

ARTICLE III.

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH AND DEMOCRACY.

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CHRISTIANITY assumes as one of its primary postulates the regeneration of human society. This appears on every page of the Gospels, and is apparent to the most casual reader of Jesus' teachings concerning the Kingdom of God. There is no longer any need for discussing this phase of the relation of the Christian religion to the social order prevailing in any state of society. Whether the method chosen be by the personal reformation of the individual man through conversion or through the Christianizing of the great social agencies by which human life is more and more largely being directed and controlled, the underlying assumption must be that the end to be achieved is a society as regenerate as the individuals that compose it. Moreover, this assumption appeared from the moment the Christian church attained any consciousness of itself as a part of the social life of the world. Its earliest disciples not only saw that this was the end to be achieved but took immediate steps for its attainment. With such knowledge as they had and with such instruments as they could command, they undertook the task of regenerating the world.

It is also clear that the very largeness of this undertaking spurred them on to extraordinary activities, and these activities in turn reacted upon them to such a degree that they not only undertook to regenerate the world, but believed that it might be accomplished within their own time. From

the period of the immediate followers of Jesus to this very time there has never been wanting a considerable number of Christians who have believed that they would see the world made over into the actual demonstration of the Kingdom of God. It is true that this has usually been allied with some expectation of supernatural intervention of one kind or another, notably with the return of Christ to rule and reign in the world; but whatever the particular form of the hope it has always been present in the church and is present now. Even when it has not been openly confessed and preached, this lurking expectation of the final visible triumph of Jesus Christ and his actual rule in the world has held a large place in the Christian thinking of men. Even in its most grotesque forms it commands a certain measure of respect, because of the underlying idea that Christianity assumes that the world both can be and will be regenerated and made coextensive with the Kingdom of God.

Viewed in a broad sense, the course of history has justified the hope and the expectation. Society since the advent of Christianity has been and is steadily becoming increasingly moral. There is no evil so great, no social wrong so heart-rending, no difficulty so colossal, that it can for a moment weigh against the historical fact that Christianity has steadily moved onward in human society and has forced men to the conviction which is its own primary postulate. Men whether avowedly enlisted under the standard of Christ or not have acquired this conviction no less than Christians who first gave it to the world. One of the great contrasts with which Christianity startled the Roman world when it actually began its world-wide propaganda for Jesus Christ, was, that society could and must be made Christian. Over against the prevailing skepticism and unbelief in the salva-

bility of humanity and the regeneration of human relations, the gospel steadily affirmed and demanded both. Beginning with the least capable members of the Roman world and often with the most inert morally, it steadily proclaimed that there was no soul without hope, and consequently that there was no humanity beyond the pale of the final triumph of Christ in the world.

The faith of those early teachers and followers has been justified in the event. It does not need recapitulation in detail but only the now unchallengeable statement, that the moral order of the world has under the influence of Christian teaching and preaching not only advanced but become increasingly sensitive to the moral motive in both individual and corporate action. Christian ideas are now the property and heritage of all men, who scarcely dream that there could have been a time when they were not. Indeed, the multiplicity of social programs of one kind and another is itself evidence of the almost universal belief that the world is a subject of redemption, and that the redemption may possibly be accomplished within the lifetime of the propagandists. Confident assertions are made on every hand that the adoption of this or that plan of social adjustment will bring about justice and fair dealing in the world. The advance from the ideas of a fair distribution of the spoil to the demand for justice is itself one of the most emphatic evidences of the moral advance of men. If it be asserted that this advance is not due to Christianity, then the reply may be made, It has come coincidentally with the spread of Christian ideas and the general acceptance of the Christian idea of the value of human life and human relations. It is not necessary specially to quarrel on this point. Christianity and the moral advance of the world have gone hand in hand and, whether the lat-

ter is the result of the former directly or not, the two are so inseparable that nobody will ever be able to say that we should have attained the state to which we have emerged had there been no Christianity to affirm the possibility and to assist in the regeneration of mankind. What may be stated without any risk of successful denial is, that before the advent of Christianity there was no such hope in existence and almost no consciousness of such a possibility as is expressed on every platform which discusses the condition of the world to-day.

By the same tokens it may be affirmed that the moral order of society is inseparable from religion. The expansion of religion and the increase in the varieties of the application of the religious motive to human affairs, whether these be social, political, or legal, is the most striking fact in the thought of the modern world. Many of the leaders of the various forms of social propaganda state that they are engaged in religious work. To many of them the particular plan which they have is in a very real sense a religion. The writer has seen one of the venerable founders of a great labor organization stand before a crowd of thousands and hold up his union card and say with great impressiveness, "This is my Bible." The thought underneath that statement was that he held his social program as a religion, as, in fact, he did. In hundreds of meetings of almost every kind the same thing can be seen, and has been seen by the writer. In fact, so common has this become, that, in some of these assemblies, if the particular local color of the meetings were extracted and the terminology of the particular social creed held by the assemblies were replaced by the terms distinctive to the Christian religion, they would pass anywhere as Christian meetings. There was no distinguishable difference in the end and aim which these men

sought to achieve and that which is affirmed on every occasion when the Christian church has need to speak on social questions of any character. The inseparableness of religion with the advancing social order must be apparent to everybody who has given even the slightest attention to the matter.

It would probably surprise a great many of these leaders to be told that they were advocating Christianity. But not a few, however, have arrived at the consciousness of the identity between their own aim and that portrayed by Jesus in the Gospels. Where the identity is recognized, it is almost always accompanied by violent onslaughts on the Christian church with the claim that the church has ceased to be Christian. And here we are in the presence of a great question on which many things may be said in both directions. For the present, let it be understood that whether the Christian church has or has not ceased to be genuinely Christian, this has been the fact in times past and is therefore not impossible. But the natural alliance of religion with every form of moral progress and the completeness of the identity of aim between the moral aspirations of the leaders of society and the teaching of Jesus are unquestionable. So continuous has this fact been through the Christian centuries that it may be said that the two are inseparable, and that, without religion interpreting religion in its broadest sense, there can be, as there has been in the past, no moral progress in the world.

It is hardly less true that this religionizing of social theories is a part of the work of Christianity in the democratization of the world. Christianity is democracy if it is anything. There is no armory which furnishes more weapons for the teaching of democracy than the Bible. And here, again, while we may not say dogmatically that the expanding democracy of the world is directly due to Christianity, it must

be acknowledged that the immediate effects of Christianity are such as to produce democracy naturally and spontaneously. While it is possible to conceive of a high state of personal religion absolutely apart from any form of institutional organization, it is also true historically, that where there has been any considerable religion it has been allied to some form of institutional life. Christian institutions in their earliest form were the expression of a pure democracy, and that idea has never been absent from the thought of the church, whatever its practice may have been. The Christian church could not read its own sacred writings and utter the words of its Founder without teaching a democracy as absolute and far-reaching as that contemplated in the most advanced social program known. In fact, every Christian assembly the moment it utters the most elementary form of Christian teaching begins to teach democracy. For this reason the churches have been schools of democracy from the times of the apostles. If democracy has a natural atmosphere anywhere, that atmosphere is in the church. This, again, is not merely the plain teaching of the Gospels, but it is also the undeniable teaching of Christian history.

It would be difficult to conjecture how democracy could have made the advances which it has made in the world without the coöperation of the Christian church. The one thing needful for a successful democracy is a clearing house which will bring all ideas to the test of some fundamental law which shall be the acid test distinguishing genuine from spurious democracy. The Christian church is the only known organization in the world which has such an acid test for genuine democratic ideas. Its doctrines of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, which it has always held and holds now, whatever its practice may have been or

is now, are the final tests of genuine democracy. They have always been the rallying cries for social advance; and the one social institution which has uttered them repeatedly and unceasingly, in fair days and foul days alike, has been the church of Jesus Christ. Democracy needs, and always will need, just such a clearing house for the various forms of democracy which are presented for general adoption. The Christian church is naturally adapted to be such a clearing house, by reason of the fact that constitutionally it is bound hand and foot to the fundamental ideas by which alone democracy can be comprehended. A democracy which does not rest upon such conceptions as are the basis of Jesus' teaching of the Kingdom of God is a political illusion which will go the way of all illusions. But, based upon the fundamental ideas which Christ affirmed and which his disciples have been automatically forced to preach as the necessary postulates of Christian propaganda, democracy is not only firmly grounded, but offers the natural pathway for the progressive steps needful for socializing and redeeming mankind. The weakness of democracy has always been its institutional inefficiency. The Christian church is adapted by its constitution, by its elementary doctrines, and by its history, to give democracy the working model of institutional efficiency upon the only principles by which we can democratize the world.

It is sometimes affirmed that the Christian church is particularly assailable on this very point. But all such accusations seem, when critically examined, to be based upon very limited observation. There is at this very moment no institution in the world which has a vital relation to humanity, which exhibits such institutional effectiveness as the Christian church, even when most of the common accusations against it have all been admitted. Viewed on the world

scale, including the vast foreign missionary enterprises of the various branches of the church universal, it is the most colossal social propaganda the world has ever seen, and embraces every possible form of social service and method. It would not be possible to state a single area of human interest into which the Christian church has not at some time pushed for the purpose of carrying out its fundamental ideas of democracy. It could not do otherwise and be Christianity. Not to do this would be to deny itself. Nor have instances been wanting illustrating this very fact. When the revival of world-wide evangelism arose in America it is unquestionably true, that the missionaries were sent out with a purely theological idea of Christianity. The idea was to evangelize the world by means of a particular kind of Christian teaching. Confronted with the facts and forces of alien civilizations, Christianity was compelled to adjust itself to the elementary demands of the gospel, with the result that the theological Christianity which at the beginning of the nineteenth century undertook to save the non-Christian nations has become a social Christianity addressing itself to the immediate needs of men in their social and institutional life. The result everywhere has been the indoctrination of the oldest empires of the world with the ideas of democracy and the expansion of the practice of Christianity, so that now it embraces every possible form of social activity. The vitality of the Christian religion and its essential and inevitable democratic character have thus been demonstrated on every missionary field of the world. This has not come about by accident. It came because Christianity is democracy; and when Christianity ceases to be in a vital and effective sense democratic, it ceases to be Christianity. And it is effective democracy too. It is the one form of democracy which has no

limitation of race or previous condition. It is the one form of democracy which grafts itself naturally and efficiently upon every form of civilization and culture.

There is an additional reason for this, apart from its fundamental constitution. Christianity must be an efficient democracy in order to be any kind of a democracy. And its efficiency is assured because there is no domain of human life to which it has not a real and necessary relation. It thus provides at once for the utilization of every form of talent, for the expression of every kind of need, and the development of every form of resource for meeting the needs expressed. It is, moreover, in a continual state of readjustment, by reason of the fact that its reserves are always coming forward with fresh capabilities to be expended and a wider theory of the application of its fundamental doctrines. There is no other social institution known that thus, by its nature, couples itself with almost any conceivable situation. It is literally all things to all men. It must be, to be anything to any man. And these fundamental elements of its nature are always reacting upon each other. Christianity has thus within itself the capacity for continuous rebirth, stating itself in the form best adapted to the particular field in which it is operating. By this means it provides the laboratory for many things beside itself, because its nature requires it to prove all things and hold fast what is good. Here again history is suggestive, in that it shows that there is no social program extant that has not, in some form or other, been tried, at least within some limited area, under Christian auspices and under Christian inspiration.

Christianity then as a religion, and the Christian church as the institutional expression of that religion, become democracy's most potent and effective instruments for its de-

velopment and the corrective for its blunders. The very differences of Christian organization have contributed to this result, because complete functioning in a democracy requires many varieties of tools. The Christian church is the one instrument which will respond to every need, because it sets up no fixed standard other than those which are fundamental to the democratic idea. The emphasis in one part of the world or in one portion of society may be one thing, the emphasis in another something different, according to the state of development in that particular branch of society or portion of the world. The Christian church operates in them all. It must, as stated, affirm democracy in them all, in order to be itself. The inevitable outcome of this must be that, finally, there will be a common tongue which they all speak and a common platform on which they can all stand. This is the greatest outstanding fact in the social history of the world. Nor is it necessary to deny that sometimes this has not been the case in such a manner as to make the various types of Christianity recognize their common destiny. To state this, is simply to say that in a long road many people do not know who are in front of them and who are behind them. History is a long road. The world is wide. Many believe themselves alone who are not alone at all. And in the turns of the road, as on the winding tracks of mountain railways, the train which seems to be going backward is really going forward. The history of the Christian church is full of such apparent recessions. But so is the world. Yet the long view through the centuries must convince the candid thinker that it has been Christianity as religion, and the Christian church as the institutional embodiment of that religion, which have made the fragments of democracy throughout the world intelligible to each other

as parts of a growing whole presently to be revealed. When any part of this world-wide fellowship has failed to function properly to this great end, it has almost always been assailed angrily from both without and within. The world without the church, and the world within the church, alike have at such times forced Christianity to face its fundamental documents and the practice of its Founder, and together they have usually secured the desired result of restoration to fundamental ideas. This may be safely contended, no matter what form the church has taken or what its excesses have been.

In a certain sense this has made the church the moral barometer of society. This does not mean that it has had, nor that it has now, the highest types of Christianity within its own numbers, though it is reasonably safe to assume that the finest expressions of Christianity are found within the Christian church. But it is saying that, on the whole, the attitude of the natural constituency of the Christian church has revealed the moral height or depth of society. When the church has been corrupt, society has been corrupt. When the church has been pure, holy, and vital, society has exhibited these same qualities, so that the state of the church generally reveals what the prevailing social ideals are.

The relation of the church to the total democratic movement may therefore be described as friendly relations with all social programs and entangling alliances with none. And both phases of this relation are inevitable. If Christianity ever should become inseparably allied or identified other than in the ultimate aim with any social program, its life and influence would be limited by the life and availability of the particular program which it espoused. By its nature it cannot do this, since its constitutional doctrines cannot be

thus limited. The Fatherhood of God is not a social program. It is a spiritual conception of regenerate men. The Brotherhood of Man is not a social program. It is the life of regenerate men. It is a principle of approach capable of infinite varieties of expression. It may mean war or it may mean peace. It may mean electrocution or pardon. It may mean municipal ownership or it may mean competition. Whether it means the one or the other, depends upon a great many conditions which are themselves pendent upon influences some of which are fixed and others of which are constantly changing. The brotherhood of man may mean the wage system or it may not. It would be absurd and obviously absurd to hold that man could not believe in the wage system and at the same time believe and practice the brotherhood of man. But Christianity cannot possibly avoid facing the question whether any system at a given time appears to embody its cardinal doctrines. Neither can the church avoid noticing and declaring what appear to be the human values in terms of brotherhood of any given system in which it operates. The simple truth is, that it has always done so, and is doing so at the present moment. In this sense Christianity is always facing a social crisis, because Christianity is always at war with an unregenerate world, and always at variance with a program which indicates any inequalities which do not express its consciousness of the brotherhood of man. But it cannot be limited to any statement of social reform and cannot be bound to any platform of social principles wider or deeper than those which are inherent in its very life. Thus democracy and the church are natural allies and must ever be so. There is good reason for the statement that this has always been the case even when the outward terms of the church life have been in a

form which did not seem to be indicative of the democratic content of the religion for which it stood.

There is still another phase of the relation of Christianity and the church, its representative institution, to democracy which is worthy of careful notice. This is the question of liberty. Democracy must mean liberty if it means anything. But liberty is itself a very spiritual thing, and rests upon qualities which are, if not religious, so nearly religious, that it would be very difficult to make the distinction perfectly clear. The liberty which is necessary for the widest expression of the social hope of mankind can be found under the constitution of Christianity, but hardly anywhere else, and reveals again the futility of trying to limit Christianity to any particular social plan. The recent national convention of the Socialist party illustrated this point with great vividness. A very considerable minority of that convention were syndicalists and wished to embody the special dogma of syndicalism in the platform of the party, which led to a fiery interchange of opinions as to genuine and spurious socialism. Now of course this does not prove anything, about either socialism or the particular form of it called syndicalism. But it does indicate that the moment the broad substantial platform is left for the narrower declaration of special interest, you have instantaneous disruption and division of forces. Christianity has been divided and subdivided world without end. But the interesting fact is that it has never been subdivided on the question of the Fatherhood of God nor of the Brotherhood of Man. It has quarreled about many things, and usually such quarrels have been disgraceful affairs. This is true even to the present day. But it is worthy of note that no such division could possibly have taken place except in the obscuration of its fundamental ideas; and it is

again historically true, that the return to unity has always been by an irenicon based upon the fundamental ideas which Jesus taught,—tolerance and liberty, especially liberty. A similar scene was enacted at a more recent meeting of the American Federation of Labor at Buffalo. Here again the division was so acute that the members assaulted one another, and the police had to be called in. This is not unknown in the history of Christian churches. But it again emphasizes the futility of limiting men of like minds to particularities of program. Still later, at a meeting of the Joseph Fels Fund Commission for the propagation of the Single Tax doctrine in Boston, an outbreak occurred almost exactly analogous to the other two. The founder and chief contributor to the Fund objected to the form in which local devotees were experimenting, and made a personal attack upon one of the most devoted members of the cult. Immediately there was uproar and confusion, while later other differences appeared as between those single taxers who were individualists and those who were socialists. Now, as before, this argues nothing as to the validity of the single-tax doctrine. But it does show that harnessing men to a limited program generally means the destruction of liberty. It is also indicative of the fact that presently there will be division in the ranks of these various bodies, which will be only repeating what is the outstanding fact about Christianity to-day, with this important exception, that on its fundamental ideas Christianity is not now and never has been divided. It is entirely within the possibilities that all these brethren might work harmoniously and effectively within and under the ægis of the Christian church. In fact, many of the most ardent Socialists are also Christians,—so much so, that there is a distinct branch of that comradeship which calls itself Chris-

tian Socialists. There might conceivably be a similar branch of single taxers who called themselves Christian Single Taxers. And so on down the line. In fact, the liberty which is the *sine qua non* of the fullest exposition and discussion of all these various ideas for social amelioration can be found only within the Christian church, strange as this notion will sound to many of these advocates. Indeed, it may be said that the most effective teaching of the valid parts of socialism is now being done in the churches. The social nature of Christianity permits it. It does more,—it invites it. But what the social nature of Christianity also, by its democratic content, demands, is that Christianity never shall be limited to socialism, and socialism only. It is not outside the bounds of possibility that in a given community the single-tax question might become a religious issue. The local church might conceivably become committed to it as religiously expedient and wise. But no Christian church which was truly Christian, and therefore also truly democratic, could define Christianity in terms of single tax. The very statement of the supposition reveals its absurdity; and yet the whole weight of Christian influence might point to that system as most effective, under the time and circumstances, for affirming and demonstrating the brotherhood of man. Only the democracy which affirmed, obedient to the inclusive character of its constitution, the duty to stand by the best possible expression of brotherhood, supposing the single tax for the moment to be that expression, would at the same time affirm the liberty of any dissenter for holding a view exactly the opposite. Not to do so would be to become the ally of a tyranny.

Social and individual liberty are thus bound up in the idea of a Christianized democracy, and are safe in no other. It will come to many as a new and a strange idea that the Christian

church is the custodian of liberty, but the logic of the situation is pretty clear. One of the strongest proofs of this function of Christianity is that the Christian churches very generally in democratic countries have insisted upon the disestablishment of particular churches, not so much for the protection of themselves against other branches of the Christian church, but because they feared tyranny and feared most a tyranny that called itself Christianity. It would not be an unheard-of thing if the very church itself should have the final voice in protecting many of those who, dealing with revolutionary ideas, found themselves expelled from every other association but that of the church. The church is the natural asylum from persecution for all social revolutionaries by reason of its teachings and the example of its Founder. A democracy that is genuine, and not itself a form of tyranny, must coincide with the fundamental law of Christ. This has already appeared in many other things beside the political agitations. It has shown itself in education and medicine and law as well as in politics. But the striking fact everywhere has been that when Christianity has held sway and has held to its own fundamental law, it has been the natural progenitor and custodian of democracy.