

THE CHURCH AND THE NEW DAY

(By Rev. A. E. Mitchell, D.D.)

Ours is a new day. Have we discerned it? While this new day has broken upon us with some dark and heavy clouds in the horizon, we do not feel there is any need for hysteria, but there is cause for the church and for all who love her to be fully awake to the responsibility that is thrust upon her. In a manifesto issued last year by a group of eminent religious leaders in Great Britain, these sentences occur: "Civilization itself seems to be on the wane, the nations are filled with distrust and antipathy for each other, the classes have rarely been so antagonistic, while the relation of individual to individual has seldom been so frankly selfish. It is becoming increasingly evident that the world has taken the wrong turn, which, if persisted in, may lead to the destruction of civilization."

If this new day is to ride on to its meridian, if civilization is to be saved from collapse, then there must be created among the people a new idealism, there must be developed an education into Christian ideals, the whole basis of life must be adjusted to the moral standard sanctioned by Christ. There is needed the recreative power of the Holy Spirit to remake men, remould society and re-establish the world in righteousness and peace—and the human instrument to bring this about is the church, the body of Christ, the members of which must assume the leadership in generating the spirit of brotherhood and goodwill which alone can save civilization from its threatened doom. Where else can we find a cure for a sick world?

Helpful replies may be given by diplomacy and international law and commerce. Education, science and philosophy will have something to say, and should be heeded; but the ultimate reply will need to strike a deeper note than any of these can sound. Where can that deeper note be found if not in the religion of Jesus Christ, which alone changes the hearts of men? And the church professes to be and has the right to be the exponent of this religious truth.

Herbert Spencer says: "An organism will live just as long as it can perfectly adapt itself to its environment. At the very moment an organism begins to get out of harmony with its environment by which it has been nurtured and nourished, that moment the organism begins to die."

Christianity is an organism, and as such has enough of heaven's wisdom and dynamic to solve our problems today, but it must adjust itself through its body to present conditions.

At the outset we are confronted with two criticisms:

First—The church is very freely criticized today. There are many who say that the church has not met the situation in the past in a very satisfactory way or Christianity would have even better credentials to present before the bar of public opinion than it has.

If we admit that Christianity as taught and lived by the Carpenter of Nazareth has never been tried, or that membership in a community of true believers in which there would be neither Jew nor Greek, barbarian, Scythian, bond or free, has not been experienced or exemplified, then let us try to ascertain what is true Christianity and teach it, and, above all, let us live it.

Second—Along with the criticism of the church there is deep and widespread dissatisfaction with our existing social system. The driving power of our social and industrial system is today what it has been for years—mutual self-interest. The only power able to eradicate this is the Gospel.

Would any one argue that in presence of the social injustice everywhere manifest the church has no obligation to correct the abuses and to rectify the wrongs, or that she must

observe a complete neutrality, confining herself to the conversion of sinners and the edification of saints? Did not Jesus give his followers a social ideal—the kingdom of God—and a social law—the law of love? Surely then if the church is His body, existing in the world to express Him and to realize His will, it must exist for something more than even the conversion of sinners and the edification of saints—it must exist for the doing of His will, the establishing of His kingdom in the whole world.

For the church to remain content with the social system under which we are living means spiritual apostasy and practical disaster.

The church must either lead or lag in this new day. To cease from teaching doctrines concerning transcendental things and to devote herself to matters of social reform would be disastrous, for beneath all questions of social reconstruction lies the need for spiritual regeneration, whence comes the power to drive the programme through. This is the peculiar work of the church.

In what way, then, can the moral forces of the church, renewed by faith, be brought to bear upon the regeneration of society? By precept and example. She must teach the people the cohesive power of the Gospel in the unification of the races. This is her mission as the prophet of God, and then by her own example, in exhibiting vital brotherliness, a standard will be set as an ideal for the whole world.

Through her agency there must come about the unification of the peoples of the earth. Nations must be made to see more nearly eye to eye in matters that affect the welfare of the world. Lloyd George pins his faith on the League of Nations—so would I if that League of Nations were permeated with the Spirit of Christ. Nothing else will hold it together and constrain it to work for a common end—the peace of the world. Then there must be the unification of our heterogeneous population. Cohesion is one of our great national needs today if we are going to make a strong, united national life.

Many people have come to our shores with very crude conceptions of our laws, ideals, or institutions, and with little love for them. These must be welded into one. The church possesses the only force that can leaven these people, and if she cannot do it on her native soil, how can she hope to overtake the work when she has to transplant herself to a foreign shore?

It ill becomes members of the church to speak of those who come to us as:

Dago and Sheeney and Chink,
And call them the vipers that swarm
Up from the edge of Perdition's brink,
To hurt and dishearten and harm.
O shame! When their Roman forebears walked
Where the first of the Caesars trod;
O shame! When their Hebrew fathers talked
With Moses, and he with God;
These swarthy sons of Japhet and Shem
Gave the goblet of life's sweet drink
To the thirsty world which now gives them
Dago and Sheeney and Chink.

A study of the New Testament reveals what the church has been very slow to learn: that Jesus included all races in the circle of His thought.

The Apostles experienced this expanding fellowship that knew no limits, while in the heart and mind of every truly great religious teacher or leader there has always been the profound consciousness—more or less clearly expressed—that God hath made of one blood all nations of men who