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Christianity the Law of Life, National and Individual.

IT will not, I think, be disputed that there are two outstanding facts which confront us at this moment. The first is that the world is out of joint, a fact sufficiently evidenced by the frightful explosion of this devastating war. The second is that there exists a Society in this same world which claims to hold the cure for all this ill—a Society which propagates a scheme of life which, if it were adopted, would put an end to war. In the words of the title of this paper, if Christianity were the law of life, both national and individual, all this misery would come to an end, and would recur no more. I can imagine that if a visitor from Jupiter or Mars were to step on to this planet and investigate its state he would be lost in complete bewilderment. “Here are the inhabitants,” he would say, “engaged in a murderous conflict in which half the world is involved, and yet for near two thousand years a way of life has been held and preached by a world-wide Society which strikes at the root of all such strife, and which might reasonably have been expected to have altered both the ideal and the behaviour of the nations.” To us who are members of that Society it must be admitted that the situation is humbling to the last degree. It is not enough to answer that, given the situation of August last year, the only Christian thing we could do was to go into the war. I ask at once, Why, then, was the Society of Christ in Germany not strong enough to control the ambitions and to mitigate the behaviour which brought it on? I will go farther back still, and ask how it was that the nations who profess to accept the law of Christ were so jealous of each other, so suspicious of each other's motives, so distrustful of each other's intentions, that in every land a colossal pile of armaments was gradually built up—a pile of armaments, involving a pile of money, which by its very vastness contributed to the conflict which it was designed to prevent. If anything is certain, it is that Christianity has not been the law of national life, whatever may have

been the case with the individual; and not the least of the indirect advantages which the war has already conferred is that we are compelled to face that fact, to investigate its causes, and to think out its cure.

I.

In attempting to indicate some lines of investigation, I would put in the forefront our Creed. In spite of every discouragement and of immeasurable disappointment, we believe that Christianity is the supreme law of life, both national and individual; that the adoption of that law is the one hope of the world; that already that law has wrought a mighty uplift among the nations; and that, if the Church is alive to the opportunity, this very turmoil may lead to the adoption of that law, individually, socially, and internationally, on a scale hitherto undreamt of. We believe that when God became incarnate He brought the promise of the redemption of everything that is human—the individual, the family, the nation, the world. He touched with His pierced hand every human activity, personal, social, industrial, as well as national and international. He created such an atmosphere that mere existence, when touched by His Spirit, became glorious life. That this has been recognized far and wide is of course a mere commonplace. To remind you of one or two of the verdicts which have been passed by men who were far from biassed on the side of religion: “The brief record of those three short years of Christ’s ministry,” says the historian Lecky, “has done more to soften and regenerate mankind than all the disquisitions of philosophers and all the exhortations of moralists.” Said Richter, the German thinker: “Being the holiest among the mighty and the mightiest among the holy, He has lifted with His pierced hands empires off their hinges, and has turned the stream of centuries out of its channel, and still governs the ages.” Said Robert Browning:

“I say the acknowledgment of God in Christ
Explained by the reason, solves for thee
All questions in the earth and out of it.”

Said John Stuart Mill: "There is no better rule than to live so that Christ would approve your life."

If all this is true—and we know it is—it only makes us the more desperately anxious to discover what forces they are which hitherto have so thwarted that Divine influence—what the causes are which have so sadly prevented the nations from accepting Christianity as their law of life.

II.

It will not take long to discover the central evil at the root of it all. It is, in one word, selfishness. As someone said: "The mark of the beast is a capital I, and his number is number 1." The chief hindrance to a man in accepting the law of Christ is his selfishness. For the law of Christianity is essentially unselfishness. What is true of a man is equally true of a nation. The nation and the individual are here inextricably intermingled, for the private opinion of a man contributes to the public opinion of the nation; and on the private lives of its citizens is erected the public life of the State. In the national life this root-evil tends to show itself in two or three marked directions. It shows itself, for example, in the craze for cash. "Money, money!" cries the hero in a novel published a few years ago. "What could not be done with it in the world? Only a little more! only a little more!" That, until the war broke out, was the cry of unnumbered thousands. Speaking of the condition of England in his well-known book,¹ Mr. Masterman says: "It is a society organized from top to bottom on a money basis, on a business basis, with everything else as a side-show." The national ideal, as expressed in terms of pounds, shillings, and pence, is simply the sum of innumerable individuals of which the craze for comfort has been the motive-power of life. As you look back over the tracks of history, this well-worn road has generally led to war.

We are up against German militarism at the present time,

¹ "The Condition of England."

but it has been maintained¹ with a good deal of conviction that German militarism is only the handmaid of German commercialism, and that the militarism would never have obtained the proportions which it has now reached if it had not been egged on year after year by a grasping commercialism which hungered for new markets, and was determined to oust all rivals. Nietzsche may speak of the will to power, but the foundation of that will was to a large extent ambition for commercial supremacy. I do not wish to be pessimistic, but I believe that all over Christian Europe these many years past the creed which has found most adherents, to judge by actions, if not by words, has been this: "Cash! I must have it; and if I cannot have it by fair means, I must have it by foul." It will hardly be denied that in the months before the war broke out the plainest thing in our national life was the determination of certain groups or sections to get their own way, no matter what methods were used. In the political sphere there were the Home Rulers and their antagonists facing each other with drawn swords and loaded rifles. In the industrial sphere there were the great unions working up for a stupendous strike—a combination of railwaymen and miners and transport workers—which, if it had been accomplished, would have completely paralyzed the country. There were the groups of employers setting their teeth, and determined never to budge an inch unless they were forced. There were the militant suffragettes, determined to browbeat the nation until their terms were conceded. We talk glibly, and rightly, of the horrors of German militarism, but the roots of it were to be found on a smaller scale all over Britain's ground; and if the development reached by August last year had gone still further in a time of sleek and soulless peace, God only knows what might have been the consequences. For many years past this innate selfishness has shown itself on its national side in false ideals of patriotism. Since the war began we have had the most superb exhibition of true patriotism that perhaps our country has ever seen. Men

¹ Carpenter, "The Healing of the Nations."

giving themselves for dear love of England, to serve her, if need be, with their lives, in whatever place she may deem it right to send them. Men actuated by no mere blind hatred of the the enemy, but by the unquenchable longing to keep Britain free, and, if it may be, to inaugurate in Europe a new era of peace and progress. I am thinking rather of the muddy kind of patriotism which has so often been seen in times of peace—the patriotism of the Jingo who cries: “My country, right or wrong.” The patriotism which identifies the superiority of its own country with the inferiority of all others. The patriotism which excludes rather than includes, which regards the prosperity of other lands as so many bars to its own progress. The patriotism which claims as its right the denial of the rights of others. The patriotism which is much more concerned with what it can get from this war than what this war can give to others.

Wherever you look, the same many-headed hydra of selfishness has been showing its ugly head. In Germany, indeed, it has loomed larger—far larger—than anywhere else, for there they have exalted the system of State selfishness into a gospel. But, broadly speaking, it has been the plague spot of Europe. Whether you look at the French Government trampling on the Church in the supposed interests of the State (though that phenomenon has been amazingly changed since the war began); whether you look at the various groups in Britain, each playing for their own hand—indeed, if you look even now at those national parasites who hope to profit by their country's loss and to further their own interests by the profits of the war, it is the same story. There is nothing new in it since the world began. Selfishness has always led to strife, and so long as man's ideas are merely selfish, so long will war flaunt itself and flourish. The question is, now that the whole system has burst forth into a world-shaking explosion—now that we see at last where it all leads to, are we to merely shake our heads in pious gloom and say that so long as human nature is what it is nothing can be altered? Or do we believe that Christ can yet redeem mankind,

and that the Society which Christ founded can yet be the salt of the earth and the light of the world ?

III.

I venture to think that in the very awfulness of this catastrophe God is calling the Church to a new vision of what He intends for us, and a new faith in His power to achieve it. To this ever-obtrusive law of selfishness we have got to oppose with a new insistence the law of Christ. That law of Christ means three things at least :

First, a law of value. It has been said that this war will be worth while if it cures people of the inveterate habit of looking upon man as a mere calculating animal. It will be worth while if it makes people revise their estimates from top to bottom of the things which really matter. We have been cabined and confined in the clutches of the cash estimate, whether personal or national. Up till now the question "What is he worth?" in the English language has always expected the answer in terms of cash. After this war, and indeed now in the midst of it, that old and misused word "worth" connotes something far different indeed. Our gallant men are showing their worth—a worth for which a cash measurement is merely impertinent and absurd. Other things, too, will have to come under the new valuation—property, for instance. The only question usually asked in this regard is, "What does it bring in?" We shall have to begin to ask, "What does it give out" in usefulness to the community? We shall have to ask of the houses not merely whether they are good rent-producing places for those who own them, but whether they are good character-producing places for those who live in them. We shall have to inquire of the concerns in which we are interested, not merely "Do they secure good dividends?" but "Do they secure good conditions of life and work for those who by their toil produce those dividends?" We shall have to measure the greatness of the nation not merely by its trade returns, but by the returns it makes of good citizens ready to recognize their responsibilities

and to do their service for the common weal. The war is helping us to all these in lightning speed. We now know that for the nation's safety only one thing matters—the personal devotion of its men and women, whether on the field of battle or in the munition factory, or in the thousand and one avenues of service which are opening every day. A year ago it seemed almost impossible that this revaluation of life should ever come. The conventional estimates had gripped us so fast that escape seemed wellnigh hopeless. But through our very sins God has intervened, and the opportunity for cleaning the slate and writing upon it a new way of life is, perhaps, the most superb that ever came to a nation. God help us to use it!

Then, in the second place, there is a law of fellowship, and the same is true of this. The fellowship between the countries of the Empire, the fellowship between the Allies, is the outstanding feature in the crisis which is upon us. But we remember with pain and penitence that we have always progressed to believe in a fellowship far transcending this—a fellowship in which every nation is destined to have its place. Every Sunday, perhaps every day, for years and years we have stood up in the house of God and said, "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church." Granted that there is not one in the sense (which I believe was the intention of our Lord) of one worldwide comprehensive organization with the definite orders of the ministry and the definite Sacraments of the Gospel, and in which all Christians are included. Granted that from that point of view it is torn and split into unhappy divisions, yet the fellowship between its component parts—such, for example, as manifested in the Student Christian Movement—might have been thought sufficient to counteract the national selfishnesses with which we have been oppressed. Yet the fact remains that, even before the war, the Christian Englishman felt the bond infinitely closer between himself and his respectable and patriotic but irreligious neighbour than he ever did between himself and his fellow-Christian in Austria or in Germany, or even in France. The national bond is so close, the Christian bond so loose. As

Mr. Temple has so pungently put it :¹ "When the spirit of national patriotism makes its appeal, no one has to make any effort to understand its claim ; our nation is a definite and concrete society, in which we easily realize our membership to the full. We know that there is no escaping from it, and that when it appeals for our service or our lives we must either respond or refuse. But the Christian Church, as we know it, is powerless to bring home its appeal in the same way. Largely because of its divisions and endless controversy about the points, secondary though important, which separate the various sections, it has become curiously impotent in the face of any great occasion such as the present, and curiously unsuccessful in persuading either its own members or the world outside of the nature of its mission. We are not conscious, for example, that we are permanently either responding to, or else refusing, the appeal 'to preach the Gospel to every creature.' That appeal does not hit us personally as does the appeal, 'Every fit man wanted.' Our membership in the Church does not, in fact, make us feel a personal obligation to assist the cause of the Church. We are content to 'belong to it,' without admitting that it has any power to dispose of its 'belongings'; we think that we 'support' it by 'going to Church' and contributing to 'Church expenses.'" The causes of this are many, but the fact remains that at this time there is a new opportunity to put it right. We must put it before our people with an intensified urgency that of all the unions in the world, national and otherwise, the fundamental union which eclipses all others is union in Christ. The national antagonisms, the national enmities of to-day are appalling indeed, but as a matter of fact they will pass, whereas this unity endures for ever. In days gone by there was an uppish nation, a nation which thought itself much superior to every other, which hoped to become a great empire and exercise a world-rule from Jerusalem. But from that nation came One who, though He was a patriot to the core, yet broke down the wall of partition between it and the rest of the world and made both

¹ Papers for War Time: "Our Need of a Catholic Church."

one. "Having slain the enmity, He came and preached peace to them that were far off and to them that were nigh." For through Him they both found access by one Spirit unto the Father." If the Lord Christ could solve that problem in the first century, He can do so in the twentieth. Once more, the law of Christ means a law of patriotism. In our Lord's time, patriotism to the average Jew meant the desire to oust the alien Government from their country, and, if possible, to dominate the world. To our Lord, patriotism meant that the nation should become through His spirit the servant of all the nations, sending to them His light and His truth, leading them to the God whom He revealed, and whom that nation had always worshipped. In other words, to the average Jew patriotism meant mere national ambition; to the Messiah it meant national service for the good of the human race. Can we rise to this? Can we understand that perchance God has brought us to this pass because we have failed to realize the service which in His plan Britain was to do for the nations? Can we understand that if in His mercy the victory is ours, it will mean one more chance, perhaps the last, to fall in with His plans? Which is the finest ideal—the British Empire dominating the world's trade, or the British Empire working for the world's uplift? An Empire whose first concern is to capture markets, or an Empire whose first concern is to capture men for God, for the life which is life indeed? To judge by her statistics, there is not the slightest doubt which of these ambitions Britain believes in most. There is also not the slightest doubt which of them is Christian. If the British Empire is to be worthy of Him whose Cross she bears on her flag, she must come forth from this high ordeal, not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give her life in service for many.

If the Church is to be awakened to these things, if this Christian law is to dominate men's minds, there is an impossible task before us. But for precisely that reason it has got to be done, for in these days the achievement of the impossible is the commonplace of history. We shall have to begin

first with a great repentance ; if ever we have known a day of judgment, we know it now. Now is the time for seeing ourselves as we really are. In these days of blood and death

“ Every day is judgment day,
 Count on no to-morrow,
 He who will not when he may
 Act to-day, to-day, to-day,
 Doth but borrow
 Sorrow.”¹

“ To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.” It was because they were becoming hardened that He has intervened with the lightning of war. He has given us a place of repentance. Repent we must. But it means, further and lastly, a great adventure. Hitherto, during this last century at least, in great movements the Church has been laggard, while other men have given the lead. But the Church may yet lead the way out of this turmoil if she is alert and alive, for no one else can do so. National selfishness will not be conquered by international law. The gospel of force will not be conquered by force. The ideals and ambitions of men will not be turned into right channels by the polite phrases of diplomacy. There is only one prospect of either peace or progress, and that is a new and wide-spreading devotion to the ideals of Christ, and a new and wide-spreading propagation of those by His Church, not only in word, but in example as well. We talk of converting the heathen to Christianity ; we must first convert Europe. It is a moot point whether the East or the West is most in need of that change. One thing is certain—Christ can accomplish it if His men will embark on the adventure of faith and believe in Him. You may say it is a forlorn hope, but Christ is Captain of a forlorn hope, and always has been. “ The attitude of Christ,” as an inspiring writer has lately said, “ led Him to storm the fortress of evil with nothing but the truth on His side, to place Himself athwart the forces of evil without protection or means of defence, sure in the triumph of spiritual powers,

¹ John Oxenham.

and careless of what happened to Him." "The world-powers of His day recognized that this attitude was utterly dangerous, that it meant the entire dissolution of the things men trusted in—expediency, prestige, coercion, wealth ; and they were so impressed with the menace of Christ that at any risk He had to be swept out of existence."¹

But He has not been swept out of existence ; He is the one central Reality of this moment. It is for us so to believe, so to obey, so to adventure in His Name, that out of this trouble may emerge a world more amenable to the law of Christianity, both national and individual, a Church more utterly devoted to the task which He has given her to do.

F. T. WOODS.

¹ Papers for War Time : Dr. Orchard, "The Real War."

