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National Conference of Social Work, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania,
1936.

American Conference
Social Work - March 16, 1936
Philadelphia, Pa.

The religious man will be driven by the dynamics of his faith to a morality of battle and struggle. The axioms of faith lead to tremendous ethical mandates. Every human life must be regarded as a reflex of divinity. Every act of wrong and injustice, therefore, mars and defaces the image of God in man. Oppression and exploitation are more than violations of social laws. They are sacrilege and blasphemy. They thwart life - God's life in man. They distort and mutilate that which is the end and goal of all being - the free unfoldment of personality. The religious man will not rest content with personal salvation. He will strive to bring about a social order which will insure to all men freedom for self-realization. He will weigh all social institutions in the balance of spiritual utility. If found wanting, he will set about to reconstruct them, or, if need be, to destroy them. His morality will be militant, and when necessary, revolutionary.

~~Hence it is that~~ The profoundly religious men of all times were the mightiest spokesmen of social justice and its uncompromising champions. It was from the lips of men touched with the burning coal of divine faith, from the lips of the prophet, the seer, the man of God, that the first great cry for justice leaped out upon the world. They who sought God most zealously spoke of human rights most fearlessly. It was in the name of God, the stern and righteous Judge, that those spiritual men of valor wielded the scorpion whip of their fury upon those who ground the faces of the poor and turned aside the way of the humble. It was in the name of God, the compassionate and the merciful Friend, that they pleaded the cause of the orphan and the widow, the beaten and the broken of life. It was in the name of God, the Father of all men, that they espoused the cause of a human brotherhood which, over-leaping the dread boundaries of ancient enmities erected by fear and greed, leads men to turn their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.

Herein lies the first great service which religion thru its historic agency the church has rendered and can continue to render the cause of social justice. It can function as the motive power of enthusiasm for all programs of social amelioration. It can be the dynamo of spiritual energy for every great human enterprise. Speaking betimes and oft of a God Whose ways are justice and truth, Whose worship is goodness, and upon Whose high altars only the sacrifice of righteousness is acceptable, religion and the church can so sensitize the minds of men to moral values, that when a situation confronts them, involving a clear moral issue, whether in their private life, or in their social, political or industrial life, they will be moved to choose the good and eschew the evil.

We speak here, of course, only of those religions which are not exclusively absorbed in subtle theologic intricacies as interesting as the Ptolemaic system and quite as obsolete, nor of

those religions which spend their energies in answering questions which men no longer ask. We have in mind only those religions which aim to serve man in the most vital needs of his life and which aspire to build Jerusalem "here among these dark Satanic mills."

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The first great service which the church, the effective arm of religion, can render the cause of social justice, is to galvanize by education and inspiration the will of men so that they will seek justice and pursue it. It can enkindle a crusading zeal for the Kingdom of God, which will be a kingdom of this world, fashioned out of the lowly clay of this life but after the pattern and grace of highest perfection.

The church, however, must not remain content to speak of social justice in the abstract. The church is not an academy for speculative sciences. It is a dynamic agency equipped for social reconstruction. It must enter the arena of life and do battle for its sanctities.

There are, ~~however~~, economic problems in modern society of vast social import, reaching to the very heart of our civilization and affecting the whole structure of society, concerning which the church must speak, and in no uncertain terms. Conditions of palpable and vast wrong persist throughout the world, which thwart the rich promise of human life, consign millions to degradation and defeat, and fill the habitations of men with anguish and sorrow. Greed and lust and oppression devastate life. Untold millions are starved by poverty and physically and spiritually drained by exploitation. ~~Millions of children are broken upon the wheels of industry.~~ The burdens of our economic order lie heavily upon the shoulders of our womanhood. The dread of unemployment, old age and disability hang like a pall over the working classes. Nowhere in the world today do those conditions of justice and opportunity fully obtain which would make possible the free, untrammelled unfoldment of personality, the harmonious development of all of God's children according to the measure of their capacities.

In the face of these conditions the church cannot, dare not remain silent. It must cry aloud. It must lift up its voice like a trumpet to declare unto the people their transgressions. Else its vision is a lying vision and its ritual an abomination. It is true that the church has always cared for the victim of social injustice. It fed the poor, clothed the naked, sheltered the homeless, healed the sick, sustained and comforted the denied and the dispossessed of the earth. Nearly all the agencies of mercy and relief in the world are the creations and wards of the churches. The church was indeed a compassionate mother. But it must do more. It must not wait until the flotsam and jetsam of social wreckage come drifting to its doors. It must anticipate disaster. It must labor for a social reconstruction which will afford all men a better chance of security and happiness. The

church must summon its adherents to a close scrutiny of social ills. It must stimulate research and inquiry into their possible remedies. It must place the social responsibility for ameliorating these conditions squarely upon the shoulders of its devotees. It must demand the application of their best intelligence and highest motives to this task. It must arouse and disturb them with the desperate challenge: "Ye are your brothers' keepers," and drive them on to ever new experimentations in perfecting this stewardship. It must voice the maximum idealism of life, calling for a condition of society in which man will at all times be primary, and the satisfaction of his legitimate needs superior to profit or the accumulation of wealth, in which rewards will be commensurate with service, and in which none shall partake of social goods who does not contribute to the social weal. It must organize the religious consciousness of the world and the mighty hosts of the faithful for strategic action at decisive moments.

If the church cannot propel men to seek ways of lessening the bitter inequalities of economic life and of securing for all men who toil adequate satisfaction of their legitimate needs it stands convicted of incompetence and spiritual bankruptcy. The sons of Mary will smile upon its inanity and the sons of Martha, upon whom the Lord has laid the crushing burdens of life, will turn upon it in the dread hour "when whirlwinds of rebellion shake the world," and will destroy it. When the Dumb Terror of Russia, after the silence of the centuries, found voice to make its reply, it spoke as the Red Terror and hurled itself in devastating fury upon the church which had consistently betrayed it by joining hands with its oppressors.

X Religion has not always been faithful to its ⁱⁿ performing purpose. When the first great impulse which creates a religion embodies itself into an institution, it loses much of its daring and courage. All religions at the first moment of their revelation, when they leap hot and frenzied from the soul of some God-intoxicated seer, are purging fires, consuming flames. They speak in thunder and sweep life with a "besom of destruction." They possess the volcanics of prophecy. They are "set over nations and over kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build anew and to plant."...The world stands aghast and frightened. It turns upon the prophets of the new revelation and crucifies them, only to kneel a moment later and worship them.

X But soon the hot coals of religious passion cool off. The heroic mood vanishes. Loyalties lose their sacrificial quality. The voice crying in the wilderness becomes an echo, faint and timid. Enthusiasm is quenched in habit. Religion becomes institutionalized. Hierarchy and vested interests appear. The church becomes an end in itself. When its interests are at stake it will compromise and yield and betray men in their direst needs.

X This danger, of course, is inherent in all organization. Whatever moral pioneering has been done in the world has been largely

the work, not of groups, but of individual spiritual adventurers; rebels and non-conformists. Revelations never come to groups. There were schools of prophets in ancient Israel, but they were merely the monitors of ancient superstitions. It was only after the individual separated himself from the school and the group and pursued his own solitary quest of truth that the prophecy discovered its authentic voice and mood.

X The church, therefore, freighted down with organization, must constantly war against itself to save its soul. The church must protect itself against the downward drag of institutionalism and the paralysis of will which result from over-organization and prosperity. The church triumphant often spells the faith defeated. How often has the church been a flunkey to the rich! How often has its revolutionary passion for justice and social righteousness been leashed by worldliness and sycophancy! The church set out to admonish men to put away the evil of their doings, to "cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek justice, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow" but it ended by truckling to the powerful and the rich and by sharing in the spoils of the marauders and exploiters of society.

X In the Temple at Jerusalem there was a flute fashioned out of reeds, an old flute, having come down from the days of Moses. The sound of the flute was sweet and beautiful, ravishing the souls of the worshippers. But one day the priests at the sanctuary decided to decorate the flute, and they covered it with gold. The flute was never the same again. Its sweet, clear, cool tones were now harsh, metallic and jarring. Gold had coarsened its melody....

X Can the church survive prosperity? It is not so difficult after all to be a voice crying in the wilderness. It is far more difficult to be a voice - clear and courageous - crying for justice amid the pomp and splendor and costliness of a Temple or a Cathedral which is built and supported by those who must often become the very target of the voice's invective.

X But the church must do just that. It must deliberately choose the "via dolorosa" - the hard road of conflict and persecution. Else it will become a tragic futility in modern life. Thoughtful men will turn away from it and will seek their light and leading elsewhere, and the youth of the world will come to regard it as a mere survival, an anachronism, interesting but irrelevant.

The experiences of the *four* ~~last two~~ and a half years have brought the social worker face to face with the limitation of his profession and the inadequacy of his program in the scheme of social amelioration. Organized social service has during the last generation moved steadily forward, broadening its scope and improving its technique.

More and more of the human waste lands came under its faithful and intelligent husbandry. From elementary palliative relief it passed on to prevention, rehabilitation, and adjustment. Its ministry spanned the whole life of man and all forms of dependence, from infancy to old age. Painstaking study and research in all related fields placed at the disposal of the social worker a body of knowledge which made possible a refinement of method and an increase in skill and effectiveness. Scientific training and high standards gave to his calling the character of a profession.

The social worker was sustained and inspirited in his labors by the thought that he was helping in a very real way to solve a solvable social problem. The world in which the social worker moves is largely a world of deprivation and sadness. The harshness of life is there, the stunted growths, the tangled lives, the unsightly things. The belief, however, which he entertained, that he was the emissary of a great social purpose and that he was in a very real sense helping to build a juster and nobler social order, fully compensated him, and brought a glow to his heart and beauty to his days.

The overwhelming economic debacle of the last ~~two~~ ^{four} and a half years and the disastrous effects which it has had upon the whole structure of his service have left the social worker staggered and confused. Floods have swept over his carefully tilled field lands and have completely engulfed them. In the face of an incredible economic collapse, the social worker today stands helpless, his tools pathetically inadequate, and all his garnered wisdom vain and futile.

His elaborate social program is being dismantled. The cry for bread - the primitive hunger cry of the race - rising ominously from twenty million throats to a terrifying crescendo, drowns out all other voices. Everywhere there is a throwback to primitive charity, a headlong retreat to sheer, stark almsgiving. Case work is suspended. The individual again becomes an impersonal recipient of a dole against starvation. The budgets of the health, child welfare, and character building agencies of communities are slashed. Some agencies are reduced to a shadow of their former selves. Others are entirely discontinued, as if these agencies were a mere social indulgence, a venial luxury of genial, affluent days, and not a bed rock social necessity.

X Medical social work and psychiatric social work are suffering as a result of curtailment of budgets.

X In the field of probation, staffs are being reduced and the individual probation officer is being loaded with more cases than he can properly supervise. His standards are being lowered and probational treatment of crime and delinquency is being severely hampered and retarded.

X The American Public Health Association reports widespread "contemplated or actual material curtailments of appropriations for

X personnel and facilities of public health service in states, counties and cities." It warns the country that over 50 per cent of the communities whose 1932 health budgets have already been passed have shown reductions up to 43 per cent. "Inadequate food, insufficient clothing and overcrowded living conditions may not manifest themselves in immediate ill health, but they eventually lead to an undermining of vitality and lowering of resistance to such an extent that in years to come serious and permanent disabilities may result."

Thus failure is written large over all the activities organized social service. The fault, of course, is not the social worker's. When the pay roll of a country declines 40 per cent in ~~two~~ ^{a few} short years, no private or public charity can hope to cope with the situation. The fault is of the economic system under which we live. Periodically this system disgorges its victims. Periodically it pries millions of men loose from their means of livelihood and sends them broken and helpless to knock at the doors of charity. This is not the first instance of mass unemployment within the memory of living men. It is a constantly recurring phenomenon, seemingly inherent in the very nature of our capitalistic society. Prosperity and depression have been the obverse and reverse of our coin of national economy for generations. Our concentrated national wealth has been purchased through a partial or total periodic impoverishment of our working population. There are insect societies where most of the offspring are partially starved and allowed only imperfect development in order to make possible a ~~populous~~ ^{chosen} society. Our economic order has been operating on such crude, primordiate principles.

If any criticism is to be launched against us social workers, it is on the ground that we have not attacked with sufficient relentlessness the roots of the evil whose fruits we are now called upon to harvest. We did not throw ourselves into the struggle for a radical reconstruction of our economic society as zealously as we gave of ourselves to the perfection of our professional technique, and to the definitive tasks of relief, prevention, adjustment, and personality therapeutics. Some of us were satisfied with research, with facts and figures, with statistics full of static. Many of us were content to do for the victims of our economic warfare what the Red Cross does for the victims of national warfare. We salvaged. We gave first aid. We engaged in work of rehabilitation. But we were, nevertheless, content to remain part of the war system. We did not make a resolute enough onslaught on the system itself. Military systems are generous toward their Red Cross and their hospital services. They hold them in high reverential esteem. And so were we held by the representatives of economic militarism. They knew that we were indispensable. We cared for their victims. We attenuated the ruthlessness of their socially disastrous campaigns. The more effective our service became the more we allayed popular

unrest and assuaged the spirit of rebellion. Unconsciously and unwillingly we became the allies of a predatory system, the instruments of reaction. Organized charity stands today between our discredited economic system and revolution. This is as much an indictment as it is a tribute.

The experiences which we have gained from this latest and greatest economic collapse have made us sharply aware of the fact that private philanthropy and emergency public aid are insufficient for the major social derangements which our economic order periodically effects.

Charity cannot deal with the problem of poverty in modern society. Organized philanthropy is a survival of an individualistic society which assumed little or no corporate responsibility for its handicapped. But a new type of society is now in the making. The social control which is inevitably coming over industry will embrace also our charitable institutions. Society in the future will not wait upon voluntary individual aid and private sporadic generosity to care for the disabled, the sick, the aged, and the unemployed. That which is socially necessary will become socially mandatory. There will always be room for private initiative in social service to supplement the basic social institutions of the state, to experiment in newer types of service, and to point the way of progress. But the elementary and indispensable tasks of safeguarding the health of its people, of protecting childhood, of caring for the weak, the aged, the widow and the orphan, and of giving relief to the workless are the direct fixed and continuing obligations of organized society, and must be so met.

Certainly the care of the unemployed is not within the province of charity. Unemployment is industry's problem and industry's burden, not charity's. Industry must not be permitted to lay its myriad casualties periodically at the door of philanthropy. This is a grotesque, not to say criminal, procedure. The most highly developed industrial system in the world employs millions of men in the production of huge wealth which largely goes into the hands of the relatively few owners of industry, pays its men in normal times wages which fall short of the requirements of a decent standard of living, and as soon as the opportunities for profit-making cease, throws these men into the discard, advising them to go to the charitable agencies, to which the workers themselves had previously been asked to contribute, to beg for famine rations for themselves and their families. Such is the cynicism and brutality of our economic order! It has even failed to give to its workers the security of servitude which feudalism once gave its serfs. So that a new terror has now come into the world. Every generation has own overshadowing dread - pestilence, famine, invasion, the devil or the end of the world, and the lives of that generation are darkened because of it. Into the 20th century has come the dread terror of unemployment which hangs like a pall over the homes of the toiling masses.

The state must compel industry to lay aside adequate reserves

out of which benefits shall be paid to the worker whenever he is forced into involuntary unemployment. These benefits should be his as a matter of right, not of charity. Labor is not a commodity which may be purchased and disposed of at will. The worker is more than a partner in industry. His interests are primary and paramount. Industry exists to provide a livelihood for the working masses of the world, and to supply them with the necessities of life. Capital's share is secondary. First must come adequate wage, security, protection against the disabilities of accident, sickness, old age, and unemployment, and then may come the profits to investor and stockholder.

How blind the responsible leaders and protagonists of the present system must be, not to see the fateful threat in all this to their own cherished interests. Even a bad system must have certain principles to which it remains unswervingly loyal. A system which makes a travesty of its own code of ethics is doomed. The ethics of capitalism places great value upon the virtues of work, industry, and thrift. Rewards, it preaches, are in store for the faithful worker. Prosperity waits upon industry. The thrifty and saving are assured of security and advancement. But prolonged periods of unemployment give the lie to this entire code. The rewards of years of faithful labor are the bread line and the eviction order. The thrifty are compelled to consume their savings in idleness, and they ultimately find themselves in the same wretched plight as the spendthrift and wasteful. Our system teaches the dignity of labor and surrounds it with all forms of indignity. Youth is taught to eschew idleness, to work hard and to accept gladly the high discipline of labor. Yet hundreds of thousands of boys and girls who have become of working age since 1929 have not been able to find a day's work since, and have been confined to idleness which is the seed-bed of mischief, crime and delinquency.

Most assuredly we are still in our economic dark ages, yet many of us were beguiled by a few brief years of abnormal prosperity into believing that we had entered a broad new era of economic enlightenment, progress and justice. We know now that we were fond and foolish optimists, for we had laid none of the foundations for such a new era - no planned national economy, no central and scientific control of production, no correlation between production and consumption, no adjustment between the productivity of the machine and hours of labor, not plans for the distribution of all available work among all available workers, or the transfer of surplus labor from one industry to another, no provision for a full measure of insurance against the economic disabilities of unemployment, sickness, and old age. We expected a system of ruthless competition, bordering on anarchy, to yield us those advantages which only a socially minded and a socially organized and controlled economic system can yield.

We must now give up, if we have not already, the messianic economic romancing which characterized the pre-depression era, and all the apocalyptic dreams of miracle-working captains of industry who by acts of mystic financial wizardry would make us all

rich and put two cars in every workingman's garage. Painstakingly and patiently we must apply ourselves to the task of a radical economic reconstruction, ~~joined~~^{drawing} upon our best knowledge, courage, and enthusiasm. The social worker whose experiences have revealed to him more vividly than to any other section of our people the tragic deficiencies of the things as they are and whose trained social sense has discovered for him the vision of the things as they ought to be, should be numbered among the faithful and zealous vanguard of the forces of reconstruction.

A new civilization must be built. Spires, domes, and minarets are not religion; neither are radios, aeroplanes, and swarming, teeming cities civilization. The essence of civilization is a free, secure, and creative social life. The criteria of civilization are neither wealth, nor size, nor speed, nor invention, but the values which it places upon human personality, the rewards which it grants to labor and merit, the quality of its intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic interests and the stimulus which it gives to those social factors, which make human lives sweeter, more confident, and more joyous. Measured by these criteria, our present-day civilization is but an ultra-modern expression of barbarism; and the sharp contrast which exists between its social backwardness and its scientific progress only makes the fact more bewildering, and, at the same time, more menacing.

We must build a new civilization. We must wage war upon chaos. Chaos is matter resisting form. It is the principle of the unformed, the unorganized, the uncontrolled. The creative, life-giving word today is social control of industry. This is in no sense a war upon the individual and his sovereign, inalienable rights. It is not the individualism of growth and self-expression which is menacing society today, but the individualism of exploitation, the individualism which destroys the individual.

We have the power to build such a new civilization. Man's mind is capable of solving every problem created for him by the machines which he created. Man can master his machine ~~work~~^{world}. Only naive and easily-scared romanticists will call for a moratorium on inventions and the scrapping of machines. The machine has lifted the curse of drudgery from the shoulders of the workers of the earth. It will in the future release more and more of man's time and energies for the real joyous adventure of living. We have, till now, stupidly misused the gifts of the mind-made machine, permitting the few to monopolize the wealth which it produced, and the leisure and the security. Put the machine in the hands of a truly social ideal, and mankind will be launched on a career of social evolution such as no prophet has ever dreamed of.