

Where Do You Stand?

By Paul Taylor

(Extracts from a Sermon, upon leaving the Church—reprinted from "Unity").

Go back just a little ways in the history of our own nation to the days immediately before the Civil War. All of the churches south of the Mason-Dixon line were opposed to the abolition of slavery—because the church members owned the slaves. Their economic interest decided their religion and then they hunted up verses in the Old Testament to prove their point. The churches of New England were likewise united, because their cotton mills depended upon the product of slave labor. Therefore they persecuted Wendell Phillips and Lloyd Garrison. On the other hand, the churches in those northern states which did not depend so directly upon the cotton fields were the first to join in the abolition movement. You could preach yourself black in the face, but those southerners could not and would not see the ideals of freedom for the black man when it meant financial upset for them.

The case is identical today. The church derives its income as a result of the present system of industrial autocracy and she is not going to commit suicide unless she can help it. She has never considered that Jesus' sayings: "He that loseth his life shall save it," and "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend," had anything to do with the church as an institution. I think that I am within the bounds of truth when I say that the average minister would think it a sacrilege to sacrifice the church for the cause of humanity. The ministry, and I might say the average church member also, has become so accustomed to think of the welfare of the church that they very seldom stop and ask themselves: "Suppose we had every child an attendant in the Sunday School, how would conditions be changed?" If the church members in that day were to pay the same wages as some of our prominent ones are paying in Detroit today, if those who were employers had as little dealing with the laboring class as the proverbial Jew had with the Samaritan, we must admit that the only appreciable difference would be that the ministers and priests would probably receive a living wage and an old age pension.

Let me draw a comparison: The old Jewish synagogue appealed to the people's loyalty to their organization. The height of piety was to give one-tenth of your income to the temple, be regular at the services and punctilious in the observance of their "law." Jesus came as one of the old prophets with a real message of brotherhood. They hounded him from the beginning and sought how they might accuse him and put him to death. Why? Because the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." They did not care for the welfare of the common people; they were thinking of the prosperity of their institution and their own positions. And I do not hold that they were necessarily so evil. They were probably sincere in the belief that these were of primary importance. "Self-preservation is the first law of life" they tell us. It may be true to a limited extent, but it is not the last law or the highest one.

And what has that to do with the church today? Simply this: The attitude of the church leaders is identical. They are talking of church unity with no other motive than to keep themselves intact against the enormous inertia of the great mass of people. They are raising funds against that day when there will be less and less coming in.

There has not been one item of benefit to the people included in their program. Those who are in control of the church machinery in this country stand absolutely in harmony with those who put Jesus to death. Yes, they would even imprison, deport or kill all those who are opposed to the system—as Jesus opposed that in his day. They will not argue with you, they will not meet you on a fair platform, they simply want to get you out of the way in the quickest possible manner because you are a stumbling block. I wish that I could get one of these gentlemen who is so solicitous about the divine mission of the church on a platform to debate the subject. I do not deny that she has a divine mission, but I do hold that she does not and cannot fulfill it as long as she exists for herself with absolutely no program for the relief of the world. If she does not want Socialism or Bolshevism it is her duty to offer something better. And it must be something more than the promise that the capitalist will from now on be considerate and generous. The working man does not want kindness and charity, but justice! We did not ask the southern slave owner to be kind to his slaves but compelled him to set them free. Nor is this the time to ask the employing class to show consideration. The time has come to do away with classes and establish the world-wide brotherhood!

There is not the remotest chance for the church of today to take this stand. It would mean the crippling of their organization. That is why some have opposed me here—not because I was wrong, but because it was ~~the~~ the church. Those who co-operated with Billy Sunday know now that I was right, but they were willing to put up with his crude theology and burlesque manners because they hoped to secure some members thereby. If they have followed the so-called peace conference at Versailles which has had "open covenants, openly arrived at," and have compared their decision with the Secret Treaties, they know that I was right when I insisted that this war held no promise for the rank and file of the people. My position has always been this: it is of no vital concern to the people of any nation as to whether German, English, French or American capitalists control the Bagdad railroad and the mines of Alsace-Lorraine. The condition of the people will be the same. That is why I could not forsake the gospel of the Brotherhood of Man during these past two years and exalt Uncle Sam as the only God with President Wilson as the Messiah. I was looking after the effects upon the people—during the war and after it—and not the effects upon the church and my career in it.

But I do see a struggle which is worth the entire energy of any man. I have come to the conclusion that this struggle is outside of the church and that those who are in it are rightly prejudiced against the church. We cannot help them if we will. They do not want the people to work for them but with them.

The trouble with the four autocrats sitting at the peace table is that they cannot realize that we are on the edge of a new day; they think that political reorganization will rescue the world. The trouble with our church dignitaries is that they are likewise

blind and think that sermons which will entertain and not instruct, frosted with socials during the week, will build up a Kingdom of Heaven on earth, because it builds up their church and solves their salary problem. On the other hand the great mass of people, yes, "even the least of these, my brethren," are coming to the conclusion that they can trust only themselves in the future. They are rising like a mighty flood the world around. To be in the floodtide, to be one of them in their struggle, their disappointments, their mistakes, their hardships, their final triumphs—"is no job for a priest, it calls for a man!" My heart is with them. I love their spontaneity, their sincerity, their needs. I can feel no common tie with those who live on their backs as employers or so-called labor leaders, but most of all I have a profound distaste for the man who repeats the prayer "thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven," and thinks he shall be heard for his much speaking, when he will not so much as lift the load with his little finger.

I was brought up to be tactful. I was told in the seminary to follow the admonition of Paul and feed the people with milk when they could not stand meat—for the sake of the organization. I have done it, but never again! I am through with that method. From now on it is going to be meat, and those who have not good teeth will either have to go to the dentist or have a case of indigestion! There are two sides to this fundamental economic question, which is just another name for the labor question: the side of the capitalist and that of the worker. Some day I am going to give a talk on "The General Public, a Myth." The churches rather boast that they represent the middle class. In one sense they are right: they are on neither one side of the fence or the other, they are "middle class." For me the time has come to get off the fence. The apple is in two and I must decide which side is to be mine. I certainly refuse to chew on the core, because, as the little boy said, there soon "ain't goin' to be no core."

May I sum up what I have tried to say? The big, vital problem of the day is an economic one, a labor one. The contest is between those who live by owning and those who live by working. We must solve it before we can go on. Politics will not solve it. Preaching ideals will not solve it unless that preaching lead to some very definite concrete action. The church today is in favor of the present system of industrial organization because she is prosperous under it—just as she was under chattel slavery and feudalism. Where she is not actually upholding the system, she is doing it indirectly by taking a middle ground and assuring her people that the interests of the employer and employe, capital and labor, are identical. She will do anything from condemning violence on the part of labor to extolling the virtues of a capitalistic war—according to the suggestion of a prostitute press. They have sense enough not to dictate, that would be crude and too obvious.

Where do you think Jesus would stand in this struggle? I know! He was a working man and lived for outcasts and oppressed. He would disdain to make his preaching a means of a successful career. He would not today be above having no place to lay his head. He would con-

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