

The SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE SECTION

A Magazine for your Reading Table

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS' PAGE

The Church and the Social Evil

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WE ARE witnessing in this country at the present time, a tremendous awakening of conscience in regard to what is known as the social evil. All the moral forces of the community seem to be concentrated on the problem of how to rid society of an evil which has been endured, all too patiently, since the dawn of civilization. The question has been put to me, what should be the Church's contribution to this great crusade? What can the Church do to aid in crushing out the social evil?

At the outset let me venture a word of caution. The problem is so large, so complex, so interwoven with other problems that it will never do to approach it as if it were something to be killed with one blow. I wish also to dissent from those who are so absorbed in the problem that they can see nothing but evil in society. These people have lost their sense of proportion. Without denying that we have an appalling amount of evil in the community, we must remember that the heart of society is still sound, the mass of men and women is still normal, decent and inclined toward good rather than evil. The situation, though bad, is far from hopeless. While it is true that hospital records have revealed a terrible amount of suffering on the part of innocent women and children, as a result of sexual excesses of others, this does not prove that immorality is gaining ground. In former times hospital records were not made public. Now they are. That is all.

The population of this country consists of moral men and women, living with their children in good homes. There are millions of good homes in the United States, and there always have been. Otherwise our civilization would have broken down long ago, instead of advancing steadily as it has. But the good people and the quiet homes are never in the limelight of public interest. They never get into the newspapers. Remember that exceptional and abnormal facts, not commonplaces, make up the news. We read the newspapers and we unthinkingly rush to the conclusion that the world must be approaching moral dissolution. This is not the case. People are still normal. They are still religious, they still go to church, they are still amenable to the voice of conscience.

The Crusade Against Vice

NOW, as to the practical question of the Church's part in the crusade against the evil which unquestionably does exist: I have great confidence in the work of the social service committees which are becoming more active each year in seeking and reporting to the churches on community conditions. I have confidence also in the work that is being done in many parishes to enrich the



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lives of working girls and young men. In clubs and classes and recreation circles, vacation homes, in many other agencies the Church is successfully overcoming conditions that make for evil. The Church can and must extend all such work. We must constantly exalt the ideal of a Church whose threefold mission is to preach, to teach and to serve. Not only the soul of man, but his mind and his body are the objects of Christ's divine love. The whole man must be the concern of the Church and of those who serve Her.

Some of our clergy have taken a definite stand in regard to keeping immorality out of the home by demanding health certificates entering the married state. I have always upheld their action and praised their courageous zeal. But I should hesitate before I advocated this procedure as a general policy of the Church at large. I am not at all certain that it would accomplish a great amount of permanent good. One guarantee of health does not insure a lifetime of health or morality. Then again, wholesale health requirements might drive a great many sensitive persons into civil marriages; worse still, it might be used by the unscrupulous as an excuse for unhallowed unions. Now if the state required health certificates as a prerequisite to a marriage license, we might see good results.

The Firm Stand of the Church

HOWEVER, in effecting any reform I place legislation at the foot of the ladder. Next above I place the power of public opinion. And in line with public opinion I place the influence of the Church on the general morals of the community. On the question of the

double standard of morals, for example, the Church ought to be uncompromising. Personally I would punish the men as well as the women who contribute to sexual immorality. I would go farther and punish the men more severely than the women, who are often the victims of men, and who in any case are more severely punished by nature and by society. Nothing in the teachings of Christ justifies the conventional morality which places upon one partner to a sin the sole burden of expiation. What future is there for children, repudiated by their fathers, often deserted by their unhappy and helpless mothers, save a future of pauperism and crime? For these society pays. The trouble with a very large group of people is that they have not only a double standard of morals, they have a treble, a quadruple standard, in other words no standard at all. They have slipped all moorings. What the Church must do is to awaken in the individual the sense of personal responsibility to God. The power of God is, in the end, the only regenerating influence in the world. All others are superficial and temporary. The question in every heart, "If a man die shall he live again?" means more than physical death and resurrection, it means moral regeneration, which the Church holds out as a possibility to every human soul.

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