

As in theory, so in practice, the attempt to attain to "individual reform" on one's own part, or to lead others to "individual reform," is to face the most momentous and critical and far-reaching turning-point in life.

This is the great problem the church strives to solve in theory and in practice. The state, on the other hand, is specially concerned with what we may term "social reform," the problem of the regulation of society and social conduct through legislation or governmental action of some kind. In "social reform" one of the initial difficulties is to attempt to answer the question, "In what relation does society stand to the individual?" What is the justification for legislation? What may be accomplished by means of legislation?

Because society, in the last resort, rests upon and is made up of individuals, and as all collective decisions and actions must react upon individuals, it is very natural to conclude that in reality we have only individuals acting or being acted upon, and the term "society" is merely a confused name for referring to a number of individuals.

This all seems so natural and self-evident that we learn with a shock of surprise that it is in reality a very recent and modern view of society and of the individual.

Early civilization never recognized the individual as an individual. The individual was merged in family or tribe or clan or caste. Paradoxical as it may be to us, society preceded the individual. At least it preceded the individualistic individual, the one consciously aware of his own individuality, the one explicitly demanding for himself certain rights and opposing them to the claims of society.

Christianity did a great deal to awaken and deepen the consciousness of individuality. With Christ we have the question, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" The infinite worth of the individual is here plainly indicated.

During the middle ages the individual was largely dominated in an extraneous, external or arbitrary way by church and state. It was the downtrodden individual who arose, like a giant from his sleep, in the Reformation period, broke the secular power of imperial Rome, and disintegrated the great centralized church.

It is indeed true that new secular and religious organizations at once took the place of those which had been resisted or rejected. We shall find that the individual, again and again, with growing consciousness of power, resists various social claims, repudiates the "Divine Right of Kings," and more and more claims the "Divine Right of the People"