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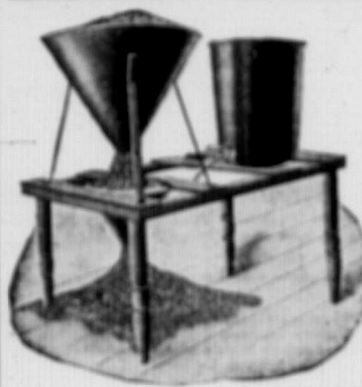
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WHEN WRITING TO ADVERTISERS PLEASE
MENTION THE GUIDE

The Community

Co-operation in Theology

By J. S. Woodsworth

Secretary of the Canadian Welfare League



J. S. Woodsworth

The editor has suggested that I tell of the experiment that is being worked out by the theological colleges in Montreal. For some years there have been four separate theological colleges the Presbyterian, the Diocesan (Anglican), the Congregational and the Wesleyan (Methodist). The numbers of students were not large. Montreal is said to have a population of some 600,000. Of these only about 100,000 are English; 100,000 are French-Canadian, 50,000 Hebrew, and the remaining 50,000 mixed—foreigners. Outside of Montreal, the English or Protestant population in Quebec is not large. So the colleges have no large constituency. They have drawn some students from the West and a number from as far east as Newfoundland. This small Protestant constituency made it difficult to maintain strong well-staffed denominational colleges. But year after year they kept struggling along. Then some of the more progressive laymen began to study the situation. Why should they be so heavily taxed to maintain inefficient institutions? They examined the various courses of study and discovered to their surprise that many of the same subjects were being taught in each of the four colleges. Why could not one man teach these subjects to twenty students rather than four men each teach them to five students?

The result was a co-operative arrangement that brought the resources of the four colleges together. Two or three professors from each college made a good staff of ten or twelve specialists. A united board administered the affairs, and supplemented the finances of the individual institutions. A joint faculty arranged the courses. Each institution retained the control of its own internal affairs and taught a few special subjects. For example, the Anglicans have special lectures on ecclesiastical architecture and the Methodists on Church discipline. But for the greater part of their work all the students meet in the same classrooms in "Divinity Hall"—the building secured by the Co-operating Board. They listen to the same lectures, read the same text books, pass the same examinations.

When they graduate will they preach a different Gospel? When they graduate will they regard one another as enemies or rivals? We think not. The common training, the personal friendships, the spirit of co-operative effort will go with them into their various "parishes" and "circuits" and "charges."

Why Not?

But if this can be done in Montreal why not in Toronto and Winnipeg and Saskatoon and Edmonton?

If the theological colleges can co-operate why cannot a group of local churches co-operate. If an Anglican professor can teach Sunday school methods to Presbyterian and Methodist students, why cannot an Anglican minister teach Presbyterian and Methodist Sunday school teachers, or why cannot one of these Sunday school teachers instruct a class of boys or girls in which there are members of various denominations? If a Methodist professor of Church History can teach Anglican and Presbyterian ministers, why should not a Methodist minister teach Anglican and Presbyterian laymen?

Yet these Montreal people have not given up their own beliefs. They have simply discovered that they held much in common and could co-operate up to a certain point. And they are co-operating up to that point. This has

not meant the giving up of anything except jealousy and misunderstanding and suspicion and exclusiveness! It has meant the gaining of much—among other things efficiency and community goodwill.

Church union between certain denominations may or may not come in the near future. But co-operation among all the denominations is essential if we are to attain efficiency and community goodwill. Few realize what a large measure of co-operation is really possible. Let me again give illustrations from conservative Montreal. Students from all the colleges attended the class in Sociology. In the course of their investigations into local conditions they had occasion to visit a number of Roman Catholic institutions and to interview various Roman Catholic priests. Much to the surprise of some of them, they were everywhere received kindly and given all possible assistance in carrying on their work. On one occasion a lecturer in Loyola Jesuit college came to Divinity Hall and gave a very stimulating lecture on the development of social work in Montreal. Again let us ask: if a Roman Catholic lecturer can help train young Protestant ministers, why might not a Roman Catholic clergyman or layman have some contribution to make to the social welfare of the local community?

At the Synagogue

Yes, we may go still further. The students in their investigation of conditions among immigrants visited the Baron de Hirsch (Jewish) Institute, and there received an invitation to attend a meeting at one of the Synagogues, where they were given a special welcome by the Rabbi. Later on their "professor"—a Methodist minister—was invited to take the pulpit at the regular Sabbath (Friday evening) service. He opened his address by reading the words of the prophet Isaiah—

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, Because he hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor.

He hath sent me to proclaim release to the captive,

And recovering of sight to the blind.

To set at liberty them that are bruised,

To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

These were the words which Jesus had read when he spake in his home synagogue at Nazareth.

These self-same words had a few days before been quoted by the Roman Catholic lecturer as he impressed upon the young Protestant ministers the need of being true to their calling as ministers to the suffering and needy. What other words could the Methodist minister quote when he was asked to give a message to the congregation of Temple Emanuel?

Here was common standing ground for Roman Catholic and Jew and Protestant. Again, what about co-operation of the various sects in the local community? We may not be able to worship in one building or even to exchange pulpits. But there are a hundred places where we can come together and there are a hundred ways in which we can exchange ideas and helpful services. If we cannot yet pray together, let us at least work together. If we work together, we may some day, to our surprise, find ourselves united in some great common aspiration in which our differences fade into insignificance. Such an aspiration as it passes upward becomes a common prayer!

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