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The relation of the pulpit to social reform

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The Relation of the Pulpit to Social Reform.

The problems that confront the Christian minister today are numerous. They must be met with a wide awake man who is able not only to pray and preach, but one who is able to do things. They must be met by one who is willing to face opposition, not as alone, but as one who is led by a conviction of right, aided and guided by the Spirit of God, with a never dying faith in his ultimate victory. They must be met with an intense interest in the welfare of humanity, or those whose condition is to be benefitted.

Christ came into this world because of oppressed condition of humanity. Centuries had passed and gone, during which time certain revelation had been given ^{to} of this world, and yet the world was groping in darkness. The social condition was pitiable; one could scarcely call his life his own. The rights of women had either never been appreciated, or were wholly neglected. Rather than standing on an equality with man to a great degree they were either his servant, or, it may be treated, worse than a slave. Child life was neglected physically, morally and mentally. The aged, infirm and dependent classes were permitted to suffer uncared for. Might was right in the practice, if not in the conscience, of men. Such suffering and neglect was largely due to sin and iniquity. The priest to a certain extent had misinterpreted, and, to a certain extent, neglected the law. Selfishness was running riot.

It was that these conditions might be changed that Jesus came into the world. It was that men might know their rightful place; that the strong, simply by reason of his strength, had no legitimate right to oppress or afflict or even neglect the weak and helpless. It was that there might be a new ideal of the relation of man to man; that there might be a true recognition of the true obligation of the strong to protect and care for the weak, and to be of mutual benefit one to another.

He came to inaugurate a new era, not simply to prepare men for a residence in a future world, but to fit them for citizenship here in this

world. Upon this mission being fully performed depends the future ^{real} ~~wild~~ or woe of every man.

The pulpit of today is to voice the sentiments of Christ on earth. It is to promulgate the teaching of the man of God; it is to turn men Godward in thought and mind, and, by continuous operation, hold them in such a frame of mind, thus reflecting such mind in their everyday life.

We read in God's word that John the Baptist- than whom no greater prophet ever came to bear the sacred message- was a voice of one crying in the wilderness, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord." True, John was the forerunner of Jesus, but his essential relation to the truth, as was represented in Jesus before his coming in the bodily form here on earth, was not different from what all true prophets' relation should be to the truth, as represented in Jesus in the present dispensation.

So we might say that the pulpit of today is the place from which ~~shall be heralded the truth of Jesus Christ. It is the source of~~ information from which help and strength may be made known. It is the place from which the light of the gospel should shine into the darkened corners of this world to illuminate the pathway of men who are groping in darkness. It should be the place where the standards of everyday life are set up, revealing each man's limitation, as well as every other man's privilege.

The pulpit should be the exponent of those high principles, of practical christian life, that will reveal to every man the path in which he may go to find greatest opportunity of helping his fellows, and of self development. With this as its high standard, its relation to every movement, the object of which is to lift up the fallen, help the oppressed, should be a very close one, especially in this day and age of the world when men are on such different plains socially. The pulpit should stand ready to help every movement that will tend to give every man his rightful place.

The prophet of old lived in a day when sin and iniquity engulfed the people in the depth of immorality; they were untiring in their effort to point out the love of God and call men to walk in his way, calling upon the people to leave the cunningly devised fables that lead to destruction. They were fearless in the presence of king or peasant, rich or poor, high or low; even though they were persecuted at times, and had to flee for safety, yet they did not hesitate to speak forth the truth. Elijah might have had his season of despondency; Jonah might have endeavored to run away from duty, but yet they withstood all and heralded God's word to sin cursed men, and called them to repentance, and rebuked those who were responsible for the great social evils.

So today the world is full of human beings who are not much more than things in the great mercantile system; simply cogs in the wheel that are being moved by social greed; simply grain which has fallen between the ~~nether and top mill stones of composition and are being ground to helpless~~ conditions, those who are being trampled down under foot of the ruthless traffic of the saloon, as grass beneath the hoofs of a herd of cattle on stampede.

Thousands of children are being compelled to face the vice, sin and immorality of the slum districts; others, by reason of circumstances over which they have no control, are compelled to participate in the unspeakable crimes; thus the last ray of hope, the last spark of ambition is crushed out. In this day when money can speak in primaries, in elections, and even in legislative halls, when judges are influenced, jury boxes are packed by it, when the honest laboring man is often crushed down by his employer, when the poor man sees his children handicapped through the race of life with the children of the rich; so with all these, and many more as bad, if not worse conditions, what should be the relation of the pulpit, the representative of Jesus on earth?

The pulpit should sound forth the truth of Jesus Christ as touching a readjustment of social affairs, not so much that the minister should become the head of a vigilant committee, whose duty it should be to find

out those who are violating such laws, as are now on our statute book, with a view to having them prosecuted, as that he might be a potent factor in directing such committee by advice. Not so much that the minister should throw off his coat, and endeavor to oust the saloon by main strength, as by a wise leadership bringing together such forces as may be found and unite them for that arduous task. Not that he should go broad sided against the Labor Union Camp, in time of controversy with capital, nor even espouse the Labor leader's cause indiscriminately against the employer, but, rather in the name of justice to all parties, seek to eliminate hatred and strife, and seek to bring about an agreement by which neither party will be oppressed, and both parties will have what rightfully belongs to them, and each ones rights be respected and regarded by the other.

The pulpit should be slow in hurling itself against public men in a personal way, and should not be too hasty to champion the cause of a ~~movement that has the stamp of a political party upon it.~~ The church is composed of people of all political faiths. The minister should have political convictions, but not make this a theme of pulpit discussion. He has not only a right to attack all evil practice and teaching, whether embodied in a political teaching or out of it, but he is under obligations to do so. The minister may not be excused for keeping silence when men are trampling under foot some law of God, and by so doing are injuring others directly or indirectly.

The true relation of the pulpit to all uplifting movements should be one of stimulating such high regards for another's right and privileges that every one will want to assist in the overthrow of injustice, and the establishment of true principles of inter-relation of man to man; the establishment of the Christlike principle of, "loving one another."

We can not find in the Bible a direct teaching concerning some of our everyday problems in so many words, because certain questions and problems are the outgrowth of present day conditions. But we have in His life and teaching the principle of practical everyday life, which, when applied to present day conditions, will solve the most intricate problems, as well as it would in his personal teaching while upon earth; when men

everywhere will realize that they can not live unto themselves, and that in a certain sense they depend upon others, as well as others depending upon them; that they owe a certain amount of time and talent to others, and that by a proper exchange of soul food, namely, association; when men recognize that others have certain claims, rights and privileges, and when each one will realize that his own privileges are limited by the interference with another's rights. Then there will be an adjustment of ones affairs in such a way as not to injure some one else.

Thus the minister may find his greatest opportunity in establishing a real christian brotherhood here on earth. He should sound forth the sound principle of christian doctrine of a love that is not limited with ones own enjoyment and acquirement of what may be sought after, but rather show a Christ love that enables one to take pleasure in another's pleasure, and a love for another's welfare, that will really grieve one with another's sorrow and grief.

The pulpit should be a potent factor in stimulating such a principle of love that will unite all classes, whether rich or poor, whether bonded or free, thus eliminating the lines of distinction that now exist, out of which grows so much contention, dispute and even destruction of property and life.

The minister might covet the privilege to be associated with men of these different classes, and expound by daily life direct teaching of their true relation to each other, showing not only that it is the Christlike principle, but even to show to some, to whom even christianity itself does not appeal, how that ones own highest interest is best served by the prosperity, in a legitimate way, of every other one. He can show by direct teaching that it is God's plan that children should be properly clothed and provided with food; not only that, but should have a good moral atmosphere in which to live, and that when their young lives are hampered and stunted by sweat shop ordeals, by the immorality of the slum districts, and when, on account of drunken husbands, mothers are compelled to neglect children to earn a meager existance, that not only such

children and such mothers suffer, but the entire society proportionately suffers.

Thus the pulpit should be an enthusiastic advocate of every reform that will lift the standard of the home life; that will impress the people with the sacred relation of the marriage vow, trying to eliminate so much cause for divorce, making desolate so many homes, casting so many children out from under parental influence; that will give women her rightful place in society and in the home; that will give the laboring man an equitable share in the distributing of wealth; that will provide an equal opportunity for the poor man's children in education with the rich man's child; that will eliminate all cause of inefficiency; in finding what every movement has for its object and purpose. The betterment of the social conditions should receive the most heart support, and leadership of the pulpit.

No means should be spared in the endeavor to march all forces under one common flag, namely, the flag of "Peace on earth, Good will toward men." Not only our own class and society, not only our own country, nor even our own nationality, but all people everywhere. The world was the parish of a Wesley. Nothing short of a movement that will include all men everywhere will fulfill the commission of Jesus when he said, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."

The best way to transform a community, and lift up a standard of morality, is by transforming the individuals who compose that community. The best way to evangelize the world is to lead individuals to accept Christ as a personal saviour. The best way to bring about social reform is usually to get individuals interested, and let them by united effort bring about the desired end.

Let the pulpit lead on to a personal conviction of the need of a sacred brotherhood in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, who loved all alike; who was no respecter of persons. He alone will lead on to the highest and best conditions here on earth, and will enable us to fulfill the

command of loving our neighbor as ourselves, then his kingdom will truly come here on earth, and his will may be done on earth as in heaven. Then this life will be the beginning of the larger and better life in the world to come.
