister of today to be silent about this question or to misjudge it; because his silence would bring distrust to the people.

There seems to be a tendency upon the part of some Churches to be limited by its cleavage to society: As a rule, most Churches would welcome the laboring classes to their pews, but they as a class do not care to go to the Protestant Churches because they distrust the preacher and the people. We must acknowledge that there seems to be an indifference toward them by both clergy and people. Hence, this being the condition of affairs, what can the Church and Pastor do concerning the "Social Movement"? Every city needs institutional Churches. By their work they make religion supreme, but whatever a Church may do in the various kinds of work, such as charity, amusements, employment bureaus, it must be kept conscious of its spiritual mission as a coordinating and unifying force. But if the fact of religion is left out and it is an institution for debating societies, gymnasiums, suppers, concerts, stereoptican lectures, etc., without its religious aspect, is to bring it into competition with the variety show. As a religious organization the Church, fitted to educate and direct the social impulses by enforcing regard to law and by guaranteeing sanity in reform,

must do something more than stir the individual conscience. It must champion obedience to existing law. The Church should oppose the custom of the large concerns manipulating law making and the evading of the law. In fact the office of the Church is that of developing a social conscience that shall, on the one side, protect men and corporations from the "sandbagging legislator" and "organizations" so frequently in our legislatures; and of insisting that Christian men shall not be political anarchists. Religion used to be the controlling power and the idea of authority must be replaced in religion. It must be the authority of the universal will. The leaders of social movements have very little use for God, but they know the meaning of natural law. The God of the Church must be the God of the universe, and must be too great for a rising democracy to dethrone. If the Church would stand for such a God who is but law and love, it would aid the social movement. Socialism and Christianity are alike in that they are both laboring for a new and higher social order, in which all shall live happier, better lives.

Christianity seems more capable of producing permanent social betterment than does socialism. It attempts to bring this about by education, while socialism would bring it about by legislation, but legislation will succeed in proportion as the influential men in the community are in sympathy with its objects. Hence the need of the educated citizen, so that the Church should be considered in the movement. Then, too, the social doctrine of the Church is superior in its practical bearings upon the individual to that of socialism. It is essential

ly an economic system and approaches the individual life with much the same presupposition as the older political economy it assails did. The best way the Pastor can assist in aiding the social movement is to strive to bring about regenerate lives. And when the life is regenerated it will bring forth a social reform, and if this is done the Church need not be outgrown, but may be a factor in the advancement of social reform. A genuinely Christian Church member always is material ready for any social movement. It is not only his duty to preach an individualistic salvation but he must educate the social sympathies of his people.

Then it is the duty of the Pastor of the Church of today to arouse people to self-examination and repentance. There is no source in which this can be done as well as from the Church and Pastor. He must do something more than denounce sin; he must educate society to loathe sins and seek righteousness. He must so organize and direct the awakened conscience that it shall not suffer the outward inevitable penalties of overstrain. The minister is the priest between man and God, between society and the Kingdom of Heaven. The Minister is the promoter, a man of affairs. He should bring things to pass. He should arouse the religious life to make it intelligent and moral. He should organize or assist in organizing it into social groups of all sorts. There never has been a time in the history of the Christian Church that the Pastor has had a wider field, never has had such an opportunity, never such a possibility, never such a responsibility, as today. Hence he should be a man of men, a man thoroughly equipped for his

work, a man full of courage and faith, a man who does not know discouragement and defeat, but a man of good judgment, wise in all things. With the present day conditions there are many problems which were not thought of a few years ago. Among these, as we have referred to the social question, we may find also the "Temperance Question", which is of vast domain, as well as the "city problems" which are appalling in their vastness and astounding in their power. The Minister seems to be the natural leader and agitator on these questions. Then with regard to the more perplexing problems of Church conditions is the fact of so many "non Church going" men. What to do to get them interested in Church attendance? Many and varied are the theories by which the Minister should secure their attendance at Church. One says that the Minister should be a "MAN" among men, discouraging the idea that there are three sexes, viz., MEN, WOMEN, and MINISTERS. This we believe to be true, that he should meet men as men, talk to them as men, and deal with them as men. It seems also reasonable that if he took up problems that they were individually and definitely interested in, questions that they meet every day in their life, that they would be attracted to the house of worship. Then, too, the Pastor must believe in his work, and be decidedly earnest in his labors. Humanity cannot be deceived into believing a person in earnest if he is not. With a heart throbbing and yearning for humanity, and with a soul full of the spirit of Christ, who was ready to give Himself for men, and with an intellect which has been trained and thoroughly equipped, let him go forth and proclaim the truth, and Christ will be honored, the Church uplifted, society benefit-

ted, and humanity greatly blessed. Such men are needed in the Church of today.

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C.K.Corkill.

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