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Christendom Observes a Birthday

Christendom has observed a thousand of these birthdays, and still calls upon us in the name of sweet, cold charity to remember the poor, particularly at this season. It continues to call upon us to observe the personal virtues of love and forgiveness, kindness and honesty, but it has not yet asked us to apply the Christian philosophy to the social laws that regulate our economic life.

The December Bulletin of The Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America prints part of an address by Professor Hough of Drew Theological Seminary. The first paragraph reads: "From the beginning, Christianity has been changing men's ways of living and working. It was a social conscience long before anyone had coined the phrase 'social gospel.' From the very first century of its life it has put honesty where there had been dishonesty, justice where there had been injustice, and fraternity where there had been the ugly contention of selfish wills."

In another article, Edward T. Root refers to *The Springfield Survey*, published in 1926 by Dr. H. Paul Douglas. "That study of a typical well-churched city yielded such startling findings as these: 'Protestantism is geographically unbalanced; its affinities are shamefully with the more prosperous part of the population; it has run away from the poor and needy.' It has been 'characterized by competition between denominations and between churches of the same communion.' The best that can be said is that 'Protestantism has a fighting chance.'"

These paragraphs are like Mark Twains two, feeble lamps, you have to have one to see the other one by. This article is not intended as an attack on the Christian church, but does wish to show, if possible, how the observance of God's laws by Christian or Mohammedan, Jew or Gentile, would mean a fundamental change for the better in "men's ways of living and working." Such a change would come more quickly if the church would balance itself a little better geographically;

if its affinities were not "so shamefully with the more prosperous part of the population."

Charity is not a Christian virtue; it is a badge of shame. It brands any civilization as a failure in its primary and most important functions of social life. It is a mark of stupidity. It is a reflection on the wisdom and justice of God, Himself. Every prayer that appeals to God for help in this hour of need is virtually an attempt to lay at His door the blame for our own folly. We say, in effect: "You got us into this mess. Now get us out."

In the hour of adversity, some people are won't to find comfort in the thought, "The Lord will provide." Provide what? Do they expect God to stop directing the course of the Milky Way, and we know not how many other and greater groups of heavenly bodies, and come into their kitchens to bake coffee cakes or slice onions for the soup? All over the world, Christians are down on their knees asking God to help them because they are hungry and cold!

Did the Lord ever provide anything for humanity? Why, certainly He did. He provided a beautiful and a fruitful world, controlled and regulated by systematic and inexorable laws. There are the fertile fields, warmed by the sun, refreshed by rains. There are the tiny seeds, designed to respond to these influences, to draw nourishment from the soil and to grow into plants bearing fruits that may be utilized for food or spun into thread for cloth, and trees that may be hewn into timber for buildings. There are mighty streams forming natural highways for commerce, waterfalls providing power to turn the wheels of industry. Nor has the esthetic side of man's character been left to wither in a barren land. There is beauty everywhere, in the tiniest floweret and in the mightiest snow-capped peaks and shadowy gorges.

Has the Lord provided? He has provided abundantly, but He has furnished the materials, not the finished articles. He has not supplied

hats nor coats nor pianos nor bran muffins, but He has given us the wool and cotton and wood and steel and grain and all that we need to make these things. To live in comfort and contentment, we need many things from books and radios to dainty food and mechanical ice boxes, and not one of the articles requires a substance that God has not provided. He asks but one price from each and everyone of us—work. In order that we may work efficiently, He has blessed us with two hands that can grasp and hold tools and materials. God not only has provided every man on earth with a job, but He demands that every man labor if he would eat, if he would be clothed and housed.

It is men who rob each other of the opportunity to labor by monopolizing the materials God put here for all to use. When some men insist upon living, not by their own labor, but by the labor of others, it is hardly fair to blame God for the depression, not quite good sportsmanship to ask Him to help us to find a job. If men haven't enough sense to make what they need and want out of the materials He has provided, what can He do about it? Why does the Christian church confine itself to reprimanding us for our peccadilloes, for personal misdemeanors of little importance, yet remain strangely silent when men rob each other of the very means of life itself? Is it because "its affinities are shamefully with the more prosperous part of the population"?

Until men learn to share the earth, itself, it will do little good to share work or the products of labor. Until men are willing to recognize the equal rights of all to the use of the earth, they will make little progress in the direction of peace and prosperity. Some fields are more fertile and will yield more fruit for the same amount of labor than will others; some city lots are so situated that a greater return in manufacturing or merchandizing may be had for the same amount of labor from some than from others; some residence lots are nearer than others to the schools and libraries and parks. Obviously, we cannot all occupy the choice bits of the earth's surface, and when any individual settles on a particular plot of ground, whether farm acreage or town lot, it means that all the rest of the world must keep off. Now, how is he going to compensate all other individuals whose rights to the use of that land are equal to his own?

Part of the present selling price of land is not its real value, but is due to speculation. Individuals are allowed to hold land out of use until the demand sends the price up out of all proportion to its real worth. With this speculation abolished, we could arrive at a true valuation. No one can say now just how much difference there would be. The important thing is to make it possible for the whole community to share in

this land value, that is, to make it possible for every individual to get some of the benefit attaching to every lot or every acre.

There seems to be only one feasible way of doing this. How much is it worth to an individual to occupy a certain lot, either for residence or for business? Let the individual pay that amount, that value, into the public treasury. It can then be used to defray the expense of government, to pay for schools and parks and playgrounds and the various services of government that are enjoyed by the whole community. In this way, every individual could share in the benefits of all the valuable land that he did *not* occupy, but to which he had as much right as anybody else.

Only by sharing the earth can any country or race or civilization hope to solve its unemployment problem or its tax problem or any other social problem.

Only by sharing the earth can the brotherhood of man become a reality, and the doctrines of Christ's philosophy the basic principles of our social laws and conduct.

Christendom observes a birthday—with many little empty stockings. How is the church going to explain that to God? If Christianity came into the world to "put honesty where there had been dishonesty, justice where there had been injustice, and fraternity where there had been the ugly contention of selfish wills," why does it side always with special interests, why does it countenance the greatest injustice that has ever cursed humanity, why is it persistently and consistently silent regarding man's possession and use of the very earth itself which was created by God?

And God said let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

The story says that God gave "man", not a few men, nor certain groups of men, but all mankind, dominion over the earth. Why does Christianity give its consent to this trading, speculating, gambling, in what is the common heritage of all? Is it because not only protestantism, but all Christianity is "geographically unbalanced"?

ON HOUNSLOW HEATH

Here is an interesting paragraph from the *Commonweal*, London. "Heath School, Martindale Road, stands upon a portion of the famed Hounslow Heath, where Claud DuVal, the dashing highwayman, danced a minuet with a fair passenger in the coach he had held up that he might levy taxation in accordance with what he judged from appearance was ability to pay. Claude was compulsorily retired from active con-

duct of the business, which now is carried on as a going concern by his successors, the Land Lords."

Apparently, the public protested against Mr. Claude DuVal because he insisted upon taking money and "valuables" without giving anything in return. Such transactions we usually call robbery or theft or larceny. How long will it be before the public will protest against the system that allows landowners to take money or products of labor without giving anything in return?

NONE SO BLIND

In an editorial, the Los Angeles Times made this statement: "The scientist and inventor dominate the forces of nature only when they never violate nature's laws; and there are fundamental moral and social laws, many of them uncodified, that can no more be violated by a people with impunity than the laws of physics."

There are two reasons why the scientist and inventor have so little trouble with the laws of physics while the economist and statesman—and the Los Angeles Times—find the moral and social laws beyond their comprehension.

The punishment that follows the breaking of the laws of physics is much more immediate. Even a very small child can learn from bumping its head or burning its fingers. In the second place, the greed of man never goes so far as to make him deny the law of gravity or the circulation of the blood, the curvature of the earth or the germination of grass seed. To deny these things would not give a man any advantage over his fellows. In fact it would put him at a disadvantage. On the other hand, to ignore the law of rent which governs our social welfare, is to keep men in ignorance of the greatest injustice ever inflicted on mankind, the denial of equal opportunity to use the earth. The professional economists cannot and do not deny this law, they merely ignore it and help others to ignore it. Whenever the breaking of a natural law will confer a privilege upon a few, that law will be broken.

Punishment will follow this economic law breaking just as surely as it does in the physical world, but much more slowly, so slowly that the majority of people are unable to associate cause and effect and we have the sorry spectacle of many thinking men and women, sincere educators and earnest statesmen utterly bewildered by this present economic disaster which is no more of a mystery than the eclipse of the moon. But as long as wealth is to be got for nothing by ignoring this greatest and most fundamental of all economic laws, you may rest assured it will be ignored by the economist, the statesman—and the Los Angeles Times. None so blind as those who will not see!

BOUND AND GAGGED

Fortune for September 1931 has this report to make of Trinity Church. "Trinity's million-dollar net income comes chiefly from its land, of course, and real estate accounts for all but a couple of million of Trinity's \$17,000,000 assets. . . . Trinity doesn't like to sell its land, but a few years ago had to sell some to the federal government which refused to lease the land. . . . Trinity, disappointed, had to sell, but promptly invested the purchase price in a couple of uptown corners which give a much better yield than the government's site did."

It is not difficult to understand why Trinity objects to the philosophy of Christ. In his *Autobiography*, Lincoln Stephens tells of an attempt to clean up the tenement district in New York City a few years ago. The movement met with strenuous opposition from Trinity Church, which owned some of the land on which the dilapidated and unsanitary tenements stood. No, it would be very bad business for Trinity Church to put into practice the philosophy of Jesus Christ.

HIDDEN VALUABLES

Voice of excited and indignant woman: "Why, Officer, you don't mean to tell me that a woman in this city can have over two thousand dollars worth of jewelry stolen and the police won't do a thing to help her? Why, nearly half that jewelry belonged to my mother and grandmother!"

Officer: "Madam, we have referred this matter to the assessor's office and find that neither you nor your mother nor your grandmother have ever paid taxes on any jewelry whatever. So far as this city is concerned, that jewelry never existed. There is nothing to prevent your employing a private detective agency to help you, but according to the new law that went into effect the first of August, the city police department can make no move whatever to recover stolen property on which taxes have never been paid. The assessors have always known that you ladies, and the men, too, were holding out on him. You deny the possession of any jewelry when the assessor comes around, but are ready enough to call for the police when a burglar drops in. You can see how much money we can save the tax payers if we don't have to chase after stolen property that never appeared on the assessor's books. Good afternoon, madam."

Government is taxing checks when people think it ought to be checking taxes.—*Weston Leader*.

The trouble is that men who drink like a fish don't drink what a fish drinks.—*Duluth News-Tribune*.

Insull was one who said public ownership wouldn't work because men are such grafters.—*Bellingham (Wash.) Herald*.

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EDITORS

STOUGHTON COOLEY - - - - NORMA COOLEY

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TOWERS OF BABEL

It is natural that such an unhappy condition as now exists in the world should prompt many people to search for a remedy. Many are the schemes that have already been proposed, and some will receive enough publicity to attract the attention of the general public. How can the average man or woman tell which ones deserve careful study and consideration.

The science of the production and distribution of wealth is based on natural law—or it wouldn't be a science. Whenever men set out to cure economic ills by methods that give no consideration whatever to these laws, we may know that they are not worthy of serious attention.

The public has been asked recently to consider the findings and proposals of a group of men at Columbia University. These men, or some of them at least, are engineers. Their professional work of bridge building or building-construction cannot be performed unless they take into consideration the laws of physics. Their structures would not stand. Have they given the same recognition to the natural laws that govern the body politic, for better or for worse?

These well-intentioned gentlemen have spent ten years accumulating evidence to show that modern machines and inventions have put us on the road to ruin. Why, we can make more bricks in five minutes than the Children of Israel could in five weeks. What in the world are houseless folk to do? If we are not careful, the bakeries will be turning out loaves of bread so fast they'll be running in the gutters—and we'll all starve to death!

It is obvious that these would-be economists have made one mistake in diagnosing our ills. They have fallen into the trap of supposing that men want work. They don't. Nobody wants work. Whenever men work because they "love their work", that expenditure of energy has ceased to be work and has become play. Men don't want work—they want what work produces. They want food and clothes and houses and automobiles and thousands of things that God didn't have time to make and can come into existence only by the exertion of human energy.

Men want these things, but they will always take the shortest cut to get them. They will

never walk a mile to get a stone for the foundation of a house when walking ten feet will take them to one just as good. They will never sit down and laboriously grind corn in a hand mortar when a nearby stream will turn a couple of mill stones and produce corn meal in shorter time and with less energy. Labor saving machinery always has and always will have an important place in our lives because we insist on taking the path of least resistance. Anyone who holds up a picture of a world without drudgery and expects us to cry about it, is going to be disappointed.

If these gentlemen want to blame machinery and invention for our troubles, they must explain the poverty and starvation in China and India where there is almost no labor saving machinery compared with the United States. And if they attempt such an explanation, they will be forced to find a common cause for the poverty here and abroad.

In his book, *The Science of Political Economy*, Henry George says: "The reason of the constantly increasing confusion of the scholastic political economy has lain in the failure of the so-called science to define its subject-matter or subject noun. Statistics cannot aid us in the search for a thing until we know what it is we want to find. It is the Tower of Babel over again. Men who attempt to develop a science of the production and distribution of wealth without first deciding what they mean by wealth cannot understand each other or even understand themselves."

Any scheme that would aid in the production and distribution of wealth must distinguish clearly between the products of labor and the "passive factor" in production, land, and it must not confuse labor and land, nor labor and labor's products. Does technocracy make these distinctions? Does it recognize rent and the law of rent and its significance in the production of wealth? Does technocracy make clear the fact that taxation is not merely a method of raising revenue, but is the great social adjuster, adjusting the affairs of individuals to each other and to the social group as a whole? Does it propose to work toward a condition of economic freedom where a man can choose between working for himself and working for another?

The engineers of Columbia have been attacked by business on the ground that their statistics are inaccurate, the number of bricks that can be made in a day compared with the brick-making fifty years ago isn't quite correct. These engineers might as well take their laboriously collected statistics and dump them in the Hudson River. As a key to the cure for our economic ills, they are worth just nothing at all.

"Statistics cannot aid us in the search for a thing until we know what it is we want to find."