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Christianity in Action.

The Church and the Social Services.

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There was a time when the statesman was responsible for keeping order and dispensing justice within his country, and for defending it from its enemies. Citizens paid their Government to do that for them, and not much more. But in modern times the State is no longer content to confine itself to the functions of the policeman, the lawyer, and the soldier. In all countries it has gradually enlarged its sphere of action. It has taken one department of human welfare after another into its controlling care. In some countries it claims now to embrace the whole of life. In Germany and Italy and Russia there is hardly anything a citizen can do for himself except with the permission or by the order of some official of the State. In Great Britain we shall never accept this totalitarian theory of government, however attractive its immediate achievements may be, because the love of liberty is in our blood. 'Britons never will be slaves,' even to their own freely elected Government. Nevertheless, we have to recognize that even Britons are in many respects not quite so free as they were. We have submitted to interference by the State in matters which the politician of the past would never have dared to touch at all.

What have we lost by this public invasion into what used to be regarded as private concerns? There are some who declare that it has not only threatened our essential liberty, but has also weakened our sense of responsibility. A man says, 'If the State will educate my children, will help me to feed them, will look after me when I am ill, will keep me going somehow if I lose my job, will give me a pension when I am sixty-five, then I have by so much the less need to provide these things for myself and for my family. I need not "look forward."' And if he can say that, his independence of character, his whole moral fibre, is in danger of being weakened. But there need be little apprehension in this regard. After all, however much is done for people, there will always remain incentive enough for them to do more for themselves. And the provision now made for the poorer citizen enables him to provide further for himself. Moreover, we have to recognize that all these changes are themselves due to a new sense of responsibility, not for ourselves, but for our neighbours. When we of this generation pay our taxes and our rates, we know that we are enabling the country, or the city, to do for the needy what could never have been done for them anywhere in any previous century. And what does this mean? In the simple language of the gospel it means that the love of our neighbour has made its way into the law of the land. If ever we are asked what Christianity has done for the world, may we not for one of our answers point to the achievement of the social services? In them we have seen God at work.

Here, then, is a change in our national life which has come upon us by almost universal agreement, and, as it were, so inevitably that we are apt to overlook all that it involves for the Churches and their work. It is well, therefore, that we should face this new situation squarely, and consider how we can best adjust ourselves to it, and what new opportunities it offers us. At first sight the increased and increasing claims of the State upon social, and therefore upon individual life, seems to imply a shrinkage of the field of activity hitherto open to the Church. In the old days, when the relief of all kinds of distress was almost entirely the concern of private benevolence, how was it effected? Individuals discerned here and there a need of one kind and another which they felt impelled to meet. So they formed themselves into voluntary societies and set to work to do what they could. May we not claim that they acted under the inspiration, direct or indirect, of the Church? In those days it was the Church that took the initiative in teaching the children, in building schools, in founding hospitals, and innumerable other institutions designed to alleviate poverty, ignorance, and distress. Again, it was the Church that sent its agents into our Police Courts, bringing with them Christian help and guidance to offenders against the law. Out of that work has grown the whole of our great probationary system, and it is much to be desired that the Church should still take a share in this work by providing voluntary helpers in the after-care of young delinquents.

It would be easy to quote other examples in

which groups of individuals have done their best on a very small scale to make the lives of the poor a little less hard and a little more secure. And they have done it so well that the State has followed their examples upon an immensely larger scale, and in many respects with far greater efficiency. Does this mean that the Church is being squeezed out of the sphere of practical benevolence? May it now relegate these good works to a Government which has taken so definite a responsibility for them, and confine itself wholly to what is after all its primary task of drawing men into its own body, and there preparing character for service? Such a prospect need not be considered. For, in the first place, there will always be room for new enterprises and adventures of Christian love, and for these the initiative must still come from the Christian Church. Christ's followers must ever be asking themselves what *more* He would have us wisely do for His poor. The Church must continue its work of stimulating and inspiring State benevolence, and of pointing the way to fuller and more far-seeing applications of love for our neighbours. But, in the second place, there are new and rich opportunities opening before us out of social legislation as it exists to-day. They are waiting for our foresight to discern and our courage to use them.

The first great extension in England of State concern in the social life of the people was in the sphere of education. In 1870 the Government took over responsibility for the instruction and, to some limited extent, for the training of the children. It began to build schools and to maintain them out of public funds. And that public service has been developed ever since, till now a large and increasing number of elementary and secondary schools are provided and maintained by the State, and very considerable assistance is given in grants to schools and universities by local authorities and by the Government. This at once suggests the question whether in these new conditions it is wise to continue a policy designed to meet the old ones. I have myself no doubt that it is not wise. Up till 1870 the Church of England was right to build and administer schools. There was no one else to do it. The Church did so with such success that the State was impelled by our example to assume this responsibility as a public duty. How shall we take our proper share in that public responsibility? First, as I think, by maintaining the schools we own, as examples, still needed, of what elementary schools should be and do, and making these in all respects as well provided and equipped as Council schools. But it is not part of our proper share to compete with the State any further by the provision of new schools. We desire to be partners with central and local authorities, and not their rivals; and we ought to leave to them that part of the work which they can do far better than we can. What then remains for us in the sphere of education as it surrounds us to-day? I hold that there is a great range of opportunity which we ought resolutely to explore in the wider setting I have tried to describe. In the educational field I have only time to indicate one of our chances, to my mind the most important of them all, namely, the care of those who teach in Church or Council schools. Let us press on their behalf for a longer period of training. Two years in a Training College is not enough. In our own colleges let us secure that this training shall offer them the best and wisest religious influence we can provide. Let us be bolder in suggesting to them that the vocation of a Christian teacher calls for a real and complete dedication of mind and spirit. In the State Training Colleges and the University departments, and also in our secondary schools, let us see that opportunities shall be offered to students at least to prepare themselves to teach the Bible. There we can count upon the willing, I would say even the eager, co-operation of the Free Churches. I believe also that State authorities, both central and local, are more than ready to accept our suggestions and even to help us in this matter, provided that our approach to them is based upon our common Christianity and can be kept free from any suspicion of sectarian claims. Again, we have as a Church a duty to the teacher in his school. He needs our help, and he wants it, as is nearly always shown by the response to our offer of lectures, refresher courses, and discussion groups, by which he may enrich his own spiritual life, and exercise a stronger Christian influence in his work. He ought, moreover, to be protected against the poison of secularist literature. There are books which fall into his hands subtly designed to undermine his faith. They can easily be answered. Ought not the Church to be watchful and alert in counteracting this kind of false and subversive propaganda? There are many other means open to us of securing that teachers shall have at least their full chance of becoming, in knowledge and in life, what they must be if they are to train our children to be members of a Christian country and a Christian Church. And, after all, it is not through buildings or systems but through persons that they will so be prepared. I have written of Church and State as partners in educational

service from an English point of view. In Scotland this co-operation has become happier and more settled than ours, and many of us wish that we could attain a similar partnership south of the Border on similar lines. For various reasons, some of them historical, this seems at present out of our reach. In this country we have problems of religious education to solve which are special to ourselves. But we shall approach them with a larger wisdom and with new hope in the wider setting I am attempting to describe.

From the State's concern in teaching I return to its work in alleviating economic distress and insecurity. Since 1906 social legislation of this kind has come upon us with a rush. We have had Acts of Parliament dealing with insurance against sickness and unemployment, with the provision of houses, with relief of distress, with medical treatment, with the maintenance of health, with pensions. And now we are to receive State aid in providing our leisure hours with wholesome recreation through clubs and community centres. For these purposes vast administrative systems have been set up and very complicated machinery has been devised. This is entirely necessary where the State has to provide for great multitudes and varieties of people. And it is inevitable that these operations should in the main be wholesale, mechanistic, impersonal. I am not one of those who are quick to complain of the evils of bureaucracy and officialdom. I know too well that they exist. But when we consider fairly the difficulties that confront our Civil Servants, we ought, I think, to be thankful that in this country, and both in London and in our municipalities, they are in their work as human and sympathetic as we know them to be. Nevertheless, if this State benevolence is to be conveyed to the individual in a Christian spirit, there is need of something more than the administration of a law. And that has been recognized. In nearly every Social Service Act there is provision for a voluntary advisory body. The State relies upon the assistance, the counsel, the experience of individual social workers. It gives a share in public administration to the subtle and invaluable influence of personal service, and, so far as I can ascertain, ours is the only country in which this policy has been deliberately adopted.

Here, then, is a clear call to the Church which we dare not neglect. 'I am among you,' said our Lord, 'as he that serveth.' Now that the State is itself a servant of the Royal Law, ought we not to be producing men and women prepared to share with it that service? As members of the Church which is His Body they should be growing into just that type of personality—observant, keen, unselfish, humble—which He needs for work both within it and outside. May not the State rightly expect that the Church, nurturing such personalities, should send them out for service in the world? We have seen how Christian principles have won their way into secular spheres. To that extent the gospel has already permeated public life. Ought not the Church to follow up that achievement by a stronger leavening still? Let the clergy make it a part of their teaching to encourage and inspire laymen to grasp this opportunity of Christian service whenever it comes within their reach as members of district and borough councils, of advisory committees, of community councils, or of one or other of those voluntary social service organizations which are handmaids of the State and partners in State enterprises. Most of them have a gift for some constructive work if not for leadership, though in many it is latent, waiting for its chance. If they are conscious of any such capacity, let them seek their opportunities first in the parish. But let them not be content with Christian service that is spent wholly within the family life of the Church, and never goes beyond it. Their opportunities outside are multiplying year by year.

Within the last few months a new set of chances have emerged into special importance. They arise out of the latest venture of the Ministries of Health and Education. It is much more than an encouragement of Physical Training. To establish its full purpose there will be need of the co-operation of a large number of existing clubs and other voluntary associations and of some new ones. Community Centres are springing up not in new districts only but everywhere, to be homes of all manner of healthful activities and of fellowship life. These new institutions will of course offer membership to individuals, or, as at the Peckham Health Centre, to families. But they will serve a still higher purpose if they also provide a common shelter for clubs or other social units, each preserving its distinctive character and bringing its own separate contribution into the life of the whole. Thus might a Centre become a *communitas communitatum*. But as such it will be incomplete if local Church 'communities' remain outside. What prospect is there that they will throw their influence into this development? Here we have to reckon with a serious obstacle to co-operation between social agencies of the Church and those others that stand outside all religious adherence. They regard each other with mutual suspicion. The former,

using culture and recreation as means to spiritual ends, are naturally apprehensive of activities which seem to concentrate on the welfare of the body and the mind with no regard for the health of the spirit. Their concern is with the whole personality, and they feel at a disadvantage when they have to meet competing attractions offered by others who care for only a part of it. This helps to explain the reserved and negative attitude once very common among churchmen towards any welfare movement to which the word 'secular' can be applied. Thus, when Women's Institutes began to be established in English villages, many of the clergy stood aloof from them as irrelevant, and even potentially hostile, to religion. The 'secular' organizations on their part are equally suspicious of the Church. They resent the inference that because they are 'undenominational' therefore they are against religion, or even that they take no account of it. Many of them would declare that they must wear that label, not because they are careless of spiritual interests, but because they are afraid of sectarian discord, and because, working for members of all Churches, they cannot afford to be dominated by any one of them.

Recently, however, hopeful signs have appeared from both directions. Among Church people there is a growing recognition that a true line of Christian advance lies in the permeation of all social effort by the spiritual influence which it is the peculiar function of the Churches to exert both within their borders and outside. It is not denied that this influence must begin its work in self-contained and homogeneous groups looking to the Church for religious teaching and worship, and also for opportunities of social intercourse in which learners and worshippers may become friends. Otherwise the Church cannot build up a secure and continuous family life of its own. But it is realized that such exclusive groups may safely seek at least some of their social activities in a more comprehensive sphere, where they may be trusted to bring a spiritual influence of their own. Suppose, for instance, a Church club for young men, housed as one of many others in a Community Centre, and taking its share of advantages offered in common to all. No doubt its members might be tempted to lower standards, a risk to which they must in any case be constantly exposed. But if they are well grounded and well led, might not this club help to raise the spiritual level of the community life surrounding it? This is one of the considerations which is likely to ensure a warmer welcome from the Church for movements in which the State is helping the people to build up a richer cultural and spiritual life for themselves.

We must also take account of another encouraging sign of the times. There is to-day a widespread revival of interest among lay-folk in a spiritual or Christian approach to life. In 'secular' clubs and other organizations, as also in factories, a hearing is readily given to any one who will deal with this approach, provided that he speaks in the name, not of one of the separated Churches, but of Christ Himself. This new interest is reflected among those who are centrally responsible for the administration of the Physical Training Act. There is ample evidence of their desire that the whole movement shall not only secure the support of the Churches, but also be itself pervaded by the religious spirit and directed towards spiritual as well as bodily health. It is even likely that grants of money will be made to Church organizations which can show that they are managed with reasonable efficiency. And a far-sighted leader of this public enterprise, not himself a Churchman, goes so far as to say, 'If I did not believe that this movement is essentially religious, I could take no interest and I should see no hope in it.'

We have reviewed a new set of opportunities open to the Church. How can we grasp them by meeting the State in its tentative approaches? Only by enlisting the voluntary service of lay-men and women of all ages, who have been taught that the love they owe to God may be paid to their neighbours, and are prepared to learn by further study and training how this may be done. Upon them it depends whether the Church is to rest content with methods of Christian work appropriate enough to the social conditions of the last century, but inadequate to the environment of to-day; or is to grow into its new responsibilities, and by so doing to extend and strengthen its influence upon the national life.