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THE SUPREME TEST OF DEMOCRACY

Democracy a hundred years ago was a replevin of natural rights. The middle classes won what kings, church, and nobles had monopolized. Democracy then grew commercialized. Its members sought justice in heaven and practiced charity on earth; but they used wage-earners as parts of their factories. They were honest but not socially minded. Their virtues were largely negative or aristocratic.

The gospel of a living Christ was not impotent, however. Democracy began to feel that it had duties as well as rights, the obligation to give justice as well as to get justice.

Social morality began to inspire individual morality. The teaching of Jesus began to replace the teaching of ecclesiastics. And as the masses began in their turn to demand rights the new conscience of democracy began to admit the justice of their claims. Democracy submitted itself to a moral test.

This, however, only partially describes the situation of today. We have seen nations that had been denied democracy turning to a new absolutism—the dictatorship of the proletariat. Democracy is on trial. Having shown itself mightier than monarchies, it has now to show itself greater than its own past. The new spirit which has begun to move its best representatives must become the spirit of the democratic movement as a whole.

He who believes in a God of justice and love must believe in the ultimate outcome of the present unrest. But such faith cannot be passive. To believe in Jesus is not simply to await the decision of struggle. It is to believe in the constructive power of a democracy filled with and governed by the spirit of Jesus. Faith must be more than a conviction that one's sins have been forgiven. It must undertake to make reconciliation the order of the day. Those who

is the true rallying-ground of all who are "dedicated to the great task remaining before us," in order that their comrades who have fallen in Europe "shall not have died in vain." Let the church take to itself in the fullest way the stirring challenge that Lieutenant-Colonel John McCrea made to his fellow-soldiers just before he gave the last full measure of devotion on the field of Flanders:

Take up our quarrel with the foe!
 To you, from falling hands, we throw
 The torch. Be yours to lift it high!
 If ye break faith with us who die
 We shall not sleep, though poppies blow
 In Flanders fields.

A church that is content with standards of comfortable respectability will break faith with those who died. It will have so feeble an appeal that the rank and file of returning soldiers will have no part or lot in it. But if the church will catch up the torch and carry it farther and farther on in the same spirit in which our finest men engaged in the war, it will surely be a church that the returning soldier will want. The best soldiers of our country would then be good soldiers of Jesus Christ, and like a mighty army would move the church of God.

THE BIGGEST THING IN CHRISTIANITY

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Jesus was once daring enough to say to a group of his contemporaries, "Ye are the salt of the earth: ye are the light of the world." They were people who had joined with him in trying to live the new kind of life which he taught. This made them, in his judgment, very different from others. In becoming his genuine disciples, that is, in trying to be from day to day the sort of people he urged them to be and said they could be if they would, they had become a most distinctive and important element of human society. They had become as vital to the life of the human world as "salt" and "light" are in the physical world.

The creation of this new kind of people was the foundation of Jesus' whole

work. Everything else that he accomplished, or hoped to accomplish, for human life depended upon that. The same thing is true today. The first and most vital work of Christianity is the making of Christians. Everything else in the whole Christian program follows that and depends upon it.

Plainly, therefore, there is no question more important to the Christian church than the question, What is it that makes people Christian? What are the chief essentials of personal Christianity?

One would suppose that this inquiry must have been answered long ago. It was answered clearly and fully by Jesus himself; but that that answer is clearly understood and fully followed by

modern Christianity I am by no means so sure. My doubt on this subject is not new but, on the other hand, a year's experience with the American Army in France has clarified my opinion and deepened my conviction with regard to it, and I have come back with the desire to speak out as clearly and as forcibly as I can the conclusions that I have reached. That is what I wish to do in this article, to point out in what ways it seems to me that the church's view as to what is most essential in personal Christianity has deviated from that of Jesus, and what change is necessary in order to bring it back to the true Christian standard.

We hardly need to be reminded that at different times in the past the Christian church as a whole, or in the various communions into which it is divided, has gone seriously astray on this subject. Sometimes the observance of certain religious ceremonies, the proper use of sacraments and rituals and the like, has been so emphasized as a Christian duty as to be made in effect a prime essential of discipleship; people were not considered to be Christians at all unless they qualified in this respect; and often, if they did qualify in this respect, other matters, which ought to have been regarded as far more essential, were much neglected. Sometimes again the acceptance of certain doctrines has been exalted to a place of prime importance, and the test of personal Christianity has become, Do you believe thus and so? It was not so long ago that all but a few of the chief branches of the Christian church were making that mistake, and many of the older Christians of the present day have lived through

the period during which belief in Christian doctrine has given way to loyalty to Christian ideals of life as the chief requirement in a Christian. Not all Christians have perceived the rightfulness and necessity of thus removing belief from a primary to a subsidiary position, but an increasing number have hailed this change as a return to the true standard and practice of Jesus himself.

So far, so good; but, if we are to make sure that we are in thorough accord with Jesus in this matter, it is not enough to give first place to loyalty to Christian ideals in general. We must also make sure that in deciding which of these Christian ideals shall be given the most decisive place we again put first what Jesus put first, and relegate to a place of secondary importance whatever he treated in the same way.

It is at this point that there seems to be need of change in our modern standards of Christian discipleship.

What I am aiming at can best be made clear by pointing out that among the qualities demanded in the Christian ideal of character and life there are two sets or groups which are quite separate from one another and present a noticeable contrast. Roughly these may be described as, on the one hand, the self-centered qualities and, on the other, the outgoing qualities. The self-centered qualities are those which are usually thought of when the phrase "personal morals" is used. The most important of them, it will be generally agreed, are chastity and temperance. They represent the side of Christian character which James had in mind when he said that one of the things required in "true

religion" is to "keep oneself unspotted from the world."

What I have called the outgoing qualities of the Christian are, on the other hand, those that are of more importance to a man's fellow-men than they are to himself. They are the qualities which emphasize the duty and privilege of directing one's own life in such a way as to make it contribute to the welfare of other people. Honesty and sincerity are examples of this. By far the most important quality in this outgoing group is, however, "service" or "Christian love," for Jesus uses both terms to describe it, and it needs both to save the description from being onesided and incomplete. The kind of love that Jesus meant when he urged it as the chief duty of the Christian is not the sort of love that is satisfied with benevolent feeling, but rather the sort that completes itself in benevolent action, that is, in service. And the service which Jesus constantly insisted must be a distinguishing mark of his disciples is not like the service which we so often see in the world of business and commerce, the unintended by-product of a purely selfish enterprise, but rather service prompted by a deep desire to serve and by a profound concern for those to whom the service is rendered; in short, prompted by Christian love.

Nor was it only by the names "love" and "service" that Jesus described this great basic quality. When, for example, he insisted that his followers ought to "seek first the kingdom of God," and constantly emphasized, as he did, the Christian duty to further the interests of that kingdom in every possible way,

he was still speaking of that same "service prompted by love" to which Christians are called, only this time he was showing it in its relation to society as a whole rather than to individual people. He was stating his requirement that a man, in order to be a Christian, must make his service extend, not merely to the few people whom he can reach in a direct personal way, but also to all those, his contemporaries or men of future generations, who will benefit by anything that makes the world itself a better place to live in, that helps to make it a "Kingdom of God on earth," as Jesus described it.

Finally this great outgoing quality of the Christian appears in its most heroic form as "sacrifice," the name by which Jesus indicated what completeness and intensity of service the true Christian gives when some great need in the human life around him calls for it. Jesus, by his own example as well as by his teaching, showed what he meant by saying that a Christian will spend himself for others to the point of sacrifice.

We have before us then these two groups of Christian qualities: those, on the one hand, that concern chiefly a man's duty to himself, the sphere of personal morals, and, on the other, those that concern chiefly his duty to his fellow-men, especially the great Christian duty to give and spend one's self for the good of others. It will have been observed, no doubt, that besides these two groups there is of course a third one, to which I have not alluded, comprising those elements of the Christian life which concern especially a man's duty toward God, the most

vital and far-reaching of these, in Jesus' conception, being a spiritual fellowship with God and the doing of God's will. I have not spoken of these because it is not with regard to them that there seems to me to be a doubt in the mind of contemporary Christians as to what the true ideal of the Christian life is. About the prime necessity of these Christian fundamentals, fellowship with God and doing God's will, there is no debate. It is only when we come to the inquiry, What sort of a man will enter most deeply into God's fellowship? and, What sort of a life does God will that man should live?—in short, it is when we come to the study of those two contrasted groups of qualities which I first pointed out that we Christians have, in my judgment, set up an ideal that is different in certain respects from that of Jesus himself.

To come at once to the point, the whole thing resolves itself into a question as to the relative importance of those two groups. Is one of them more important than the other? And, if so, which of them ought to be put first? Which of them ought to count most in determining whether a man is a Christian or not, the correctness of his personal morals, or the degree to which he makes his life a life of loving and self-sacrificing service?

Let it be clearly understood that there is no question here of making a choice between the two contrasted groups of qualities, insisting on only one of them and setting the other aside as unnecessary. Both of them, of course, are necessary. Correct personal morals and a life lived for the good of

others are both essential to a complete Christian.

While, however, neither group can rightly be neglected as unnecessary, it is still possible to give to one or the other of them a more dominant influence in determining what it is in character and conduct that is most distinctively Christian. As a matter of fact this is what has always been done. Christ himself did it at the beginning. The modern church of our own time has done it. In each case one of the two groups has been put in the foreground, has been most constantly insisted upon, and has been given a leading influence in marking the difference between a Christian and any other sort of person. But which group has been treated in this way in each case? The personal-morals group or the self-sacrificing service group? My contention is that, whereas Jesus Christ very clearly gave the place of primary importance to the second, the Christian church in modern times has gone a long way toward giving it to the first.

Surely it is evident to all of us that Jesus did lay his chief emphasis upon the qualities which center in unselfish service. That was the striking and surprising thing about his teaching. That was the thing which marked such a decided difference between his ethics and the ethics current in his time. If his main interest had been in personal morals in the narrower sense (the sense in which the phrase is generally used), he never would have been hailed as the teacher of a new kind of life. He would merely have been repeating the same thing that many others had taught before him; but instead of that he set

forth that tremendous expansion of the ideal of human conduct which calls upon a man to use his life for the welfare of others rather than for himself. If the most that a man could claim to his credit was that his personal morals were irreproachable, that in itself could not be taken as proof that he was fit to be received as a disciple of Jesus. There still remained the question, whether he was able to forget himself in the interest of other people, whether he was willing to deny himself, if need be, in the way of that larger service. Only when a man had risen to that had he entered the distinctive realm of the Christlike life. If he failed in that he could not win the approval of Jesus, let his private morals be what they might; and indeed many of those whom Jesus emphatically condemned, sometimes in scathing terms, because of their meanness, their unkindness, their persistent transgression of the laws of unselfishness, were men whose private morals appear to have been above reproach.

When people who lived wholly for themselves pointed to their immaculate behavior, according to the common standard, as a proof that they were patterns of righteousness, Jesus indignantly denied their claim. Moreover, he seemed to think that people of that sort were not even promising material for the making of really good men; he had more hope that a generous-hearted sinner could be redeemed from his sin than that self-centered respectability could be cured of its selfishness. He expressed himself very emphatically and in very plain terms on this subject, for do you remember what he said to the

chief priests and elders of the Jewish people, those who were the choice exponents of current morality, but whose whole thought was centered on themselves? He said to them, "The publicans and the harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you."

Has the example of Jesus in this matter been faithfully followed by the modern church? I believe that the facts force us to answer that question, No.

In the first place, with regard to the modern people who correspond to those chief priests and elders, the men and women of our time who live selfish lives, but whose personal morals are entirely satisfactory, does the Christian church single them out as our most notorious examples of un-Christian living? On the contrary, would not such action be considered rather drastic? Does the church dismiss from its fellowship or exclude from its positions of responsibility and honor people whose only fault is that they are selfish? In theory, to be sure, we all agree that selfishness, the spirit of those who are not interested in serving other people and who decline to make any sacrifice on their behalf, is inconsistent with Christianity; that people who are controlled by that spirit are not good Christians, however exemplary their conduct in other respects may be. In practice, however, that is, in dealing with individual cases, how feeble our application of this standard often is. How often we act as though unselfishness and sacrifice were only a sort of extra adornment of Christian character instead of being the very warp and woof of it. How many people we acknowledge as Christians in good and

regular standing, although their unselfishness is barely noticeable, and you would have to watch them a long time before you found them performing any act of genuine sacrifice; and with regard to our own selves, how seldom we seriously regard ourselves as having failed in our religion, as having actually denied the faith, if the only thing that is wrong with us is that we have been more selfish than usual. Surely there is a wide gulf between this easy-going attitude of ours and the passion with which Jesus taught the Christian duty of self-sacrifice.

This tendency of the church to be slack with regard to the group of qualities which Jesus most insisted on is made the more conspicuous by the fact that with regard to the other group the church has been extremely strict. No doubt has been allowed to arise regarding the insistence of the modern church upon correct personal morals. Considered by itself, this is of course entirely to the church's credit. For the church to condone a low standard of personal morality would be to fail lamentably in its duty, to desert the leadership of the Master at a most important point. The trouble comes from neglecting that other duty, still more vital, of which we have spoken. In the words of Jesus, "This ought ye to have done, and not to have left the other undone," for the result of lowering the demand for unselfishness and sacrifice on the one hand, and keeping at full strength the demand for correct personal morals on the other, has been to make it appear that correct morality is the main thing demanded of a Christian—that that is the essence of Christianity.

It is not only that this mistaken impression is given to outsiders, but that Christians themselves become infected with it, that the tests for church membership, the rules of church discipline, the whole plan for Christian education and training, have come to be influenced by it.

That this tendency to elevate questions of personal morals to the supreme place in Christianity is both real and dangerous is nowhere more clearly proved than in the fact that from time to time groups of Christian people and even whole denominations have gone beyond the usual demands of personal morality and have added stricter rules and more minute regulations of their own, insisting that these also must be accepted as necessary to Christian discipleship or to membership in their branch of the Christian church. Thus, for example, a pledge of total abstinence from the use of alcohol and the promise to refrain from card-playing, theater-going, and smoking have sometimes been set forth as requirements for church membership.

That individual Christians should observe these restrictions for themselves, if they think they ought to, and should urge others to observe them is perfectly right and proper; but that these restrictions, or others like them, should by the church be made compulsory, should be used as a test for deciding whether a man is a Christian or not, is utterly unwarranted. It is more than that: it is a libel against Christianity. It makes men outside of Christianity, men who need Christianity, suppose that the thing Christianity is most concerned about is the enforcing of

these restrictive rules for personal behavior. It makes them forget, it makes the church itself forget, that the thing Jesus Christ was most concerned about was to produce a race of men who would be generous-hearted, unselfish, ready and eager to serve their fellow-men, even at a heavy cost to themselves; men who, in the great emergencies of life, would even be willing to die for a great cause, as Christ himself did on Calvary.

I said at the outset that it was my year's experience with the boys of the American Army in France that had caused me to make a new study of this whole subject and had led me to certain clear convictions with regard to it. Let me now explain more fully what I meant by this.

In the matter of the personal habits and behavior of the thousands of our soldiers whom I saw in France there was of course much that might have been improved. A great many of those boys in khaki, if they had talked frankly with you about it, would have told you that in order to become Christians they would have to reform at a good many points. Partly that opinion of theirs was mistaken, being based on precisely that distorted idea of Christianity to which I have been so strenuously objecting; but partly it was based on fact. There were in the behavior of many of them a good many things of the sort that a man would have to change if he became a Christian.

The more of those men I had a chance to talk to personally, and the longer I had the privilege of addressing groups of them on Sundays and week days, the less I felt drawn to give my

main attention to questions of personal conduct, even to the more important ones, and the less I felt that the best use I made of my opportunity was in my attempts to correct some moral fault or warn against some moral danger. Why did I feel that way? Because I had come to realize that for a large proportion of those boys their share in this war was nothing less than a self-dedication to a great cause, a full giving of themselves to an utterly unselfish enterprise. With some of them that had been true from the moment of enlistment. Others had reached that attitude only at a later period. In either case the main thing was that they were consciously, seriously, solemnly, risking all that they had, in order to help in achieving a great good for the world. More and more, as I discovered this fact about them, I realized that the high purpose which had thus gripped them was nothing less than the spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ, who in his day in a great cause "made the supreme sacrifice," and who called on those who would be his disciples to "deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow him."

What other fact about these soldiers of ours could compare in importance with this fact that the fire of Christ's great spirit had been kindled in their breasts? What was there that anyone could do for them to compare in importance with helping to make that spirit permanent?

As for the bearing of this experience on the standards and the work of the Christian church, I cannot help saying to myself, "Before the war these same boys were right here among us in

all our cities and villages, and yet how few of them comparatively did we succeed in reaching with the really distinctive message of Christianity, that message to which their hearts were attuned, however, for the war has brought out this response to it."

If Jesus Christ himself had been in the world to teach his own religion, are we not sure that he would have discovered the capacity of those boys for

service, for sacrifice, and that he would have deepened and broadened it in them and made it the basis for a complete regeneration of their lives, just as he did with those who came under his personal influence in Palestine so many years ago? Can there be any doubt then that his church in the world today ought to be more alert than it is to do that same thing and better organized to do it?