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FAITH THROUGH TUMULTUOUS YEARS

THE Great War fell upon the spiritual structure of Western civilisation with shattering force. In the University of Toronto we had for four years a terrible experience. Students began to enlist in the autumn of 1914, the first deaths came in the spring of 1915, and before the Armistice nearly all the available men had left the University: the women at home spent themselves in active sympathy with their absent fellow-students and suffered keenly. I took an active part in inducing students to enlist, and justified myself by my profound conviction that some things are worse than death, and that a man's nobility is shown by his being willing to die for what he believes to be a cause essential for the welfare of his fellows. The issue was between the endeavor to maintain freedom and a reign of military force. Human freedom—spiritual, moral, political—is of such supreme value that, as I regarded the choice, it was incumbent on all who held freedom as a sacred possession, to be willing to die for it. This conviction was rooted in my faith that man, the moral being, has a destiny that extends far beyond the present, and that his effort on behalf of noble human causes is not lost when he himself disappears from this earthly scene. There is an eternal Divine Realm wherein the moral values of each soul, its aspirations and efforts for the true, the beautiful, and the good, are conserved and enhanced.

But war is hideous; it exists because brutal instincts have not yet been eradicated from a multitude still in the savage

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stage and whose civilisation is a thin veneer. My dread is that unless men of this nature are held in curb by more powerful freemen, they will do irretrievable damage to civilisation and to spiritual culture. What we are going through now accentuates that fear. If the rule of brute force, so manifest in many parts of the world at present, spreads far, humanity will be robbed of its slowly won cultural treasures. But inexorable though the necessity of war seems to be as a last resort, whenever it comes its results are so permanently evil that at times the remedy seems worse than the danger from the disease. We went to war to preserve freedom, as we sincerely believed, and yet there is perhaps less freedom in the civilised world than before; but, again, we ask, might we not now be in a still worse case if we had refused the issue?

As for religion, it met grievous losses through the War. Deaths and physical disabilities were tragic, but more tragic has been the disintegration of individual faith and of the foundations of society. Boys from religious homes were flung into an environment in which the restraints and ideals of their past were put to a severe test. They returned with not only different personal habits but a very realistic view of life; they had in fact been through hell on earth; and they asked, Why had they been dragged through that hell if there was a Divine Rule? Similar thoughts swayed their sweethearts and sisters at home. How could they be persuaded that this world was under the control of such a Father as Jesus proclaimed? Youth grew impatient with professional idealists. But deterioration affected also their elders. Their will for victory silenced forcefully more sensitive souls who protested against invasions of moral order by military or political necessity. That wintry atmosphere gave a set-back to religion. Church attendance began to fall off after the

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War. In the University this was so marked that before long religious services were abandoned. Yet those who conducted them presented the Christian faith just as ably after the War as they had before. It was a time of reaction. Christianity seemed unreal; the Church offered no challenge to the emotions of youth like that which they had accepted and lived through. It did not seem to them to provide the inspiration for the solution of the problems of the world to which they had returned. This phase has not yet passed away. Idealism is still at a discount; spiritual currency remains depreciated.

The war and its sequel have made us face stark realities of a world in which the passions of men over a wide area are uncontrolled by any spiritual authority; there is no assurance of respect for moral restraint. In my younger days we had come to think of our English-speaking peoples as inhabiting a region of comparative calm; we assumed that within the civilised region violent gales would be unlikely to spring up and wreck what we had built upon it. But the War revealed ugly facts, and the vindictive peace generated dangerous possibilities. Fear was intensified by the terms of victory, suspicion became more deeply rooted. Slowly the authority of international law had been created; it was a mark of being civilised that nations would agree to act on certain conventions either to prevent or to mitigate war. But in the Great War it was realised how weak are these threads, "flimsy webs that break as soon as wrought"; and ever since, nations calling themselves civilised, when they have had the power have flouted agreements or promises if they have seemed to endanger the immediate accomplishment of their purpose. It was soon evident that the League of Nations had been blunted as an instrument for doing justice, and that the nations were not civilised enough to

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arrive through discussion at solutions of national needs and ambitions.

But we cannot in self-righteousness retreat from a foreign world and find peace at home. Our domestic social order also is threatened, at times indeed disrupted, by upheavals of discontent. One-third of the people of the United States live on such narrow margins, or on such a bare physical minimum, that disease affects them disastrously, and in these areas trouble breeds. Class hatreds make unhappy communities. Law is flouted, partly because it is often thought to be inequitable; while those who have it on their side are crying out for the authorities to enforce it. Some claim that legislation if carried out by compulsion would restore confidence. But what kind of enactments are to be enforced? Will our cities be made habitable for civilised persons if the police-force is enlarged? The structure of society is straining and creaking, and men are rushing about to shore it up from outside. This frantic recourse to external constraint for the preservation of the commonwealth means that individual respect for law and order is less relied upon than it was in my earlier life. There has been a distinct recession in regard for moral authority, and justice is being interpreted in terms of legislative decrees to stabilise conditions which support our interests. As long as classes are ranged against one another on platforms of legislation effective chiefly through force, there will be no certain peace, for the community has lost its belief in the sanctity of the moral law.

One of the axioms of the pre-War age was a belief in progress. This dogma originated among the French philosophers of the eighteenth century, who assumed that mankind was capable of infinite advance towards perfection on the earth. In the placidity of the last decades of the nineteenth century the view was widespread that progress was almost an estab-

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lished law of civilisation. This opinion fed on the magnificent discoveries of science in the following years and was reinforced by the biological doctrine of evolution. Optimism was a note of the civilised world up to the War. Many thinkers then knew that the popular conception of progress was a superficial theory; and now in the chaos of civilisation the stock of the theory has tumbled to new lows. It is by no means assured that the virtues which give man his glory will strengthen in the next generation. If belief in progress is to be maintained, some more potent moral ideas will have to take hold on the minds of men than reign in them now.

The startling fact to be kept in mind is that the civilised world has advanced far further in intellectual discovery and in the application of science than in moral self-control. Men have voyaged among the stars, by heroic endurance they have penetrated into the utmost corners of the earth, they have conquered not a few of the regions in which disease had reigned; but in inducing nations to live peaceably with one another and even in persuading ordinary persons to co-operate for common human welfare, they are far short of their accomplishment in other spheres. The application of the laws of physics and chemistry has led to swift intercourse on earth, in the sky, and through the sea; the human voice is transmitted so that we can hear one another speak from vast distances, and even physical vision at points far apart is no longer a marvel. But all these inventions may be made instruments of deadlier intercourse. Man is still dangerous to himself; in spite of astounding discoveries the real man is very little changed. It is remarkable also how soon inventions, at first very startling, lose their impressiveness. We become accustomed to the greatest contrivances of the human brain and hands; their wonder wears off. We have simply learned to use a new law of nature. By contrast,

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mankind continues to admire genius and especially to revere moral heroes; the greatest human spirits, poets and prophets, who have revealed something more of the depth of the human soul and have given man vision and hope of the future, are kept in enduring remembrance. The triumphs of the human spirit are a permanent possession for the race. While the greatest inventions are soon outstripped by man's ingenuity, the spiritual heroes of the race never die, because their greatness of soul has given us imperishable moral wealth.

We are crying out for more of these leaders, and we must get them if we are to become sure once again that the idea of progress is not illusory. We have not enough persons who are competent to make right use of the stupendous power which science has put at our disposal. One marvels at man's ability to organise business, to devise an elaborate calculus of commerce leading to the amassing and transfer of material wealth; but no less at his lack of capacity to get the best results from it because of his deficiency in moral character. How often persons, clever rather than wise, fail to use well what science has placed within their control because they forget that the men who work the machines are not themselves machines. Biological science and psychology have sometimes assumed that human action can be accounted for in terms of mechanism, but in practical affairs those who hope for success must not act on this assumption. It is moral qualities such as sympathy, kindness, insight into character, which make leaders of men; human beings respond to the human touch. Yet this truth, so obvious and essential, it is much harder for mankind to assimilate and act upon than it is to acquire new knowledge. The sight of old European peoples, who have inherited rich cultures and who pride themselves on their intellectual attainment, yielding to the

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impulses of a barbaric mind has been one of the most disquieting experiences of my later life. I ask myself whether the moral gains of the race are so secure as once I thought them. The question becomes importunate when I observe the unreasonableness and immoralities in public and private life on the part of many who have had the best educational advantages which our universities could offer.

Quite near the surface even of people who have inherited the best traditions lie sinister possibilities of trouble. Savage passions slumber so lightly, awaiting only appeals to self-interest or suspicion to be aroused, that it is dangerous to allow prejudice and ignorance to get a start of reasonableness and self-control. Let us not delude ourselves into thinking that we are free from the possibility of spasms of fear and anger. Shortly before the Great War the British people were so wrought up by political strife over the Irish situation that they were on the verge of civil war, which was averted not by their calmly reasoning themselves into a sane mind, but by the stunning effect of the greater disaster of August, 1914. And this happened among circles in which education and culture had long moulded them into a belief that their outstanding characteristics were compromise and self-restraint. If we say that civil wars cannot happen among us we are living in a fool's paradise. They will happen if we allow hatred to stir up our emotions and overpower reason. Safety demands that we cultivate a reasonable frame of mind and refrain from evil suggestion in its incipient stage. There is enough fuel lying about in our domestic purlieus to feed a raging fire, if it once gets started.

This control of material power without moral self-control seems to be producing a Sadducean temper in Western civilization. The Sadducees had no belief in any future, but they left no stone unturned to get all they could for themselves in

the present; they became rich and cruel. Is there not too much ground for fearing that hope for the spiritual destiny of men is on the wane? Is not human life being held cheap? Women are urged to bear children in order that the national military forces may be maintained. If they can be drilled in such numbers with machine-like precision as to take possession of the lands of the weak, or if they can be regimented as laborers on the land or in factories for mass production, what does the disappearance of individuals matter? The creation of a physical, racial *élite* is a national ideal for which the unit may be sacrificed, and the attempt is made to persuade the individual to find compensation for the loss of his own life by absorption in some mystical, super-individual entity such as the nation or the race.

Such widely spread propaganda is the very negation of the Christian doctrine of the supreme value of each one's soul. Civilisation, based on the Christian doctrine of freedom, should be solicitous to preserve the inalienable rights in God's sight of the individual. But the sense of personal worth is threatened, and human freedom runs the risk of depreciation, even among our so-called democracies. This may happen wherever any organisation becomes so vast that those who control it have unchallengeable power over the units who compose it. Danger lurks not only in mass production by employers but in organisations for the defence of the rights of labor. In all these the individual must yield to the multitude. This subtle denial of the moral view that man is a person and must be so treated is not the least alarming of our social phenomena.

The materialistic forces of the world are brazenly reasserting themselves today as they have not done for more than a century. At the moment they are led in Europe by dictators whose genius is an untutored naturalism, men culturally

ignorant, and deaf to the imperative of the humanities. They flout the claim of the individual, of whatever race, for justice or freedom to follow his intellectual, moral, or religious convictions. They do not know pity; kindness they condemn as a sentiment of feeble folk. And the worst of the tragedy is that they are able to trick out the sub-human aims of force with such a show of idealism that youth in millions follow these dictators when they play up the lower emotions. The appeal to aggressive nationalism easily drives them to trample on the flowers of the simple virtues. Idealism—belief in the true, the beautiful, and the good—is of a gentler, a less arresting temper; it speaks with a still, small voice. In Europe, probably also in America, idealism is having a hard time. A relentless struggle is going on between humanised civilisation, that late ripening fruit of moral culture, and upsurging brutal instincts, which civilisation has been progressively holding in check. Superficially, the contest may seem to be one between Naziism, Fascism, or materialistic Communism on the one side and Democracy on the other. But it reaches down far further: the savage, primitive nature of man is in deadly wrestle with the cultural accomplishment of his higher spirit. Many in all lands are fearful of the outcome. Will the human soul, even if it prevails, limp on, crippled for generations? The present is testing severely those who cling to the true, the beautiful, and the good. What endurance have they? Especially those who have adopted the Christian view of life? Will froward materialism daunt their belief that a faithful Creator is accomplishing an essentially good purpose in the world which He has made?

I may have seemed to be too pessimistic about civilised man, and especially as to the discrepancy between his wonderful advance in knowledge and control of nature and his lagging moral character. My diagnosis, however, is not un-

like that of many thoughtful writers who realise that the moral conventions of the world are crumbling, and who wish to retain their stabilising value, though they do not know where a new authority for them is to be found. In fact, one hears on all sides almost plaintive cries for help from those who are at a loss how to stem a current that is carrying away foundations. Is it not possible to create some powerful sentiment which will sweep the current off in another direction? As for myself, the most hopeful source for moral renewal in the world that I see is the Christian faith through a purified and extended Church.

The Figure of Jesus Christ is as alive as ever. He proclaimed with power the Kingdom of God and made it effective even at the moment after it seemed to be utterly discredited on the Cross, and that too in a world more materialistic and hopeless than ours. The seeds which He sowed on the fields of Galilee have been carried on winds far to sea, have buoyantly ridden over mountainous waves age after age and have been cast upon distant shores where they have taken root and thriven. His Gospel of the Divine Rule of the loving Father of men, instead of losing vitality and dying out, has constantly burst forth in the vigor of a new spring. He never showed the slightest doubt that His Gospel for man would triumph; He refused to compromise and accept greater immediate success; to bow down and worship the Ruler of this world in return for all its kingdoms. That temptation seems to have returned to Him throughout His career. He died rather than yield. Nor was this mere obstinacy and fanaticism. It was because He knew that God rules and that it would profit a man nothing if he were to gain the whole world and lost his own soul. I believe that in this faith are hidden the richest treasures for mankind, and that, if at times men grow sceptical as to their reality and throw down their min-

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ing tools, they will take them up again and dig for inexhaustible wealth. Perhaps some of our disquietude is due to the fact that so much human riches has been already brought to the surface; we are apt to minimise its value and forget Him who was both the greatest prospector in, and has been the unwearied developer of, the soul of man. I have faith that He has opened up inexhaustible veins in the human heart. An emblem that is often used in the Gospels is light. Jesus Christ was called the Light of the world; but in the same Gospel it is said that His light intensified the darkness of the surrounding evil, though that light would continue to shine steadily and would gradually overcome the darkness. We need today some of that assurance. If the Spirit of the Founder of the Kingdom of God is kept pure, there will be no yielding to defeatism in regard to the future of man here and hereafter. It becomes us who hold this faith to trim the wick and renew the oil constantly, for undoubtedly the flame often flickers, and gusty storms seem to be extinguishing it in some lands. History knows of not a few countries in which the Gospel was once powerful, but from which it has disappeared.

The most effective agency for diffusing the light of the Gospel is the Christian Church. For two millennia that light has been kept shining, though sometimes dimly enough, in the lives of the followers of Christ who compose the invisible Church. This Church has been represented adequately in no one visible body; no organisation is sufficient to express the universal, pure spirit of Christ; just as my body is an imperfect instrument for expressing to my fellow human beings the soul that is in me. In the churches the Word of God is not spoken as clearly or as persuasively as it might be, but if it were not for them that Word might cease to be heard at all. They are the only permanent organisa-

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tions for the transmission and interpretation of the Christian religion; and if the practice of that worship were to disappear, with it would probably dissolve the conception of God on which our moral life is chiefly supported.

But I am confronted with serious and honest challenges. The historian tells me that Jesus never intended to found the Church on earth; the moralist, that churches are but a discordancy of competitive party organisations with commonplace morals and selfish aims. If God is only to be worshipped out of a clean heart and faith unfeigned, He must be absent from many altars. It is said also that the prayers for unity which are heard in ecclesiastical assemblies are no less contrary to the spirit of Jesus than conducive to a dangerous ideal. Such a unified Church would almost certainly become a supra-national government, and would impose upon men commands which they would resent, and would retard their liberty and spiritual growth.

I agree with the historian that Jesus did not intend to establish the Christian Church as we know it. This conclusion is to be drawn from the Gospels themselves. It is true that in the Gospel of Matthew there are two verses in which the Church is mentioned; but this Gospel bears more traces than either of its synoptic companions of the views held by the Jewish-Christian section of Christianity late in the second half of the first century. When the original documents which lie at the base of this Gospel—that is, our Gospel of Mark, and other sources of which the most important is an early collection of discourses used by both Matthew and Luke—are investigated it is evident that in our Matthew there are clear signs of the thought of one section of the Church which does not go back to Jesus Himself. To the historian it is obvious that Jesus lived within the framework of His contemporary world, and He seems to have

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shared its view of the future, though He told His followers that the time of the end of the present age was a secret which the Father had in His own keeping. He knew, however, that a crisis was at hand for the Jewish nation, and He taught that mankind was offered a fresh young world when He proclaimed the Kingdom of God. A new Israel was to take the place of the old, and it was to consist of those who accepted His Gospel of the Kingdom; but He warned them not to become entangled in the political tragedy confronting the Jews. His Kingdom would survive all secular disaster, and He would be with them after His death. Then His Gospel would be carried beyond the Jewish world. How far into that future He saw, it is impossible from the early records to discover. His Gospel of the Kingdom He committed to the few who had been most with Him and who understood Him best. But He did not lay down an organisation for a long future, nor inculcate legislation and precepts for members of a perpetual institution. He let His followers, guided by His Spirit, work that out as the needs of succeeding times might require. Yet from the seed which He planted has grown the organised Church, one of the most important phenomena of history.

Some see in this history a special intervention, as though the Church has been favored by preferential Divine guidance. That view, however, is based on what might be supposed ideally to have been, rather than on what has actually happened. The history of the Church has at times been ignoble, and her leaders have exhibited as unchristian conduct and policies as the world about them. The divisions of churches into national and international organisations, and into manifold sects each claiming for itself superior knowledge of the Divine will, have been an embodiment at times of anything but the spirit of the Kingdom of Jesus.

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If there was special Divine oversight of the Church why has its history been ignoble so often? Not that I do not believe that a Divine hand is guiding history. It is a great comfort to me to think of all history as providential, and when I read each morning in the paper of renewed agony over the world, my distress would be greatly intensified were I not persuaded that there is a God enthroned above all who is perfecting that which concerns not only me but my fellow men. God does not visit the earth now and then; He is in the world always reconciling it unto Himself, though, owing to varieties of human capacity or response, the brilliance of the Divine truth is greater in some institutions and persons than in others, and at some times rather than at others.

The supernatural in the Christian Church has not been in the organisation or its legislation, but in the Gospel which it has preserved, transmitted, and expounded. This Gospel is not a cold electric light that always glows with the same intensity and illumination. It is a spiritual effulgence streaming forth from the loving God through the persons whom His Spirit creates, and who become responsive media for the understanding and diffusion of the life and message of Jesus Christ. It is in their common adherence to this Gospel that the essential unity of the churches consists. In spite of all corruptions and divisions, they have transmitted the New Testament which the Church as a whole selected from all other Christian writings as containing the standards of its common faith. In these books very little is said about organisation, and there is even less legislation. There is still a sense of freedom arising from the consciousness that a living Spirit is guiding the brethren, constraining them by its impartation of the truth.

This conviction that the possession of the Gospel is the unifying element in Christianity still remains, as was re-

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markably demonstrated in the two ecumenical Christian conferences held last summer, the one on Church Life and Work, in Oxford, the other on Christian Doctrine and Church Order, in Edinburgh. These conferences were attended by delegates from all the churches of Christendom except the Church of Rome and, for political reasons, the Confessional Church of Germany; at the Edinburgh conference, however, a representative dignitary of the Roman Church was present as a sympathetic observer. There was complete unanimity in their views as to the substance of the Christian faith; indeed it is said that there was remarkable and moving accord in the expression of their consentient belief. Christendom is one in its creed as to the Fatherhood of God revealed in the historic Jesus, as to His grace in redeeming mankind and restoring us to His favor; also as to the value of the human soul, though it has been degraded by sin which is a revolt against a loving Father, and as to the promise to those who through faith rely on His mercy that they are forgiven and will enjoy the Divine presence in life eternal. That is the superb faith of the Church of Christ.

Where difference appeared in Edinburgh it was in views on Church Order. How is this faith to be made most effective? There exist two divergent opinions as to what is essential for the promotion and indeed the true understanding of the faith: the Catholic view and what, in lack of a better term, may be called the Protestant view. The former regards as essential the organisation of the Church in one undivided Body ministered to by a hierarchy of priests, who derive their authority by historical succession from Christ through the apostles; this Church not only guides sinful man with authority in the faith which he must believe for his salvation, but fortifies him by visible sacramental aids in the Divine process of regeneration. These churches emphasize

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the sacerdotal element in Christianity. That this view contains very important truth may be assumed by reason of the fact that it has prevailed throughout the centuries and still has the widest numerical support. It is in these Catholic churches that the vision of a reunited Christendom has become a constant prayer as being the realisation of the Kingdom of God on earth. In comparison with the substantiation of this dream, multitudes of faithful Christians hold all other earthly achievements as of secondary account.

The non-Catholic churches cannot be so defined as to exclude entirely the Catholic conception, nor by any negative or comprehensive term. The sacramental idea, which is to say that symbol may be made a mysterious vehicle for conveying spiritual truth, prevails strongly in many non-Catholic churches. They also long for the day when visible unity, if not uniformity, shall display to the world the triumph of the Faith. But the prophetic element, a belief in the persuasiveness of the Divine Word in the hearts of men, occupies a relatively larger place in the ministry of these churches. More stress is laid on faith as a moral effort of the individual, on his response to the Revelation of Divine love. The person must approach God Himself, love Him with all his soul, and discover by instruction, faith and prayer how the mind of Jesus is to be realised in daily life. This is a hard undertaking; but, according to the classic teaching of Protestantism, these few elect souls become the leaven of the community, though the process of transformation is slow. Protestantism does not look for sweeping conversions of communities, laying stress as it does on the moral process of assimilation to the likeness of Christ through intelligent apprehension of the Christian faith.

This Protestant conception has had much to do with the rise of the idea of freedom among Western peoples, and it has

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contributed powerfully to the spread of democracy. Today this liberalism is in eclipse, and democracy is being challenged as it has not been since it began to prevail in Western civilisation. The Protestant churches also are complaining that the influence of the Gospel which they preach is less effective than it was. That there is any causal connection between these phenomena I should hardly like to affirm, but the idea of personal freedom is a basic Protestant idea.

As a result of what seems to be a loss of moral authority, the Protestant churches are being urged by many of their impatient members to preach what is called a social Gospel. The churches are charged with having done little to mitigate intolerable conditions or to modify the economic system under which masses of the people are living in poverty. It is said that a united Church would do much to change all this. There may be some truth in this assertion; but such an institution, even if possessed of great influence, might not have the knowledge to discover, nor the wisdom to decree, just the practical remedies that would turn the earth into a paradise. The advice given by churches and by good Christians is often of little value, because it is not determined on sufficiently broad understanding of what is feasible. National leaders do not go to churches for advice in social difficulties nor for methods to uproot the evils that lead to war. For one reason there are so many divergent voices among them. While the decisions of a world-wide Church, if arrived at after long and unselfish consideration, would probably be more humane than those of most national governments, they would almost certainly be expressed with such impressiveness and be received with such respect by multitudes, that partial improvements might become stereotyped and freedom of discussion be restricted. The Church is not intended to be another earthly kingdom legislating for the social and

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political welfare of even its own members, to say nothing of the multitudes who would never acknowledge its authority.

But the function of the Church in the social order is by no means negligible. It is to be educative rather than dictatorial. It is to enlighten and release the moral energies of its members rather than to prescribe for them the solution of their problems. If the Church, beginning with the child in the family, keeps gently instilling into his mind and heart the Gospel of Jesus as it has been proclaimed from the beginning, it will produce an educated Christian whose fundamental convictions and intelligence will guide him in his active citizenship. That the voices of these educated Christians, heard in the decisions of the councils of their churches, will also be of value in promoting good legislation by the nation, may be granted. But this will come with the authority of an assembly of persons whose Christian faith directs their minds, through enlightened and unselfish intelligence, to the solution of urgent social problems. In such discussions there may be differences of opinion as to practical measures. Equally good Christians have different social habits and political affiliations which seem to them to be most expedient for themselves, possibly for others also.

Equally good persons belong to sacramental or Catholic and to prophetic churches. But they agree in their essential religion. They believe in the same God; they find in Jesus Christ the same Savior; they cherish the same hope of eternal life. With these I am in sympathy to whatever church they belong. I admit that the churches all come far short of their professions. But I know that all spiritual ideals suffer when they take shape in an institution. Universities are under constant fire for not embodying pure educational ideals; but intelligent people do not urge the closing of them on that account, nor do they even refuse to give their children a

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university education. So I adhere to the Church, in the form most suited to my heritage and temperament, as a necessary institution for the maintenance and propagation of the Christian Faith.

I am now past the limit of threescore years and ten, and can look back without disillusionment upon a life of effort. In the full tide a vigorous swimmer is confident as he breasts the flowing stream; but as I near the further shore I do not feel like casting up my arms and sinking hopeless. I should like to send back a word of cheer to other swimmers, for I do not believe that one's efforts in life will leave not a trace behind, as the strokes are soon blotted out by the succeeding waves. I do not yield to despair in regard either to myself or to my fellow mortals. We win our souls by our endurance, however long or short the crossing. Not only have I enjoyed the fulfillment of the promise for the life that now is; I am confident also in the promise of that which is to come. Reflecting beneath the canopy of the years I realise that satisfaction lies not in individual deeds, which have flashed like meteors through the dark leaving trails of light for only a few moments, but in the contemplation of the planets and the fixed stars which remain and by which one can guide one's life. I find my assurance in the steadfast truths of the moral firmament, which are mere outliers of light in the nearer reaches of an infinite spiritual universe. In meditation on these eternal verities intimations of immortality come into my soul. I perceive that I have not been losing myself as my physical nature has been spent by daily tasks, but that, though each spasm of effort has caused a portion of my energy to disintegrate, I still retain my personal integrity.

If at times my effort has stimulated others to higher purpose, I am fain to believe that what little good I have done

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may live on after me. But who would be content with the posthumous influence of deeds, which even at their best must be defective, if he could believe that he might enter into a far richer life and do something better than he has ever yet achieved? We crave the fulfillment of our hope for an eternal life. It is an old story, the frustration of human effort by death. Aeschylus puts these words into the mouth of Cassandra when she learns of the murder of Agamemnon:

O world of men, farewell! A painted show
Is all thy glory; and when life is low
The touch of a wet sponge out-blotteth all,
Oh, sadder this than any proud man's fall.¹

Men may remark upon the contrast between the power of an Agamemnon alive and the spectacle of him as he lies in his blood; but when they look upon a noble man in death they must wonder whether in reason this can be the last of him. The sense of futility caused by the death of a great moral leader is far greater than when a ruthless person, who has marshalled material forces by immoral methods, disappears. Then the steadfast faith of Jesus in the Kingdom of God, bringing life which endures through death, finds an assuring response in one's soul. That faith satisfies both reason and morality.

As one gets on in years friends pass away more quickly, and the apprehension of the loneliness of the human lot grows upon one. In youth and in middle life our activity does not allow us to recognise how each one of us lives most of his hours in his own companionship. But this consciousness makes itself felt as we become less diverted by the presence of friends of our own age, and as former interests occupy less of our time. In fact many old people become discontented because they have never learned to provide their contempla-

¹Ag. 1327ff, G. Murray.

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tive nature with engaging pursuits for the period when they will have "been separated from the hurrying years," such as meditation on spiritual things, the enjoyment of literature, or reflection on the movement of human affairs. Left to themselves they get tired of their own company. The dreariness of old age has been a stock theme ever since man has recorded his thoughts. Empty halls, however spacious, afford little happiness to those who have lost the friends who were once their companions in them; change of scene does not long satisfy those who cannot find channels in which to divert what remains of the strength which they formerly spent on business affairs. But, whether rich or poor, those are most fortunate who can mitigate their loneliness and their sense of spent days by the practice of religion. Amiel, the Swiss thinker and one of those who have felt acutely the frustration of life, wrote: "Christianity—the Oriental element in our culture—checks and counter-balances our natural tendency towards the passing, the finite, and the changeable, by fixing the mind on the contemplation of eternal things. . . . It restores to our souls, fevered with a thousand sordid desires, nobleness, gravity, and calm. Just as sleep is a bath of refreshing for our actual life, so religion is a bath of refreshing for our immortal being."¹

Man's dread of loneliness has been heightened by the hypotheses of science in respect of the vastness and the infinity of the universe, and of the comparatively brief period assigned to the existence of human beings upon the earth. This indeed is a radical change in his point of view, for man has lost his central position. In the Old Testament, indeed, the patriarchs and saints pass the years of their life as days of pilgrimage, and in the New Testament these ancients are referred to as having been pilgrims and strangers on the earth.

¹*Journal*, p. 113.

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But they believed that they were members of a divinely appointed community, and would live on in their descendants who would in time inherit the earth. The Hebrew or the early Christian, inhabiting a world which they thought was the centre of the universe and the chief object of their Lord's care, did not fear that Israel old or new would be lost in the immensities of space and time.

But we children of the modern age are overwhelmed when we try to imagine our place in the universe of the astronomers. A new conception of the infinite has been created from which we recoil baffled. Many an educated person of these last decades has made his own these words of Pascal, one of the greatest physicists: "When I consider the short duration of my life swallowed up in the eternity before and after, . . . the small space which I fill, or even can see, engulfed in the infinite immensity of spaces whereof I know nothing, and which know nothing of me, I am terrified, and wonder that I am here rather than there, for there is no reason why here rather than there, or now rather than then. Who has set me here? By whose order and design have this place and time been destined for me? . . . The eternal silence of these infinite spaces alarms me."

Then as we listen to the geologists outlining to us the history of the earth through hundreds of millions of years, we are again confounded by the thought of man's short tenure of it. Indeed it is even only a part of it that man can occupy. Daring adventurers may penetrate into the trackless regions of the poles or the forests of the equator, but those spaces are silent. How the mystery of the Antarctic, as described in Robert F. Scott's *Journal*, paralyzes the average person: "In the midst of these vast ice-solitudes and under the frowning desolation of the hills, the ship, the huts, the busy figures passing to and fro, and the various evidences of hu-

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man activity are extraordinarily impressive. How strange it all seems! For countless ages the great sombre mountains about us have loomed through the gloomy polar night with never an eye to mark their grandeur, and for countless ages the wind-swept snow has drifted over these great deserts with never a footprint to break its white surface; for one brief moment the eternal solitude is broken by a hive of human insects; for one brief moment they settle, eat, sleep, trample, and gaze, and then they must be gone, and all must be surrendered again to the desolation of the ages."

This moving meditation of the intrepid explorer, who completed his journal after his companions, who had with him reached the South pole, had perished and he himself had but a few hours to live, is, however, more impressive than the grandeur and the solitude of the nature he describes. I can think of no finer reflection on the theme than another "thought" from Pascal: "Man is but a reed, weakest in nature, but a reed which thinks. It needs not that the whole universe should arm to crush him. A vapour, a drop of water is enough to kill him. But were the universe to crush him, man would still be more noble than that which hath slain him, because he knows that he dies, and that the universe has the better of him. The universe knows nothing of this." The silent universe cannot engulf the clear-eyed courage of those who seek to comprehend it.

The Christian religion has its own confident answer to all human fears that assail mankind set in the solitudes of time and space. Jesus with supreme certitude spoke to His followers this word of comfort: "Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings? and not one of them is forgotten in the sight of God. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, ye are of more value than many sparrows. Fear not little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give

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you the Kingdom." Moreover, who can estimate the hope which has been born in the hearts of men and women of each generation for nearly two thousand years by the parables of the Lost Coin, the Lost Sheep, and the Prodigal Son? The Owner of us all values us so highly that He never ceases looking for the lost. We are not left as castaways in the infinities of a universe. The Father loves His erring children and welcomes us home. No intellectual proof can be given in demonstration of the truth of these words; but for millions of feeble mortals down the centuries Jesus has spoken with an assurance which their hearts and reason will not allow them to gainsay; and of these I am one.

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