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The Influence of Institutional Christianity upon Secular Power *

WILLIAM STUART NELSON

ROBERT W. ROOT, correspondent for the Church Committee on Overseas Relief and Reconstruction, recently asked a French Protestant pastor on a train journey from Geneva to Paris whether he thought Protestantism in France was proving equal to the situation. The pastor answered that he did not and that in his opinion the struggle of Christianization was being overwhelmed by the evil of the world. To this opinion it is possible to add highly pessimistic American judgments, lay and clerical, on the position of institutional Christianity in the face of secular power drives. Whatever we may think of these judgments, we must concede that the church in setting out upon its mission of redemption, contracted a warfare with antagonists which in the beginning were formidable and which with the passing of the centuries have kept pace in stubborn resistance with the ever-increasing power and complexity of secular life.

I

Greatest, perhaps, among the secular forces which institutional Christianity has faced is entrenched economic power. Both in times of want and in times of plenty, it has fostered a view calculated to give it a sense of theoretical security. The economy of scarcity has bred the conception that inequality of possessions and in social position and privilege is natural and is fundamentally beneficial to all, so that this economy has been able to call custom and tradition as its witnesses. It has begotten the notion that economic and social equality are possible only through the loss of a leisure class and the impoverishment of higher cultural life.

The economy of abundance has given birth to the conception of society as a mere aggregate of private individuals with private in-

*This article was originally prepared for the Seventh Conference on Science, Philosophy and Religion, held at the University of Chicago on September 9, 10 and 11, 1946, and will be included in the seventh symposium published by the Conference.
terests and ends; to the exaltation of acquisition as over against use and the adoption of goods acquired as a means not only to material comfort but to social control; to the protection by law of vested interests often hurtful to basic human good; to the concept of economic life as above moral criteria; to a ruthlessness in the human spirit born of the struggle for profits.

The validity of the economic order is derived from its ministry to society's basic needs and most driving desires. Its danger lies in the control of great power by relatively few. Corporations, for example, have proved a constant menace to the common good in their tendency to become soulless and lawless. They have used their immense power to shackle labor, to stifle competition, to cheat the government. They have introduced the evils of the impersonal element over one of the widest ranges in human relationships. Slavery in any form is abominably wicked, but there is a difference between the direct relationship of slave to master and that of slave to master through overseers. The curve of oppression in landlordism rises markedly with absentee ownership and agent management. Dividend checks tell no tales, bear no complaints, have no misery written on their faces. Dividend receivers may not be callous but are likely to be ignorant of the maltreatment they help to perpetuate and when informed are liable never to feel the full meaning of what they do. Heads of great corporations deal with liabilities and assets, profits and losses, figures in a book, and not with human beings, especially abused human beings. Statistics cannot portray misery in its full ugliness; to be understood it must be seen.

There is general familiarity with the extent and the evils of interlocking directorates. Figures on the distribution of the whole family income in the United States in 1935-36 indicate that 10 per cent of all the families in the United States received less than $410 a year income. These families received only 2 per cent of the entire family income of the country. That is, the poorest 10 per cent of the families received 2 per cent of the income. On the other hand, the richest 10 per cent of the families in America received 36 per cent of the total family income. The total income received by the
richest 10 per cent was approximately the same as the total amount received by the lower two-thirds of American families. The following is the description by President Franklin D. Roosevelt (given in his April 29, 1938, message to Congress on monopoly) of the distribution of dividends from stock as reported for 1929: It is "as if, out of every 300 persons in our population, one person received 78 cents out of every dollar of corporate dividends, while the other 299 persons divided up the other 22 between them." The problem is seen at a glance in the contrast between one man's salary of $500,000 and that of a shore-cropper's entire family of $200.

This is the type of economy that resists social change and bitterly opposes liberalism in government or industry. This is the type of economy that encourages such substitutes for justice as philanthropy, support of petty reforms, devotion to special causes. This is the type of economy that degrades men into economic animals.

One of the most sinister aspects of our economic order is the people's resignation to evils which they are led to believe are inevitable. Even the thoughtful feel like Plato's philosopher in a den of wild beasts who holds his peace, seeking only to live his life untouched by injustice until he can make his quiet departure. Another tragic result is class war in which men, powerless as individuals, organize to oppose power with power. Thus the family of the people is rent into opposing factions, bargaining, fighting, hating.

Plato's philosopher anticipated the problem of the church vis à vis political power when he admitted: "Now those who have become members of this small band and have tasted the sweetness and blessedness of their prize can all discern the madness of the many and the almost universal rottenness in all political actions." Political actions are not always rotten but the development in political power has unquestionably been accompanied by a corresponding menace to the well-being of the people. Accounting for this in part is the fact stated by William Ernest Hocking that "the essence of the state is

power and not reason." Controversies for which Christian reason would propose adjudication statesmen declare nonjusticiable. When two ways of life clash, a try at force is regarded even by the wise as the only solution.

Accounting again for the threatening character of political power is its frequent disregard of conscience. In spite of Rousseau and his insistence that politics be placed upon a moral basis, the doctrine of Machiavelli and Hobbes still lingers. Dr. Hocking quotes from an essay on Walpole the elder by F. S. Oliver in which Oliver holds that the basic historical question about a statesman "is not whether he was an honest man who used honest methods but whether he was successful in getting and keeping power and in governing. How God judges him is God's business, but history will judge him by his patriotism and his success in promoting his state." Lord Acton has quoted with approval a British statesman who deprecates "much weak sensitivity of conscience" in public affairs.

The virus of political self-seeking attacks the individual political leader, the party, and the nation. The individual gains power, secures office, amasses wealth. He becomes the force in the community which dispenses favors and prescribes punishment; which selects candidates and dictates laws. Douglas Clyde Macintosh recites the story of a ward heeler's methods related by a St. Paul member of the profession. Said the gentleman: "I am what they call a ward heeler. I control enough votes in the three precincts of my ward to be able to throw the election whichever way I want to. In the last six elections I threw it to the Republicans four times and to the Democrats twice. I throw it whichever way pays me best. I'm not in politics out of philanthropy. I have several fine pieces of city property that I wouldn't have had if I hadn't gone into politics." To this could be added matching stories from numerous American cities as revealed in the autobiography of Lincoln Steffens. The

1"Statesmanship and Christianity" in *The Church and the New World Mind* (St. Louis, 1944), p. 80.
3Ibid., pp. 71f.
New York daily, *PM*, of July 26, 1946, describes the political power wielded in Tennessee by Senator Kenneth D. McKellar with the support, of course, of Boss Ed Crump of Memphis: "The postmasters in every town and village, the Federal marshals and referees, and even Army engineers, know no security unless they stand well in Kay-Dee's book, submit to election shakedowns, and at all times display a proper reverence for the name and whim of the 'most powerful' Senator."

Tremendous power is lodged in political parties. They decide issues, dictate laws, decree how men shall vote and even live. Witness the constant spectacle of able men bent to their party's designs under the threat of political and personal destruction. They speak and act always within a zone of consent fixed by the party. They are only half free, only half men.

The danger in political party power is graphically illustrated by a coal mine disaster in Kentucky in which at least 24 miners lost their lives. *The Washington Post* of January 4, 1946, comments editorially on this disaster as follows: "The truth seems to be that in Kentucky a pretense of coal mine inspection and the enforcement of various laws to protect the health and safety of miners is made not in the interest of the miners but in the interest of party politics. Jobs in the Department of Mines and Minerals are dispensed on the principle of political patronage by party machines over which coal mine operators are able to exert a considerable influence, and exert it, naturally enough, in their own financial interest." The connivance of political and economic power in this instance is all too obvious.

The greatest political threat to society's well-being is the selfishly wielded power of the state and the worship of that power enjoined by the state. This is nationalism. All too vivid in our minds is the brutally demonic power exercised by the Nazi state against the people. Unmistakable in its design, if not as coercive as Hitler's acts, is his final will in which he enjoins his followers to "place the honor of the nation above everything on earth." Men have not forgotten the isolationism which crippled the first great modern effort at world organization and world peace. They view anxiously any
current sign in America of national egotism and “moral solitude” in international matters.

It remains but to mention the tragic goal toward which national egotism inevitably moves—war. We look now upon an earth and peoples scarred beyond all describing by the demon of war. We know the grim story of the manner in which throughout history he has crossed and recrossed the lands with crimson feet and laid his leaden hand upon the spirits of generation after generation. En-trenched political power is not the sole cause of warfare but it has been a potent contributor.

One of the most deeply entrenched and socially destructive of power relationships which organized Christianity faces is that involving the element of race. The darker peoples have been consistently on the victim side of the relationship. It is becoming understood increasingly that this problem is less one of race than of certain social factors such as the transmission and persistence of earlier sentiments and attitudes, conflict born of rivalry—economic, political, and cultural—and the social lag and political impotence of a particular social group distinguishable by color. Certain racial traits, especially physical, serve to fix and perpetuate bias, and for convenience we can speak of racial discriminations. America presents the world with one of the most extraordinary examples of racial bias in a Christian setting, and after more than three hundred years of the grossest maltreatment of the Negro people, it is in no wise fully conscious of the enormity of its crime.

It is a grave matter when one part of the citizenry subjects another smaller and weaker part to employment restrictions, with resulting ill-housing, sickness, high mortality rates and crimes. It is a matter of great seriousness to deny men equal opportunities for an education; to make them subject to law but to deprive them of a part in the making and administering of this law; to subject them to the constant and base humility of segregation.

This victimization of Negroes in America has placed their faith in democracy under the severest strain. They read the Bill of Rights, the Declaration of Independence, the Preamble to the Constitution; they know the ideals proclaimed in the name of democracy
both in war and in peace. Beside these they place the humiliations which they suffer daily at the hands of their fellow citizens, in war and in peace. This inconsistency they cannot understand.

Many Negroes have also abandoned the religious faith of their fathers. While missionaries and missionary money spread to the far corners of the earth, there is a group in America's own household that is fast losing hope in the kind of Christianity they know. Speaking at the June, 1946, baccalaureate service of Howard University, the largest of educational institutions serving Negroes primarily, Dr. Mordecai W. Johnson described the religion of America's segregated churches as a moral and spiritual scandal, unworthy to be believed, a failure and the object now of repudiation. This is a mood that is finding increasing expression by Negro Christians, both laymen and clergy.

II

Institutional Christianity confronts the problems inherent in the forms of power we have discussed armed with a set of great ideals. Opposed to the evils of the economic order, these ideals envisage society as a moral unity, organized for the common good. They require that none shall loll in luxury while others, through no fault of their own, are denied not only margins of enjoyment but basic necessities; that all shall share in the goodness of creation and participate cooperatively in a common life. They see wealth and property not as ultimate categories but as instruments to the highest in human living, and man as a spiritual being with demands that cannot be satisfied by things alone. Christianity is a religion of hope. It cannot associate itself with the denial that the natural order can be redeemed, or with the belief so widely held that in the presence of economic evils society is impotent.

If a more specific proposal for action in the light of Christian ideals is desired, then we submit some such program as that suggested by Paul J. Tillich: "Christianity can insist that the virtually infinite productive capacities of mankind shall be used for the advantage of everyone, instead of being restricted and wasted by the profit-interests of a controlling class and the struggle for power
between different groups within that class. Christianity should reveal and destroy the vicious circle of production of means as ends which in turn become means without any ultimate end. It must liberate man from bondage to an incalculable and inhuman system of production which absorbs the creative powers of his soul by ruthless competition, fear, despair, and the sense of utter meaninglessness. Christianity must denounce equally a religious utopianism which talks about abolishing the profit motive by persuasion in order to evade necessary social transformation, and a religious escapism which proclaims a transcendent security of eternal values in order to divert the masses from their present economic insecurity. At the same time Christianity must reject totalitarian solutions of the economic problem in so far as they destroy spontaneity in the relations between man and his work and deprive the individual of his basic rights as a person. Christianity must support plans for economic reorganization which promise to overcome the antithesis of absolutism and individualism, even if such plans imply a revolutionary transformation of the present social structure and the liquidation of large vested interests.  

The difficulties which institutional Christianity faces in relation to established political power arise from its necessarily dual character, as an institution in the world and as a body of individuals acknowledging a moral imperative derived from ultimate allegiance to the supra-temporal. The church qua social institution manifests the general characteristics of any social institution with the attending possibilities of social control either as the source of social practice or the instrument of social practice which has its source in some other institution. As the custodian of a peculiar moral ideal, however, the church validly can be only the source of social practice and never the instrument of social practice having its source elsewhere. The presence of the church in society constitutes, therefore, a perpetual challenge to all institutionalized life not embraced by the church. Temporal political absolutisms in any form recognize in the church a serious threat to their possibilities for social control. From this threat

there arises for secular institutions the constant temptation to remove or minimize through opposition or subsidization the moral influence of the church upon society. With respect to all forms of violence, the implications of the Christian ideal are pacifistic. The Christian church is under the obligation to place its trust for personal and social change in moral suasion and the use of non-violent means rather than in physical coercion or intimidation of any sort.

As to political forms, "Christianity must declare that, in the next period of history, those political forms are right which are able to produce and maintain a community in which chronic fear of a miserable and meaningless life for the masses is abolished, and in which every man participates creatively in the self-realization of the community whether local, national, regional or international.¹

Established social arrangements, either of class or race, are confronted with the Christian conception of the brotherhood of man, of a horizontal society in which the categories are functional rather than social or racial. God is the Father of all men and enfolds all of his children to his heart without regard to accidental differences. His sons likewise are to know no such distinction among themselves, and to eschew every semblance of selfish domination of any by the others.

III

What now have been the results as institutional Christianity has brought its ideals to bear upon the sources of great secular power in the world? What is the history of the church in relation to the maluses of economic and political power and to racial injustice? The answer is varied.

Throughout Christian history there have been insights by the church, sometimes deep, often partial and misty, but penetrations toward the heart of its moral responsibility and social mission.

In spite of the encrustations which had begun already to gather about the gospel of Jesus, we find in the Apostle James a clear insight into the demands upon man of pure religion. In him there is no concession to partial fulfilment but demand for the keeping of

the whole law. In monasticism at many points we find a close approximation to genuine Christian morality, even though in an artificial setting. Here in matters of labor, a common life, and charity, the love of God found high expression.

In the midst of the pharisaism, legalism, and ecclesiasticism of the early church there is reflected in passages of Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus, Cyprian and Tertullian, the power of what T. C. Hall\(^1\) calls “the primary revolution.”

The insights of John Wyclif, partial though they were, penetrated the accumulated dogma and practice of fourteen centuries and touched again at many points the springs of a pure Christian ethic.

Although dominated too greatly by medieval other-worldliness and by his zeal for the punishment of the erring, Savonarola battled valiantly for the supremacy of the Christian ideal in Florence. He attacked the moral errancy of the masses and as well the sins of pope and bishops. He was a martyr to the passion for purification of his community in his time.

George Fox and his Quaker followers, unmindful of history and tradition, assumed positions that were boldly revolutionary and uncommonly quickening of easy consciences. Reference is scarcely necessary to their opposition to war and slavery and to their initiative in prison reform.

One does not forget such opponents of slavery as William Wilberforce, Phillips Brooks, Henry Ward Beecher, and Harriet Beecher Stowe. Nor does one forget the Christian victims of persecutions that course through Christian history—primitive Christians, Congregationalists under Elizabeth, Puritans under the Stuarts, the Confessional church under Nazi Germany.

If the church has exhibited at moments great spiritual insight and great courage it has also at other moments failed repeatedly to demonstrate its basic ideals in relation to the obstacles which it has faced. J. A. Hobson remarks in his *God and Mammon*\(^2\) that “it is evident that the Christianity of the church never seriously at-

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\(^1\) *History of Ethics within Organized Christianity* (New York, 1910), p. 177.

tempted to apply the plain principles of the teaching of the Gospels to the economic life of the Peoples." The papacy is described by Tawney\(^1\) as in a sense the greatest financial institution of the Middle Ages, one in which priests, cathedral chapters, and bishops were involved in questionable financial transactions. It is pointed out, moreover, that those medieval religious movements which expressed social insights and dared to criticize the extravagance of church officials were ruthlessly crushed by the church.

In matters of social reform the Reformation had its very serious blind spots. Luther's acceptance of the social hierarchy is manifest. He says, "An earthly kingdom cannot exist without inequality of persons. Some must be free, others serfs, some rulers, others subjects."\(^2\)

Both Luther and Calvin, while approving a competence and respect for men in any position, could not endorse nobility in social relations. The church proved impotent during the Industrial Revolution because the idea that it "possessed an independent standard of values, to which social institutions were amenable, had been abandoned."\(^3\) The eighteenth-century Church of England was regarded as without independent moral authority of consequence in relation to the economic life and interested itself primarily in relieving the poor, caring for the sick, and founding schools. Tawney denies that capitalism was the offspring of Puritanism but affirms that "it found in certain aspects of Puritanism a tonic which braced its energies and fortified its already vigorous temper."\(^4\) Puritanism heightened the virtues of the English middle classes, sanctified their convenient vices and "assured them that behind their virtues and vices alike stood the inexorable and majestic laws of an omnipotent Providence."\(^5\)

Unhappily the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have found the church unable to check decisively or, some would hold, even marked-

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\(^2\)Ibid., pp. 93, 94.
\(^3\)Ibid., p. 193.
\(^4\)Ibid., p. 226.
\(^5\)Ibid., p. 211.
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ly, the evil forces in our economic order. Rather it has become in many instances capitalism's captive. Its membership and officer rolls, its investments, its relations with labor, its frequent silence in the midst of great industrial strife, bespeak an entanglement with economic power highly inconsistent with the ethical genius of Christianity. As Tillich points out, the churches are largely without an answer to our present economic, political, and international orders because they themselves have become the instruments of state, nation, and economy.¹

From its beginning the church has faced the challenge of established political power and the apparent dilemma of losing its life by opposing the state or losing its life by yielding to the state. The attitude of the church for centuries was determined in part by Paul's injunction: "Let every soul be subject unto higher powers. For there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the powers, resisteth the ordinance of God. . . ." The early Church Fathers, moreover, felt political power was necessary to prevent highly dreaded anarchy. As Reinhold Niebuhr has pointed out,² this view and that imputing to God the ordination of government have persisted in conservative Christianity to this day.

The divine right of rulers received no less support from orthodox Protestantism. Calvin saw in the plunderings by the avaricious and the inflictions by sacrilegious and unbelieving rulers possible plagues by which men are chastised for their offenses. While Luther was capable of demanding justice at the hands of the princes, he also charged the peasants to submit to their rulers. In this situation he could piously invoke the perfectionist appeal to non-resistance.

The modern liberal church is described by Niebuhr as maintaining an attitude toward the state which is "a curious medley of hopes and regrets," insisting upon much but effecting little and failing itself to keep a law which it enjoined upon others.

The following confession of the Council of the Protestant Church in Germany made before the World Council of Churches in October,

1945, is a noble yet pathetic admission to the weakness of the Christian community in the presence of entrenched political power: "... we have struggled for many years in the name of Jesus Christ against a spirit which found its terrible expression in the National Socialist regime of violence, but we accuse ourselves of not witnessing more courageously, for not praying more faithfully, for not believing more joyously and for not loving more ardently."

At the request of a special commission of the Federal Council of Churches, Professor Roland H. Bainton has traced the history of the attitudes of the churches toward participation in war. This survey reveals a disheartening abandonment of the basic Christian ideal with reference to the use of force. On the whole, the church was pacifist before Constantine. Following Constantine, monasticism became the refuge of pacifism and the church generally adopted the theory of the just war. The Middle Ages were marked by the Crusades and the holy war concept. The Renaissance witnessed an attempted return to practical, if not theoretical, pacifism but the Reformation found Luther declaring that the world can be ruled only by a sword and Calvin defending the arming of princes not only to restrain private crime but to defend their territories. Pacifism meanwhile passed from the keeping of monasticism to that of the Anabaptists and the Quakers. The churches united in a crusading support of the first world war and generally saw in the second world conflict a just war, although they made such a concession sorrowfully and penitently. Pacifism, which manifested some strength between the two wars, receded to unappreciable proportions during the struggles.

The church has confronted the so-called problem of race relations with singular short-sightedness and lack of courage. The American aspect of this question affords us a convincing illustration. The colony of Virginia proclaimed as its object with respect to slaves: "to preach and baptize into the Christian religion—to recover out of the armes of the Devill, a number of poore and miserable soules

\(^1\text{Information Service, Department of Research and Education, Federal Council of Churches (New York, Vol. XXIV, November 17, 1945), p. 1.}\)
wrapt up unto death in invincible ignorance." When, however, it was held to be illegal and irreligious for Christians to hold each other as slaves, it was discovered that "out of covetousness" masters were refusing to permit their slaves to be baptized. So that none except the slave might be embarrassed of conscience or inconvenience, it was later ruled that conversion should alter nothing in one's civil estate. Missionary activity among the slaves was not motivated solely by religion, for it was held that the gospel was more powerful than arms in keeping slaves obedient. While some churchmen labored zealously for the emancipation of the slaves out of humanitarian concern, many were wholly unmoved by so brutal and manifestly unchristian an institution as slavery and still others actively opposed abolition.

An analysis of the attitude of the Christian community in America toward the problem of race relations since emancipation and including the present reveals: (1) Concern suddenly deepens about this problem when national upheaval threatens on its account. Even then action is frequently designed more to prevent immediate social dislocation than to remove the sources of injury. (2) The activities of the church are predicated upon a segregated society and a segregated church. Very little, indeed, has been done to bring an end to this fundamental betrayal of the Christian ideal. (3) The program of the church in relation to Negroes has been and still is motivated in large measure by the paternalistic and missionary spirit. There would still seem to be a greater concern for saving the souls of Negroes than those of their oppressors. (4) Positive steps by the churches are often motivated by the successful courting of Negroes by rival ecclesiastical or secular groups such as the Catholics and the Communists.

The recent heightening of interest in matters of race by the churches is promising. Unhappily, however, except for isolated instances, action has moved on the periphery of the problem and many of the attempted remedies have thus far missed the true seat of our ailment.

An account of the church in relation to society must include the tremendous contributions to social improvement which it has made as a result of the remedial impulse. The church as a whole has never opposed slavery. The treatment of slaves, however, both in the ancient and modern world, was always softened under Christian influences. Inhumane industrial practices have been modified and barbarous conduct in war has fallen under the judgment of the sensitive Christian conscience and not without effect, and the world will never completely pay its debt to the church for the agencies of relief which it has spread over the face of the earth. Its influence upon education will prove one of the most effectual instruments in the eventual turning of men from their pagan ways.

An illustration of the power latent in the Christian community for resistance to secular forces is to be seen in the history of certain European churches during the period of totalitarian supremacy. In Norway the leaders of the church made the only united protest against the most serious Nazi offences; in Holland Christians defied the anti-Semitic measures of the Nazis by themselves wearing the Star of Israel ordered to be worn by Jews; even in Germany there continued a determined and courageous effort to keep alive allegiance to a Christian concept of life, including the training by orthodox methods of a deeply consecrated ministry. But as Henry P. Van Dusen has pointed out, "This is no time for exaggerated and self-congratulatory claims on behalf of the Christian Church."¹ We must face the discomforting fact of an increasing secular power. We of the church who specialize in a denunciation of the failings of society with, I sometimes feel, too little recognition of the heroic qualities which men exhibit, can ill afford to view with other than the utmost seriousness our failures in the light of our professions.

IV

There are here suggested four emphases which are calculated to increase the influence of organized Christianity as it faces secular power in the world.

(1) *The volitional and the intellectual:* In casuistry the Chris-

tian theologian has demonstrated extraordinary genius. His ability to discover a logical link between dogma—his dogma—and the will of God is one of the great wonders of the world. Mr. Justice Holmes was very wise in pointing out that certitude is not the test of certainty although our theologians have often forgotten the distinction. The tenacity with which religious men hold to their convictions is a source both of great strength and great weakness. It becomes a weakness when the ground of the conviction is uncritical and when any question as to its validity is summarily dismissed. Such an attitude transfers the main emphasis in religion from the search for truth and the will to do the truth, where it properly belongs, to the will to defend what by deliberateness or accident is already believed.

The human heart and mind possess a great facility, when unencumbered by the complexities of casuistry, to go straight to the fundamental truths about life and our world as demonstrated in the simple teachings of Jesus and the Old Testament prophets. If for a season institutional Christianity would develop a will to obey comparable to its will to explain, we would see the law of love pass increasingly from homily and treatise into the fiber of living. We would see the powers of this world confronted by a religious institution whose principal strength is in the embodiment of its ideals rather than in a defense of its dogmas.

(2) *The inner and the outer:* The way has not yet been discovered to life in this world either as Christian or pagan without institutions, orders, form. But in proportion as these have become dominant, in that proportion has the power of the spirit waned. The church has not yet experimented sufficiently with the possibility of exercising transforming power in the world with a minimum of externals. Rather, it has seemed often to place its chief reliance in numbers, structures, budgets, fanfare. This fact has not been passed unnoticed by the common man or permitted to go unrepudiated by the prophet. A reader of the *Washington Post*, writing recently to that daily on the present Protestant-Catholic controversy, commented as follows: "Out of a simple moral philosophy of a poor Jewish rabbi zealots have reared a monstrous structure
of sacerdotal theology and pompous wealth until, with Abou ben Adhem, the common people are prone to pray 'write me as one who loves his fellowmen.'"

Micah has commented eloquently upon the relative value of rivers of oil as against justice and kindness and humility. Dr. Mordecai W. Johnson of Howard University, in the baccalaureate address to which reference has been made, charged the church with importing great quantities of "mumbo jumbo" while neglecting the weightier matters of the spirit.

One of the great problems for men to solve is that of giving their causes, whether they be religious or otherwise, the dress that will appeal to human fancy and elicit loyalty, but at the same time preventing the dress or symbol from attracting the loyalty which is due only to the cause itself. The religion that confines itself largely to outer manifestations will find devotees and generous patrons among the leaders of secular power and will run the grave risk of compromise with them. The powers of the world need constantly to be confronted by an inner spiritual drive that is never lost in outer trappings.

This inner emphasis is not to be contrasted but rather identified with an emphasis by institutional Christianity upon the changing of outer conditions. Knudson points to the fact that the tendency to "emphasize inner virtue as to neglect outer conditions" has been more or less characteristic of the church throughout most of its history and argues that the church is an ethical institution as well as a worshiping community.

(3) The exclusive and the inclusive: The task of religion cannot be performed successfully by what Tillich calls "a religiously colored society," although the task of fixing the line of inclusion or exclusion so far as membership in the Christian community is concerned is exceedingly difficult and has baffled the wisest and best intentioned of our church fathers. The one certainty is that the church can never be expected to combat successfully the secular powers of the world unless its membership senses deeply the evils

1Knudson, Principles of Christian Ethics (New York, 1943), pp. 238, 239.
in these forces and possesses the will to remove them. Some attention must be paid, therefore, to how men stand on these matters both at the time of their admission and throughout the period of their membership. They must be taught where they should stand—taught with an earnestness and an insistence which cannot be misunderstood and which will guarantee discomfort to the nonconforming. Such a procedure can result in heartache and schism. It is for the church to decide whether its strength lies in institutional unity or in moral cohesion, whether it will better serve its great calling through a larger number of nominal Christians or a smaller band of genuine followers of Jesus. The failures of the inclusive church thus far to meet successfully the challenge of secular powers suggests the trial of a more exclusive membership. To build a church in terms of numbers without deep solicitude for the spiritual quality of that membership is a vain strategy for the conversion of the world. It is the surest guarantee of the perversion of the church. A church to possess power must first possess meaning and that meaning resides in the common Christian will of those who compose it. In the absence of this we may have an organization, people, properties, but not a Christian church.

(4) Adventure and caution: It is evident that the great weakness of the church as it has confronted secular power has been its failure to attack this power frontally. Frequently, it has not seen its duty clearly. Frequently, it has recognized the call but has not answered. One explanation lies in the titanic difficulty of believing in the possibility of remolding a stubborn, complex society into a Christian pattern and of discovering the means by which it might be done. The church, as Niebuhr points out, has recognized in the law of love an ultimate criterion by which the imperfections of human social achievements are revealed but has failed to see the possibility it suggests for transcending any achievements informed by the ideal of justice. It has taken too fatalistic a view of the social forms it has found.

Contrary to the original genius of Christianity, the church has

proved more largely a force for conservation than for change. It has persecuted its own adventurous minorities and opposed radical innovation in the social order generally. It has esteemed order above righteousness, the old above the new, orthodoxy above heresy. It has sought by caution to save its life but in the same measure it has lost its life. If the church can summon the courage to move from the hinterland to the frontier of spiritual adventure it will gather a strength guaranteed to change society in a manner which unhappily the church has demonstrated far too infrequently in its long history.

Ernst Troeltsch closes his great work on *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* with the observation that Catholicism of the patriarchal guild type and ascetic Protestantism have spent their force and now fling themselves against the rock of social realities in vain; that if Christian principles are to triumph, thoughts will be necessary that have not been thought. There is much in the history of institutional Christianity of which we may be proud; on the other hand, we have in our failures a challenge to adventure to which the strong and the good throughout Christendom should rise with crusading fervor.