

IN THE THROES OF RECONSTRUCTION.

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THE great war has revealed the senile condition of many time-honored institutions; in the hour of trial they failed. The universal demand for reconstruction proves this contention. There can be no doubt that we are once more at a turning-point in human history, with new problems to confront us, but also with new means to solve these problems. We are passing through the birth-throes of a new era, pangs which occur only once in the space of a few thousand years when a new day of creation has dawned and a new "Let there be" is heard in the life of humanity.

This demand for reconstruction is nowhere of greater significance and of more far-reaching consequences than in the sphere of religion. For, as Benjamin Kidd satisfactorily proved years ago, the struggle which man has carried on throughout the whole period of his social development rests upon the motive power supplied by his religious beliefs. There is to-day a universal cry that the Church has failed in its mission. Religious unrest, uncertainty and honest doubt, absenteeism from church, indifference to religion and cooling of religious sentiment are rampant everywhere. The hope that the returning soldiers would bring with them a new zeal for the sanctuary has been completely shattered. Just the contrary has taken place. The men who saw life in the raw from every angle have become callous toward the dogmatism of the churches. They are looking for something which the churches at large have failed to supply—a reasonable religion. Their opposition is not to the Christianity of Jesus but to the theology of the churches.

However, as Benjamin Kidd in his *Social Evolution* argues at length, there can never be such a thing as a rational religion. "The essential element in all religious beliefs," he says, "must apparently be the *ultra*-rational sanction which they provide for social conduct." He declares a rational religion to be a logical impossibility represent-

ing from the nature of the case a contradiction in terms. But since modern science has so thoroughly revolutionized human society it has also influenced its conduct. Moreover, much that used to be looked upon as ultrarational must now be classified with the category of the rational, and in so far as the discoveries of modern science have removed into the realm of the rational much that was formerly religiously held to be ultrarational, they have aided religion and given us a reason for the faith that is in us. God is still speaking through his prophets proclaiming ever new truths and proving conclusively that divine revelations are not confined to one book. It is precisely this which men demand to-day from the Church, that it relegate doctrines which have become untenable in the light of modern science to the limbo of the mythical and embody in its teachings as divine revelations the well-established truths of modern science in order to harmonize life and faith. The nation-wide campaign now inaugurated by all the various denominations will not bring about this much-desired consummation as long as it is exclusively economic in design and method. It must be a movement from within and not from without, if it is to be a stimulus to spiritual growth.

Rauschenbusch in his remarkable book *Christianity and the Social Crisis* has conclusively shown that not the fragmentary records of the New Testament but the life of the earliest Christian communistic societies most accurately reflect the teachings and mission of Jesus. He came to establish the kingdom of God through the regeneration of human society. This must still be the chief work of the Christian Church. In order to do this successfully she must assimilate and sanctify all the positive dominant forces of a given age and generation. The Church has failed to do that in the past. She has fostered superstition instead; both Catholics and Protestants have persecuted the intellectual leaders who promulgated new world-views based on scientific discoveries, burning at the stake not only such men as John Huss, Michael Servetus and Giordano Bruno, but also hundreds of thousands of women and children accused of witchcraft. Andrew D. White's remarkable work on the *History of the Warfare of Science with Theology* presents a gruesome picture of well-nigh two thousand years of the Church's inhumanity to man, which has retarded human progress for more than ten centuries. If we read in present-day orthodox campaign literature that "the Church must inspire, organize and win the gigantic warfare against the sin of selfishness that corrodes our social order," we feel constrained to call attention to the colossal

crimes committed by the Church in the past, which to no small degree are the cause of that sin of selfishness. If the Church had devoted herself to the alleviation of human misery instead of multiplying the fine points of denominational differences and of orthodox standards, the sin of selfishness would not now corrode our social order to such an appalling degree as is claimed by the ecclesiastics. However, it is likewise true that the Church has rendered much splendid service to human society; she has ever kept aflame the torch of learning, and her self-sacrificing missionaries have at all times led the hordes of primitive tribes from savagery to civilization and thereby widened the sphere of human intercourse; but she has failed to assimilate and sanctify the new forces she awakened. The present crisis demand that she apply herself to this long-neglected task.

It is therefore necessary that we return for a while to the consideration of the original mission of Jesus. The first question that confronts us is: To what extent can the socio-religious forces represented by the Christ of the Gospels, especially by that of Luke, assume the spiritual leadership of the present time? The old question, so often repeated since David Friedrich Strauss, whether we can still be Christians, has not yet been satisfactorily answered. The Catholic Church has in this respect the advantage over the Protestant. She has no difficulty in answering this question. She may call herself Christian and yet not make herself the unconditional slave of the past, because she possesses in her infallible papacy a living and, therefore, a growing principle for the interpretation of the past. However much the Catholic Church maintains her historic continuity with the past, she can grow in the living flow of history and therefore change. She is more adaptable to any present condition, and, to a certain degree, also more free than dogmatic Protestantism which insists on being bound to the letter because "It is written."

But this Catholicism is at bottom metaphysical. Therefore its development and growth take place according to the conditions which determine its existence, i. e., it must become more and more hierarchical, it must more and more eliminate the will of humanity and subject itself to a will transcendently assumed. Protestantism has a higher historical claim in having, as a religious renaissance, helped the churchly transcendentalism to find its way back to life. Herein lie the merits of the liberal Protestant theology which by its intense devotion to minute scientific study has tried to penetrate to the real sources of religion.

But the individualistic conception of history by which this theology was controlled, presents religion as a psychological phenomenon of the individual man. Even its most progressive representatives interpret religious phenomena in the light of the affections by which individuals influence one another, by virtue of their natural disposition, their spiritual endowment and needs. That is to say, this theology has no appreciation of the social factors which determine the religious development, nor of the retroaction which the religious factors exercise upon social life. Only the Christian Socialists and latterly Rauschenbusch and his coworkers have undertaken to attack the religious question from the social side. The victory which the Ritschlian school won over the liberal school was entirely due to the fact that they abandoned the atomistic point of view in theology and introduced a discussion of religious life from the broad social side with all its comprehensive historical combinations. But the Ritschlian school is still lingering in the bonds of metaphysics in its treatment of the Christ problem. The historical Christ, the human individual, is here supplanted by a religious *type*, a generic being, which is just as complicated as the Jesus of historical theology and for which in the actual documents every point of contact is missing. But if the decisive factor in the history of Christianity is not the unknown individual Christ who sometime and somewhere may have furnished the historical model for the Gospel stories, but rather the community-consciousness objectivated and personified in these sketches, then this consciousness must be interpreted and valued in the sociological sense. In other words, if according to Kant that antagonism in society which Marx calls the class-struggle has called forth every historical development, there must have been active at the origin of Christian society the same historical law of life. The religious morality, then, which primitive Christianity corporealized in the person of its Christ, represents the force by which the growing Christian society maintained itself and gained its victory over the hostile powers of paganism.

But social theology, like the Kantian historical method, has its roots in the idea of evolution. However, only in the idea the final goal has here an absolute, i. e., a regulative significance. Any empirical phenomenon, any ever so important period of history has only relative value as an evolutionary factor in the realization of the idea. Therefore it is not the material, historical content of the image of the Christ, but only the ideal form, i. e., the personification of a Christ, which may claim to be of socio-theological importance. It is not the "what" of Christian morality but the "how" that reveals

a law of history which furnishes an ideal guide to life. The forces which in the beginning of the Christian era ethicized and humanized the class-struggle, transforming a particularized national movement into a universal human movement personified in the Christ of the Gospels, have gained the victory in the struggle. They have decided the victory as was historically inevitable but also only historically possible. As a result, these forces have now become integrating component parts of human culture and spiritual development. They must and will reappear in every new phase of the evolutionary development of humanity's life.

There will never be any economic or social development on a large scale unless the kinetic forces of the class-struggle are ethicized and humanized, i. e., religiously realized. Every economic creation is determined by the evolutionary law of life. The eruptive forces which give the first impulse to a new social structure are met by antagonizing forces and thereby changed in their directions and influenced in their dimensions. They can only realize their influence upon the whole by unfolding and enlarging their originally indicated aims, and by transforming their particular social demands into universal ethical standards. They in turn carry the germinal principle for new differentiations. At the same time the unifying tendencies of human reason demand that these ethical standards are brought into harmony with their cosmic sources. That which we call the good must of inherent necessity be comprehended as a part of the entire world-life if it is to inspire man to Christian devotion and sacrifice. Only in this wise can a religious faith arise which is in full accord with the moral world-order, deriving from it the assurance of its realization. This *summum bonum* is, however, always—in spite of its cosmic origin—the humanly good; it will always bear both in its aims and in the means of its realization the aspect of a human image, of an ideal Son of Man; the ethical ideal becomes a religious ideal, a Christ.

From the socio-theological point of view the Christ image is therefore the most refined religious expression of all those social and ethical forces which have been active in a given age. In the changes which this Christ image has undergone in the course of time, both in its overtones and in its undertones, in the dimming of its pristine features and in its looming-up in new tints, we have the most faithful criterion of the transformations through which contemporary life has passed from the heights of its most spiritual ideals to the depths of its most material life-processes. This Christ image now bears the features of the Greek thinker, now those of

the Roman Cæsar, then again those of the feudal lord, of the master of the guilds, later those of the revolting peasant and of the free citizen. And these features are all genuine, all are thoroughly alive, although not always in accord with the notions of the scholastic theologians who insist that the individual features of every age must correspond to the original historical features of the Christ of the Gospels. To be sure, there is always a semblance to the historic lineament inasmuch as the most widely different and even antagonistic forces may have cooperated during the formative period of Christian society, each one of which may present a certain resemblance to the forces active in the present age.

The Christ image of to-day shows at first glance very conflicting aspects. It still bears somewhat the features of the ancient saint or of the heavenly king, but at the same time the features of the modern proletarian, of the labor-leader, thereby betraying the inherent contradictions so characteristic of our age. And yet they are all human types, the interpreters of an age in search after a new all-embracing expression of all that bears a human countenance. If the root of the Christian faith is lodged in the unifying impulses of the human reason which gathers all the characteristics of its own essence from the four corners of the world to form a complete image of a Son of Man, it becomes self-evident that the creative forces of this faith are to-day fully as active as they were when man in the budding age of the spiritual life reached beyond himself and beheld the human in the light of divine glorification.

But as an organism human society is subject to the laws of growth, and as it grows so also the creative forces of its faith will grow, and with them the Christ image. In it, our modern and still more the coming humanity will comprehend all the cosmic, social and ethical forces of life, transforming them into a religious human image, its Christ. How little did the age which first liberated man from the bonds of nationality, arousing the slave to a consciousness of his human dignity, know of the cosmos, of the infinite world! That age did not even know the earth, which it considered to be the world or at least its center. It knew no other ideal of life except that created in the visionary colors of the transcendental, the beyond, the ecclesiastic ultra-worldliness. Man could only purchase his Christ at the price of becoming dead to the world which he did not know. We have grown beyond that childish view. Man now gazes into an infinite world. Its inexhaustible forces are subject to his will, he reaches out into its most distant parts to find and gather his truths, and the flame of his soul's longings is kindled at the eternal

mystery of its incomprehensible and unfathomable vastness. And the world which man used to call the dead world is now becoming more and more alive in all its parts. There is not a particle of dust at our feet in which a soul does not slumber, which does not enclose an eternal story. There is nothing so large or so small in which the whole story of life does not reveal itself to us, imparting a knowledge of a peculiar love all its own and bound up with its life.

The results of all our investigations are only the answers which this infinite life out of its fulness vouchsafes to the inquiring human mind. Whatever measure of its beauty and sublimity is reflected in our own soul and stirs us to ever new creative activity is after all only a return of the life we received from it. And what did the average churchman know of man whose inner life and character was to him a book with seven seals? Now the seals are broken and man can follow the story of his own development through all the eons which have labored to make him what he is. Now he knows that he has in himself the life of eternities and that these eternities arise in him, as it were, out of their long slumber whenever an all-powerful longing overwhelms him, leading him out of the loneliness and narrowness of his ego into the heart of the eternal world, of eternal humanity, into the heart of the eternal God.

Before our eyes an evolution has taken place which is closely related to that which once upon a time created the Christ. In the Peasant Wars of the sixteenth century, for the first time, the antagonism was felt which finally led to the new structures and phases of our own social life. In the proletariat of the cities the flames which had been kindled within feudal domains continued to burn slowly: they flashed forth brightly in a Utopian communism, overpowering the minds of men in the Anabaptist ecstasy, until its hopes seemed to be fulfilled in the French Revolution. The prophet of a new Christianity arose in St. Simon, the saint of communism, gathering and organizing a new congregation. But, while his disciples and contemporaries thought that he was the new Messiah, he finally proved to be only a forerunner. Even this communism had to overcome its Utopias: it had to learn to think in actual economic terms but it nevertheless became a social ferment. It leavens the undough of modern society: a process of fermentation sets in, fermenting and purifying the leaven and amalgamating it with elements which at first were foreign to it. The radical socialism, the Communist Manifesto became an economic theory, the aims of which assumed more and more the character of an ideal in reality. Its importance is only of a regulative and not of a co..

stitutional nature. Its practical tendencies are now gradually broadening out, endeavoring to embrace the whole field of every-day life, taking account of the elements of reality and perforce adjusting itself to it. This process of assimilation between the germs of social fermentation and the historical institutions is, according to the laws of history, irresistible and incessant. It is twofold, appearing on the one hand as a process of subsidence, widening, at the same time, the communistic movement which originally overflowed its too narrow bed into a broad stream of the socialistic views of life; and on the other hand, as a constantly increasing penetration of the worn-out political views even of the most antagonistic by the ideas of socialism.

This socializing process ethicizes and humanizes, at the same time, the older Utopian communism through the spiritual agencies of the present life. And the more the evolutionary law of life binds together what seems to separate the minds of men and the programs of parties, the more certainly will also the religious factor make itself felt and demand its right in the social movement, and the more so, the more the religious life becomes conscious of its spiritual oneness with the social life. Consequently the Christ problem of humanity must be formulated anew and find its solution. Already the artists suggest new tints for a new Christ picture and the musicians tune their instruments to new Christian hymns. There is no modern poet of any consequence who is not touched by the torment in our social life, and there is likewise none who is not in some way influenced by the Christ problem, overshadowing all other religio-social problems. The forces which once upon a time ethicized and humanized the class-struggle, which transformed a particular national movement into a universal human movement, have through the Christ of the Gospels become essential factors in human

culture and intellectual evolution, stamping every new phase in the broad evolutionary process of humanity's growth with the mark of this religious universalism. But, just on that account, the Christ of old will reappear again in the new Christ who is evolving in the midst of modern society; nothing which has given humanity real spiritual power through the Christ is lost; in this sense he is the same to-day, to-day and forever. In history as well as in nature the law of the conservation of energy holds good, allowing nothing to be lost which has ever been alive, exhibiting in the most striking new revelations transformations of former forces. Just as the Christ of the Gospels inaugurated, contrary to the century-old wisdom of the scribes, a new resurrection of the genius of the Prophets, so also will

the Christ of the newly evolving social order call the Christ of the past out of the tomb of obsolete dogmatism. We men of the transitional age must contribute our mite to this task of resurrection, so that nothing which once was really a vital element of humanity may be lost to our generation.

From the practical point of view the Catholic tradition of the origin of Christianity has the more valid historical claim over against the contentions of critical theology, but it is vitiated by the fact that it presents the events which took place on earth as transcendent, changing social phenomena into metaphysical noumena and a concrete historical development into an infallible divine-human, two-nature Church. In so far as critical theology emphasizes the actual historical foundations over against the traditional transcendental origin held by the Church, it is formally in the right, but it weakens its arguments trying to explain the rise of Christianity from an individual, instead of interpreting this or that individual or the number of individuals who have been essential to the growth of the Church, in the light of the social factors which have given them direction and influence. Critical theology, by denying the absolute character of the traditional conception of Christianity, claims this prerogative for itself by identifying Christianity with the supposed individual Christian archetype.

However, since religion is not a force of memory or of imitation but an independent spiritual life we must concede that it is only a specific religious life which turns the scientific value of historico-religious research into a religious value. However much we may study the laws of history by studying the Christ of the past, we can never learn from it how to apply this law to the social life of the present time. The Christ who is to us to-day what the Christ of the Gospel was to his time can never be an historical Christ, a Christ of yesterday, he must be born anew out of the entire content of modern life, out of the moving forces of our social culture. He can only be a human image in which all the fomenting and fermenting, upward and forward striving tendencies of modern humanity find their glorified, spiritualized and humanized expression.