

The Christian Answer to three Common Assumptions Among Industrial Workers.

I.

AN aircraft inspector who has the gift of awakening interest in good music was recently broadcasting on a Sunday morning during the hour usually set apart for public worship. During the preceding week, the forthcoming broadcast was announced in various factory canteens where the speaker was well known. The announcer prefaced his remarks with the humorous sally, "Of course, I know that most of you will be at church, but for those of you who happen to be at home . . ." This piece of gentle sarcasm was greeted with appreciative laughter, symptomatic of the widespread belief that churchgoing is out of date. It is like silent films, or hansom cabs, just a relic of a former age.

Arrangements are increasingly made for meetings or rehearsals at times which clash with Church services, and Church premises are more rarely used for such purposes. One hears more and more people setting forth the view that the Community Centre meets a need of fellowship which was formerly satisfied within the circle of the Church's activities.

At one time, representation of the Churches on certain civic committees was a foregone conclusion; it was, for instance, difficult to conceive of the planning of youth activities apart from such direct representation of the Churches. Now, however, the Church is increasingly regarded simply as one body among others. It is held that while their work is appreciated and while every assistance will be forthcoming to continue and develop that work, the strength and leadership of the Church does not justify any different treatment from that offered to a trade union or to some other philanthropic society.

A Religion and Life Week held in this locality was extensively advertised throughout the factories in this district. Yet it is doubtful whether two per cent. of those attending consisted of industrial workers who had no connection with regular Church activities. Services held in factory canteens on occasions of national significance have appeared to be appreciated, but when

voluntary services have been advertised on factory premises, fifteen per cent. is the absolute maximum attendance that could be claimed, at least for this area.

These examples can only mean one thing. *Corporate worship is regarded by the majority as unnecessary, and Christianity as an organised force is no longer something of which this majority feels it must take account.*

The reader may feel that these observations are somewhat exaggerated, but they are the result of more than two years' daily mingling with industrial workers of all types, from building labourers to skilled technicians. War conditions, certainly, are unusual. Others, who have worked in factories for many years, paint a more hopeful picture, but how far is that picture coloured by the fact that they spend much of their leisure time on church premises, and thus periodically escape from the pagan atmosphere which is, on the whole, characteristic of a factory? Speaking generally, the impression one receives is of personal friendliness with a desire to give a fair hearing to the Church's point of view, but nevertheless a widespread conviction that the Church has failed, that she can safely be neglected, and that the hopes of peace, if any, lie in other directions.

There are, however, those who look wistfully to the Church for guidance, and who believe that she is awakening to her tasks. How can this number be increased? Christians in the factory must overcome their denominational differences of emphasis, however important in their own sphere, and must present a united front, coming to know one another with some degree of intimacy in order to work together as a team. We need to realise keenly that we are in a minority. Many who spend much of their time with like-minded Christian folk will not face the implications of this fact. At a recent Brains Trust, I heard a respected Church officer argue that we might have to go back to the catacombs. It is difficult to see any likelihood of this at the moment unless Christians are far more definite in their witness of life and speech. We are not opposed, but ignored. Communists differ very much among themselves, varying from convinced Christians at one extreme to declared atheists at the other, but there are certain convictions of an economic and political character which they are prepared to defend with considerable force and lucidity. They frequently have their leaders in key positions in many factories, and they can hardly be ignored. We need united planning by Christians within industry, and this presupposes a far greater understanding of industrial problems by Christian people. We need a new crusading zeal, and one is tempted to hazard the opinion that Christians who are not prepared to make some stand where they work might almost be "written off" as ineffectives.

II.

A Sunday school commenced at a Community Centre for industrial workers living on a bungalow site, has been a very worth-while experiment, attracting some hundred children every Sunday. There are a few residents on the estate, however, whose approval is qualified by certain hesitations and doubts. The most definite objection raised has been that children must be brought up to understand the importance of "practical issues of bread and butter" and must not be hoodwinked into thinking that "heavenly" matters are of greater significance.

Industrial discussion groups have dealt with a variety of subjects, from vocational guidance to housing problems, but whatever the subject, one can be certain that sooner or later someone will say, "of course, at bottom it is an economic problem." "Until all railways, roads and canals are state owned and controlled," someone will argue, "convenient and cheap transport will be impossible." In another connection, it will be said: "Until inequalities of income are removed, all this talk about vocational guidance is largely a waste of time." Or again, people will claim that "until men are adequately housed, the appeal of music or art will not be heeded."

I remember an occasion on which I had just taken my stand on a chair before some hundreds of workers on a large building contract, when an uncouth man immediately in front of me rose with his plate in his hand and shouted: "Give us some decent b—— food, and then come and talk to us about religion." The subject of food, the question of canteen facilities, etc., occupies an immense amount of time in most factories, often causing much discontent.

These examples underline an assumption which is very general, namely, that *the root of unhappiness is economic.*

There is undoubtedly a measure of truth in this viewpoint. A man who has been brought up harshly in a squalid environment can hardly sing with the same accent as his more fortunate neighbour such lines as these: "For the love which from our birth over and around us lies, Father unto Thee we raise this our sacrifice of praise."

Nevertheless, one wishes there were more Christian believers to say at all times and on all subjects: "The ultimate cause of social distress is personal; it is the misuse of freedom by individuals who put their own interests before those of other people." If this is again only one aspect of the truth, it is from the Christian standpoint the most important, and the most generally overlooked. This conviction can be emphasised in discussions on education, town planning, health. It can be stressed in another

way by seeking the introduction at a Community Centre of a course of lectures on such subjects as "The Psychology of Post-War Reconstruction," when people are reminded of the mental factors in social health.

The importance of the personal factor can be brought out in conversation with individuals, and can assist in the resolution of disputes in the factory. Above all, it is evidenced by lives changed through the power of Christ.

As a matter of fact, if the causes of social distress are exclusively economic, we are involved in a vicious circle from which there is no escape. For instance, if chronic malnutrition and bad housing necessarily lead to a degraded outlook which in turn leads to the creation of slum conditions on a new housing estate, how is a change of conditions to be effected? If the economic system under which we live necessitates an unequal sharing of the profits of industry, and this inequality of income leads in turn to a low standard of education for the majority of workers, how is a more democratic system to be established? However, we find that in all classes there are people in whom there is an urge to establish social justice. We find those whose home environment has been very unsatisfactory developing unexpected artistic and literary gifts.

In actual fact, this overstatement in regard to the supreme importance of the economic factor reduces moral responsibility to vanishing point, and helps to produce the apathy which is at the present time the most dangerous enemy of all progress towards social justice. The will to survival and growth tends to be undermined, and this urge is personal and spiritual as well as primitive and material. It concerns the development of the whole personality, and such development is only possible while individuals, whatever their economic circumstances, are capable of responding to a call to higher life.

Here is the truth to which Christians must constantly draw attention in the factory.

III.

My booklet, *The Chaplain in the Factory*, was the subject of a recent discussion between a works manager and myself. While generally appreciative, he claimed that there should have been a more generous reference to the fact that "*genuine Christianity is frequently to be found outside the Church, which has no monopoly of religion.*" There certainly are innumerable examples of a generous and unselfish spirit. In one factory, more than a hundred people stayed behind for a period after working hours to make Christmas toys for children. In another very small factory, a most generous sum of money was raised for the dependents of a former

employee who had suddenly fallen a victim to tuberculosis. A married woman with troubles of her own did not hesitate to offer her home and her personal help to a girl about to have a child who had nowhere else to go. To cite a different type of example, in one factory we are engaged at the time of writing in a series of discussions on the Race Problem. The average attendance has been about thirty, and we have had the help of informed visitors. The attitude to the "native question" has revealed a sincere desire to give a fair deal to men and women of whatever race and colour. Nor is this attitude merely a theoretical one, for in this factory coloured American soldiers were warmly welcomed to social events at the factory, while people who differentiate in favour of whites are severely criticised.

It is certainly true that "Christian ideas are found operative within industry." Christianity, however, is a matter of personal allegiance to Christ, and Christians are ready to measure their own life and achievements against the standard set before them by Christ. They undoubtedly find that the higher they ascend up the hill of moral achievement, the more conscious they become of the need for "clean hands and a pure heart." We know that in the presence of God we experience a probing of motives which is salutary but often painful. Those who think they are filled with indignation against favouritism find that they are moved by hurt pride and resentment. Those who are fighting for social justice discover that they are sometimes thirsting for power. Those who complain that "nothing is done to improve their conditions" awaken to the challenge that they should themselves assume responsibilities of leadership. The warden of a large Community Centre recently expressed his views on the appalling lack of willingness to accept personal responsibility. Personal resentments, power motives, shirking of responsibility—these things eat like a disease into the body politic, and ruin our social life.

While, therefore, we rightly appreciate the generous human kindness to be found everywhere, we dare not overlook the evil that often lies hidden in the human heart. Christians are bound to meet all assertions in regard to human goodness with the humble confession of human sin, a factor which they know by experience and observation to be universal in its operation. Indeed, it is just here that the distinctive Christian approach can be of most help. Confronted by the vast and terrible consequences of a war of unparalleled destruction, there is only one refuge from scepticism, and that is in the thought of God's purpose to build up personal character through suffering and through redemption from sin.

The Question Master at a recent W.E.A. Brains Trust on Education was sorting out the questions beforehand. One

question, seemingly irrelevant, was quickly put on one side. The question asked was, "Has the Universe a Purpose?" In reality, this question is relevant to all subjects. Religion is relevant to the whole of life because it enshrines a revelation of the divine purpose for human affairs. The Christians in a factory, therefore, have the opportunity of exhibiting the relevance of their religion to the affairs of the factory. For a man's tactics in all circumstances are determined by his strategy of life. Now very many people are only too ready to toss this question on one side, knowing that a sincere attempt to answer it would involve a readjustment to life and perhaps also a "change of heart." It is the Christian aim to face men and women continually with this all important challenge.

It is at once the opportunity and also the difficulty of the work of an "Industrial Chaplain" that his activities are concerned with the whole personnel of the factory. It is his task to bring people face to face with the questions that matter, realising that the whole future of those with whom he deals, indeed of mankind as a whole, depends upon the answers given to these questions. If he is sometimes unnecessarily burdened with a sense of the importance of his work, it may be partly because of the comparative absence of Christian team witness within industry, to which reference has already been made.

CLIFFORD H. CLEAL.