



The Order of the Golden Age



Christian Citizenship

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Can I be a consistent Christian and keep myself apart from the great questions of the day which move our social and political life? Can I be true to Christ and the sacred charges He has entrusted me with, and not carry my Christianity into the muddy waters of State legislation and the seething tides of Social Reform? Can I obey His mandate to follow Him, and not make the principles which governed His life the principles of my citizenship in this nation?

We are all aware that there are those who would answer these questions by declaring that Christians, having been chosen out of what they are pleased to call "the world," with its concomitants of the flesh and the devil, should leave its affairs to those who are left to it, and who are still its children, who have not learned the love of God or the saving power of Christ, while they themselves live on the heights of separation and supposed holiness befitting their peculiar graces and attainments, untouched, untainted and unoffended by the putrefying sores of national or social life. If we practise this line of action we hand humanity over to those from whom Christ died to redeem it.

Others, again, would remind us that politics have *their* place, and Christianity has *its* place and that, in their opinion, these should be kept strictly separate. They draw a line of demarcation between what they call secular and sacred. In the Church and all that pertains thereto they move and have their being under one set of principles; in business and politics, under quite another. With all, on one side, God has directly to do; with all, on the other side, nothing to do. So Christianity is divorced from what constitutes by far the greater part of life, and in the spheres where Christ's spirit, Christ's guidance, Christ's love are most needed, that is, in *our relation to man*, He is ruled out of Court. *Secular* and *sacred* indeed! What God has joined together let no man put asunder.

There are others, and I trust that all of us are among them, who would reply that life is one, that its duties cover the whole sphere of being, that every one of its engagements is sacred, to be done as unto God, that there is but one service, and that is to be God's service; and whether a man be enacting a nation's laws, preaching a sermon, arranging a deal in stocks or dry goods, or breaking stones on the road, or whatever he be doing, it is to be done according to the mind of Jesus Christ, that in all things His teachings are to be applied, His commands to be obeyed. He has a mind and will about *everything*, even the smallest details of life, and *it is ours to find out what they are, and live in harmony with, and expression of them.*

If thus we view life, then our reply to the question with which I began is clear, decided, and emphatic. If I am a Christian, I cannot be consistent and stand aside from the great questions of national interest and welfare. I cannot follow Him and lay aside my obligation when it pleases me so to do. It is mine to espouse His cause, and express His mind as far as I know it in every circumstance and sphere of life, in all of life's activities. It is mine to exalt Him and labour for Him, till His kingdom be set up and He ruleth over all.

Now, throughout long centuries of sorrow and distress, labour and fear, trouble and disappointment, men have always looked forward for a Golden Age. With hungry appetites they have received and devoured the teachings of a thousand and one who have declared themselves possessed of a panacea for earth's ills; with feverish restlessness they have ever turned to the last new thing in the hope that it would prove the open

sesame to their desires; with intensest enthusiasm they have once and again followed the self-constituted leaders who have promised them an earthly paradise; but each century has put away its quiet, disappointed dead, and the promised land lies still before.

Hither and thither, in the wilderness of barren hope and fruitless efforts, humanity has wandered, expiating its sins, learning to have faith in God, being prepared that it might be called 'holiness unto the Lord,' ere it crosses its dividing Jordan and goes up to possess the country; but never was a time so full with hope as this, for now, *as never before*, the eyes of men are turning to the Christ, and their expectations are from Him. Deep in their hearts there is a reverence and loyalty to the Divine man, that at no preceding time has ever been called forth, and though they cannot define how it is so, they have a strong faith that He alone can right Earth's wrongs, and that in the application of His teachings lies the cure for our sorrows and our sins. They may not, probably do not, believe in the representation of Christ given by our churches, if we may judge by the indifference which they manifest, not to speak of the hostility which that indifference occasionally deepens to.

There is a widespread, and, I fear, a growing belief that our institutions do not adequately represent the Christ, *that we have failed to translate His spirit and carry His teachings into our practical life*, that we have narrowed the scope of His labours and sacrifice to a mechanical getting-us-off the due punishment of our sins, that we have made Him to have to do simply with *the other world*, while they hold that at least *here and now*, He has mainly to do with *this*. Whether such ideas are correct, or not, it is certain that we must face them, and sooner, or later, answer their impeachment. But though many have thus broken with the *churches*, there are few indeed who have broken with *Christ*, few indeed but believe *His way* the right way to go, *His mind* the right mind to have, *His life* the right life to live, *His rule* the best rule to be under.

But I can imagine someone declaring that for eighteen centuries Christ and his teachings have had their way. Is not this a Christian nation? Are we not a Christian people? Yet the old sorrows cease not, the old haunting questions are still unsolved, life's struggle grows more acute, life's pain still more intense? Even so, but not because Christ has reigned, but because He has *not* reigned. Is there any one bold enough to assert that to any very appreciable extent the mind of Christ is expressed in our social and political life? Dare we declare that the unspeakable evils of our social life are the expression of the mind of the Sinless? That the fierce competition of business, and the thousand meannesses and the tricks of trade are embodiments of the will of the author of the Golden Rule? That the political self-seeking, chicanery and untrustworthiness are the outcome of the government of God?

The most charitably disposed would scarce hazard the opinion that our leaders are God-chosen, God-inspired, God-filled, that in any real sense they are His mouthpiece, or that the legislation they enact is the expression of His intent and purpose. It is our boast, though we should recognise it as our shame, that our laws are based upon the laws of Rome, not upon those of God. The supposed voices of Jupiter, Bacchus and Venus breathe through them, not that of Jehovah. The laws of God were a delight to the Psalmist, and their study both a pleasure and a profit. I know of none to whom *our laws* can be said to be such, unless to those who undertake to interpret them to the advantage of him whose pocket is the deepest and best filled.

Paul declared that God's laws to Israel were the guide to lead men to Christ. Who can imagine even in his wildest dreams that there is any such motive or spirit in our legislation? No! I am not confounding things that differ. The legislation of the Nation and the laws of God *ought to be one and the same thing*, a pleasure and a profit to the devout soul, a guide-post to Christ for the seeking heart. Why, even when a man appeals for justice to our laws, it is by no means certain that justice shall be done. Too often the verdict is to him whose wealth enables him to secure the pleading of the most skilled and technical knowledge of the law, irrespective of the equity of his suit, and so it comes to pass that the robber of tens of thousands builds his castle on the Rhine, and the robber of a loaf of bread languishes in prison. Nor does it need a very deep knowledge to comprehend that our legislation is for the most part passed, not in the interests of man, "the sum and crown of things," but of property.

No party government which will take into the scope of its vision and operations, the moral and social welfare of the whole is possible. Party government must always legislate for its own, irrespective of the wishes and wills of others whom it does not represent. The irresponsible monarch is at least supposed to rule in the interests of all, but, to-day, we have no king but the majority, and we forget that the rule of the majority may be as great a tyranny as that of Nero or the Czar. The principles that fight for supremacy to-day are the same as those that engaged in conflicts centuries ago. The divine right of kings to rule has simply transferred its claim to the divine right of property to govern; the right of the Pope to assume a dictatorship has become the claim simply of accumulated millions. The will of the people has not been incorporated in legislation, or even heeded, though loud-voiced profession has again and again been made, but, on the contrary, the people's will

has been "cheated, obstructed, and defeated almost without exception," and the so-called "mandate of the people" ignored and set aside, until deep in our hearts there is hidden the belief that our boasted democracy is an utter failure, at least as we have translated it, and the bulk of its legislating a silly farce, or worse.

That legislation which does not express the mind of God as to the ruling of a nation, *which does not run in harmony with His great Law of Love and the Golden Rule*, can result, sooner or later, in but one thing, and that is Anarchy.

No! Christ has not reigned! He has had no chance. We have dethroned Him, and set up in His place our own man-devised institutions, our own selfish aims, our own wills, our own passions, our own carnal ease, comfort and pleasure, and then some who have feebly entertained the idea that we are a Christian nation have wondered how He could have made such mistakes in governing us. Believe me, the bulk of our troubles comes not from without, but from within, and are due to the fact that we have attempted, not without success, a disseverance between God and the national life and laws.

Do not say that Christianity has nothing to do with these things. It has *everything* to do with them. Christ, says some one, was no politician. I say *He was*, and the Sermon on the Mount is the political Magna Charta of the world. He came to fulfil the Law. He took up the teachings of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the prophets—and they were all much more politicians than preachers—and carried them to their completion; and it is not the dream of a visionary, or the meaningless phrase of a mystic to say that the one and the only hope for the world is to have the political teachings of Jesus Christ woven into its legislation, *Nothing* to do with it, forsooth. It has *everything* to do with it!

A Nation's politics are but the living expression of a Nation's faith. If its politics are atheistic, it is because its faith is atheistic, if God be divorced from its laws, then, though its churches be thronged, its heart is estranged from Him. Christianity must become political, and must insist on the mind of Christ being the main factor in its halls of Legislature: To save its life it must apparently lose its life for Christ's sake and the Gospel's. We insist on the spiritual nature of the life in Christ, and yet it must become, contradictory as it may seem, both political and social. Strive to keep only the spiritual life, and it will die in sentimentality and vague vapourings. Pour it into the channels of the Nation's life, send its vitality thrilling along the currents of the Nation's thought, and we shall save it unto life eternal.

We often talk of maintaining the spiritual character, of preserving the spiritual force, of deepening the spiritual life. We shall accomplish these ends in no other ways. "He that saveth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life shall save it" and all the more because it is a spiritual life. For centuries Independency has protested against a State Church. Have we recognised fully that when that desirable end is attained, our work is not finished but only begun? We can tolerate no earthly power or institution to lord it over God's heritage. Christ, and He alone, is the Church's head. Are we prepared to pay as dear a price to wage as fierce a warfare, to declare that Christ and He alone is the *Nation's* head?

Again, do we sufficiently recognise what the Nations owe politically to great religious movements? Do we recognise that the unchartered liberties of these Australian lands were voiced in the thunderings of Luther, and fought for by Cromwell and his Ironsides? That to Wesley and Whitfield and the religious revivals of years gone by, we are indebted for much of what we hold so dear to day? *Nothing* to do with it! Thank God it has had *something* to do with it in days that are gone, and will have much more to do with it in the immediate future. That reformation is needed all admit, that we stand on the brink of it, most of us believe, and that reformation when it comes is one that will have to be founded, not on the shifting sands of human idea and of human expediency, but on immovable principles, sure, steadfast and enduring; and I know of nowhere to look for those principles but to the teachings of Jesus Christ, and have no hope for improvement till they become the basis of the Nation's statutes. Now that can never be till our legislators are men who are skilled in the counsels of God, men who in all manliness will stand first of all to represent Christ, *to translate the mind and will of God for us*. It were folly to think that God had a will and mind about the *ancient Jews* and has none about *us*, that He was willing and ready to guide *their* policy and direct *their* legislation, but leaves *us*, with the thousand fold more complex problems of these later times, to our own devices, till in the whirlpool of conflicting interests we find our Nation's grave.

It has become our bounden duty, that we who profess to believe in and obey God, we who declare that Christ is our Master and all we are brethren, shall find to represent us men who can ascend our Sinais and talk with God for us face to face, and from the holy places of this communion bring back to us the knowledge of the mind and will of God, who shall follow the guiding of that unseen Spirit whose presence shall be as a sheltering pillar of cloud in the scorching heat of the day of fierce opposition and controversy, and as a pillar of fire in the dark night of difficulty and doubt. "Thy kingdom come." Let us see to it that we pray that prayer

at the polling booth, and especially at the political meeting where leaders are chosen, for so to pray and then to fulfil the duties of our citizenship without reference to Christ, or to leave them unfulfilled, savours of hypocrisy, to say the least.

But not only in our political life do we need the rule and guidance, the government of God, but even more so perhaps in our *social life*. Look at our armies of unemployed. Tramp, tramp, tramp from the sunrise to the sunset in every so-called civilised land, an ever increasing host. Look at our social battles, the strikes for higher or against reduced remuneration. Look at our sweaters' dens where hope and faith die in the fierce struggle to keep body and soul together. Look at the sorrows of our famished poor whose whole existence is the prayer "Give us this day our daily bread." Look at the drink traffic battenning on its victims; the gambling fever, slaying every noble impulse, every first aspiration of manhood, creeping into our Churches, sending its deadly virus along the healthiest veins of our life; the unmentionable social evil, and then let us answer whether socially Christ reigns, or whether we have need once again of the Man with the whip of small cords who taught us "*Do unto others as ye would that they should do to you.*"

Look at the fierce spirit of competition that rules to-day in every mark of industry and every centre of life. Importer against importer, producer against producer, toiler against toiler, institution against institution, Church even against Church. Veritably a world of Ishmaelites, with our hand against every man's and every man's against us. Self-interest everywhere, in every other man a rival if not a foe, until it would seem that, practically at least, we endorse the assertion that the only rights of men are those of the tiger. The spoils to the strong, woe to the vanquished.

Long years ago, Frederick Dennison Maurice declared that the idea that Competition is the rule of life is a lie, and it is time that the world was taught that it is a lie. It is entirely anti-Christian, a bitter and a deadly foe to the teachings and practices of Jesus Christ. Wherever it is entertained, true Christianity languishes and dies, faith wanes, and communion between God and man ceases. For how can I have intercourse with God when my heart and brain are busy scheming how to get the better of my brother? And not only is this spirit of competition the Upas tree to true religion, but it is the Upas tree which brings death to all that is best and worth most in life.

It is self and self interest which lie at the root of this bitter strife, and they are essentially against our fellows and against God. The first man that asserted the right of self interest as the law of life, was Cain when he slew his brother Abel. As things are, we live under a system of organised selfishness. Men have intuitively recognised that this is diametrically opposed to the spirit and teachings of Christ, and being unwilling to act a double part, professing the unselfishness and sacrifice of Christ on the Sunday, and acting the selfishness and self-interest of the world the other six days of the week, they have broken with the churches, and I am not surprised to find so comparatively few at our religious gatherings. Driven by the tyranny of so hard a task-master what else could they do.

We have lived too long under the spirit of "every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost." We need the spirit which is that of Christ, "Every man for his fellow and God for us all." The eyes of men have long been strained, looking for the time of industrial peace and social brotherhood. It was the dream of Moses and Plato, of Milton, and of many another noble soul, until the hope has almost grown faint with age. But we are upon the verge of all important changes, old things are passing away, all things are becoming new; old forms of thought are being laid aside like worn-out garments, and the soul of them takes to itself new clothing; old relationships can no longer bear the strain of the new times, and the old wine-skins are being laid aside, having fulfilled their part, while the new wine of Human Brotherhood needs new wine-skins in the shape of new relations to contain it.

These changes must come, but whether they come in accordance with the spirit of Jesus Christ, is for us to decide. Carry our Christianity into the State, insist upon the controlling power of God being recognised, and "peacefully as the day dawn comes down when night is past," the whole world will sweep into its newness of life. Let us oppose, or stand apart—that will not stop the oncoming of the better time, but it may then come with storm and tempest, breaking all bounds, carrying everything before it, spreading destruction and death, and in that cyclone of change organised Christianity may suffer overthrow, and our churches become as wrecks stranded on the barren rocks, and official religion be cast as chaff to drift down the winds of public ridicule and reprobation, or borne as debris on the flood waters of revolution.

We have to preach the gospel. *What is the gospel?* "The poor have the gospel preached unto them." Was it the good news that there would be a time of ease and luxury in the hereafter to compensate for the privations, distress, hunger, cold and thirst in this? No. But the good news of a mighty brotherhood wherein the strong would bear the burdens of the weak, wherein no man would be left lonely and isolated to fight the cruel battle

of competitive life, but where each and all would stand bravely together, and neither difference or distinction be known.

The building of beautiful and costly edifices, the lengthening of our Church rolls, the founding of religious and denominational institutions *are not necessarily the bringing in of the Kingdom of Christ*, and are not to be mistaken for it. We are too busy building up *our own Churches* forgetful that no *Church* has anymore right to seek *its own* than any *individual* has. We are too busy seeking our own salvation, and caring for our own souls, forgetful that it was no more incumbent on *Christ* to give Himself for the world's salvation than it is for *us* to do so. We cannot be saved *without becoming Saviours* in so far as our powers and opportunities permit, and to the same degree, the work of Christ is the work delegated to us.

Nothing is more indicative of our lack of faith— our unfaith one has called it—in Christ, than the way in which we fear to apply His teachings to our social and political life. We profess to trust Him to keep our souls out of hell, and bring us safe to Heaven, as if that were the first aim in Christ's great sacrifice, instead of *that we should be like Him*; but we give Him no voice in our law-making, we follow no direction of His in our social relations.

We are religious. So were the priests and pharisees who rejected and crucified Christ. We are religious, we have our altars, if not to an unknown God, to a God whom we have taken very little pains to know, but it is time that we learnt His will regarding this people and that it became as clear to us all as His mind regarding Israel was, that His legislation for *this Nation* be accepted as was His legislation for *the Jews*, and that we drop discussing only what He said to men and women dead thousands of years ago, and seek to learn *what He has to say to us to-day*.

We need a living inspiration that we too may say " Thus, saith the Lord." It may be ours if we are but willing to fulfil the obligations of its reception. The guidance, power and illumination of the Holy Ghost are *for us*. No shadows need fall across the path that we are called to tread, no doubt need exist as to the duties that we are to perform, and no weakness need stay us in the accomplishment of God's purposes. Forward then in His name!

" He has sounded out the trumpet which shall never call retreat,

" He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment seat,

"Oh be swift my .soul to answer Him, be jubilant my feet,

" For God is marching on."

Once again with the seer of Patmos we lift our eyes and behold a vision. A world wherein there is perfect unity between the life of the people and the life of God, wherein nor war nor strife is found, wherein are Brotherhood and Love, wherein God reigns. " And I saw as it were a new earth wherein dwelleth Righteousness." Brothers, it comes ! Our feet are touching the waters of our dividing Jordan! Forward ye who bear the Ark of the Lord !

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