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A MORE ABUNDANT LIFE

Looking back over 1933, and still further, over the preceding years of this depression, we find ourselves gazing on a very dark picture, indeed — poverty, crime, murder, kidnappings, lynchings and practically every form of human misery and degradation. Our earth is as fruitful as it ever was, our opportunities for cooperation are greater, our methods of producing wealth and saving labor are more ingenious and efficient, yet this tragic picture of want and suffering is all we have to show for our boasted civilization.

Why has Christianity failed so dismally in the part it has played in our individual and national life? Why has it been unable to cast a single ray of light into the darkness of these tragic years? In addressing the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, a few days ago, President Roosevelt said: "You have come through to the threshold of a new era in which your churches—Gentile and Jew—recognize and stand ready to lead in a new war of peace—the war for social justice.

"Christianity was born in and of an era notable for the great gulf that separated the privileged from the underprivileged of the world of 2000 years ago . . . The early churches were united in a social idea . . .

"If I were asked to state the great objective which church and state are both demanding for the sake of every man and woman and child in this country, I would say that that great objective is 'a more abundant life'."

A more abundant life! Making a living, merely keeping body and soul together, has become such a desperate struggle for many, such a colorless, monotonous existence for millions of others, that they may well ask: "What is it all about? What are we here for? Why try to go on, day after day with no hope of anything better." A Los Angeles minister, Dr. Willsie Martin, suggests that we "put our hands and heads together to build a better society, a freer, healthier, kindlier world. There is no better time to begin than now.

"Let us start by visioning the kind of society we want. It ought to be a social order in which every one has a chance to go out to the frontiers of his ability, in which every child has a place in the sun. I want a world in which there is bread enough, room enough and jobs enough for all. I want a world made as free from disease as science, right living and medical skill can make it. I would like to live in a world free from slums, ugliness and dirt. I would like to live in a world of good will, reciprocity, co-operation—in a word, a world of love. Such a world is possible. Why not start to build it now?"

Those who advocate the land value tax, do so because they believe it will bring about just such a condition as Dr. Martin has described. Now what is the difference between the methods of those who would accomplish this highly desirable end through taxation, and the church which stresses the Golden Rule and its observance as the way of social salvation? Several months ago, the Los Angeles Times carried an editorial calling for a refurbishing of conscience and morals, a new kind of revival "of real religion." "About the only thing that can save America from going the way of Babylon is straightening up in morals and stiffening up in ideals."

We have reached a crisis, not only in our economic history, but in our religious life as well. Christianity, itself, is on trial. Imagine a missionary trying to convert a "heathen" tribe and holding up the United States as an example of what Christianity can do for a people. "But, sir," the savage might say, "we have no crime problem in our little tribe, no poverty, no murders. When the season is good and the crops are plentiful, we all eat; when the rains are too heavy or the drought prolonged and the crops are meager, we all go hungry or poorly fed. We have no years when food is plentiful, yet some of our members starve. Why should some of our young men steal skins or meat from others when the chase, manliest of all sports, is open to

all, and it is noble and honorable to bring home game of one's own capture? You are asking us to adopt a faith of brotherly love. If we do, will it make our country like yours as we see it pictured in the newspaper you have been showing us? Must we give up this life of equality and happiness and see our little children go hungry and cold and our young men steeped in the blood of their brothers? What would we do with them, we have no strong prisons as you have. What is Christianity? What kind of a religion is it that turns brother against brother, that allows some who do not work to take from those who do, that permits some to take possession of the fields and not allow others to raise food unless they give a part of it to this so-called owner? I am afraid we don't quite understand you and your Christianity." Our savage would probably conclude his remarks with a native word meaning "Applesauce."

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We don't know what a missionary would say to this. We don't know what he could say, but the advocates of the Christian religion will have to do something, and do it before long, if they are to justify their philosophy. We speak of Christianity because this is what is called a Christian nation. The same thing might be said of any of the major religions.

In spite of the fact that the churches are suffering from pernicious anemia, that their ministers feel obliged to defend the privilege that supports them, though doing so has warped the world's most beautiful philosophy into a shabby, shapeless thing, yet there are many earnest souls who come in all sincerity to lay their burdens before their God and tearfully beseech Him to relieve their anguish. They honestly believe their own words when they say that all we need to gain this "more abundant life" is to practice the Golden Rule.

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Let us look at this carefully. Our unequal distribution of wealth has resulted in great riches on one hand and extreme poverty on the other, in crime and unemployment, in false standards of success and happiness—these are social problems. They arise when men live together in groups and communities, and they increase in number and importance as the size of the group increases and its activities become more complex. The interests of the individuals in the larger state become so diversified that the rules of conduct followed in the simpler society are not adequate for the new relations.

The natural laws are still there, on the job and up to the minute, but they are not so clearly seen when we have so many things to observe and ponder. The principles involved in the production and operation of an oldtime hand press are not difficult to understand. To the unini-

tiated, the big power presses of our daily newspapers are almost as much a mystery as the Milky Way. Yet, if a single natural law—of motion, of gravity, of the conservation of matter—had been violated, the power press could not be operated.

The primitive man places a log across a narrow stream and tests it by putting his foot on it. He needs no scientific knowledge to determine whether it will bear his weight. His problems of social life are equally simple. Without having heard of the Golden Rule or the Sermon on the Mount or the Lord's Prayer, he and his fellows attain a life of well-being and satisfaction that puts our civilization to shame. Without knowing how nor why, he recognizes the fact that the well-being of the individual and the group are interdependent, and he molds his simple activities to bring about that end.

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We have graduated from logs to suspension bridges and concrete forms. Bridge building is a science and it must be studied and mastered if we are to span the Golden Gate or the Hudson River. Observance of the Golden Rule will prevent a man from using too small an amount of cement in his mixture or imperfect steel beams in his structure, but it will not in a million years tell him how much cement *ought* to go in the mixture nor how strong the beams *ought* to be to support a given weight.

The knowledge of how to live together in groups, yet enjoy the freedom, the peace and prosperity, the opportunity for work and play that we have a right to expect in this life—the knowledge of how to do this is a science and should be treated as such. Moral laws are no guide in solving scientific or mechanical problems. We are not born with a systematized knowledge of the natural laws that govern the universe, and no one has yet proposed the Golden Rule as the key that will unlock the mysteries of astronomy or of differential calculus.

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There is a moral element in our social relations, to be sure, but we cannot observe the Golden Rule, except to a very limited extent, until we have studied political economy and discovered those natural laws upon which our man-made laws must be based if we are to achieve that more abundant life of which our President spoke.

How can we make a contact between the philosophy of Jesus Christ, a philosophy of love and kindness, honesty and justice, and our present day complicated social relations? So far as we know, Henry George was the only economist who ever attempted to do so, who ever spoke of God and God's laws throughout his remarkable books, the only man who ever amplified and

completed the idea embodied in the Golden Rule so that those who believed in the philosophy of Christ might make a practical application of it and really practice the Golden Rule about which they have talked so much and done so little—as is evidenced by the deplorable conditions prevailing in this Christian nation.

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Today the administration is trying frantically to correct these evils by effecting a change in what is obviously an unfair distribution of wealth, and all of these attempts to better conditions are made by legislating or dictating rules and regulations without any pretense of determining whether there may be a natural and orderly sequence in the production and distribution of wealth. Perhaps the efforts of these well-meaning gentlemen in Washington would meet with better success if they knew even a few of the things that Henry George has made so clear. Mr. George, in his *Science of Political Economy*, Book IV, Chap. II, makes a nice distinction between the kind of natural law that governs production and that which governs the distribution of wealth.

"For natural law is not all comprehended in what we call physical law. Besides the laws of nature which relate to matter and energy, there are also laws of nature that relate to spirit, to thought and will. . . .

"In short, the distinction between the laws of production and the laws of distribution is not, as is erroneously taught in the scholastic political economy, that the one set of laws are natural laws, and the other human laws. Both sets of laws are laws of nature. The real distinction is pointed out in the last chapter, that the natural laws of production are physical laws and the natural laws of distribution are moral laws. And it is this that enables us to see in political economy more clearly than in any other science, that the government of the universe is a moral government, having its foundation in justice. Or, to put this idea into terms that fit it for the simplest comparison, that the Lord our God is a just God.

"In considering the production of wealth we are concerned with natural laws of which we can only ask what is, without venturing to raise the question of what ought to be. . . .

"For the perception of right or justice, the recognition of ought or duty has no connection with or relation to two of the three elements or categories into which we may by analysis resolve the world as it is presented in consciousness to our reasoning faculties. That is to say, right or justice, ought or duty, do not and cannot have any relation either to matter or to energy, but only to spirit. They presuppose conscious will, and cannot be extended beyond the

limits in which we recognize or assume a will having freedom to act.

"Thus is it that in considering the nature of wealth we come into no direct and necessary contact with the ethical idea, the idea of right or justice. . . .

"But the moment we turn from a consideration of the laws of the production of wealth to a consideration of the laws of the distribution of wealth the idea of ought or duty becomes primary. All consideration of distribution involves the ethical principle; is necessarily a consideration of ought or duty—a consideration in which the idea of right or justice is from the very first involved. And this idea cannot be truly conceived of as having limits or being subject to change, for it is an idea or relation, like the idea of a square or of a circle or of parallel lines, which must be the same in any other world, no matter how far separated in space or time, as in this world."

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What Socialist or Communist or Technocrat has seen so clearly the hand of God in the affairs of men? What politician or statesman has credited natural law, either physical or moral, as having any part in this problem of the production and distribution of wealth? What minister of the gospel has come forward to say that the brotherhood of man and the Fatherhood of God implies an equal right to the use of the earth?

Those who would achieve "a more abundant life" by beseeching all to obey the Golden Rule—and explaining no further—are like one who would give a few steel beams and a couple of handfuls of rivets to a man and ask him to construct a skyscraper. Those who would work toward the same end by giving every man an opportunity to use the earth without paying another individual for the privilege, recognize the truth in the Christ philosophy of love and justice, and have found one means of applying it to our present day complicated social problems by following the principles laid down in the teachings of Henry George. We must have Christianity, or something like it under any name, to teach us that we *ought* to practice the virtues of justice and honesty and kindness. Then we need the clear and concise statements of Henry George to tell us how to make our man-made laws follow natural laws in the production and distribution of wealth so that we may realize that state of society pictured so alluringly by Dr. Martin.

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The Christian religion and philosophy cannot do it alone, for it is concerned with the moral laws and does not pretend to define property rights or advocate systems of government. The church says: "Thou shalt not steal," yet makes not the slightest attempt to define property or

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the natural rights of man. How do we know when we are and when we are not stealing unless we know what is thine and what is mine? Either the churches are wholly ignorant of the natural rights of man or are indifferent to them, for many churches have subsisted on stolen wealth ever since the Christian church was founded.

Again, we say that the observance of the Golden Rule is not enough to solve a scientific problem, and it is just as absurd to expect it to clear up our economic problems as it would be to consider its observance sufficient to solve a mechanical problem. It ought to teach a motorist not to be a road hog (it doesn't) but it certainly cannot teach him to drive an automobile.

If the moral precepts contained in Christ's philosophy are true at all, they are just as true today as they were when Jesus trod the streets of old Jerusalem. If they are true, they open to us that sublime vision of a social order in which "everyone has a chance to go out to the frontiers of his ability, in which every child has a place in the sun." Is the relinquishing of land speculation too great a price to pay for that?

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The Los Angeles Times and realtors' organizations, particularly the "big time" land speculators, do not want you to make a practical application of Christianity, for that would mean that those who collect wealth, without producing any, would have to go to work. The great monopolies and public utilities would be shorn of their power to take from the people more than a just return for their goods or services. Yes, the Times and the real estate boards would fight a plan that proposed *doing* something to establish economic justice, but is it necessary to go on suffering depression after depression, with all their attendant want and misery, just to please a few powerful ones "at the top of the pyramid"?

Christianity, today, is being put to the severest test in its history. No wonder the young people are not joining the churches. Why should they? They have finished their schooling and are ready for work—but there is no work. If a young man wants money, he'll have to get it at the

point of a gun. It is a very dark and discouraging world, indeed, that he steps into from the portals of his school. And what are you Christians doing about it? You have put the whole matter up to God. You have shamelessly passed the buck to the very Being who provided this beautiful world for your use, for your happiness, for your very life. You are down on your knees begging God to have pity on you, to help the little children, to succor the poor widow. It's a mercy He doesn't take you by the nape of the neck and knock your heads together!

People sometimes like to speculate on what Jesus would do if He were to return to earth. If He were to enter one of our churches and find His beautiful and gentle philosophy wrenched and distorted in behalf of privileged—even human slavery, if He could walk through the churches of the land and see these things, He would die of a broken heart. That's what He would do!

Brace up. Forget your creed-and-dogma nonsense. Stop your hair-splitting. There is a way to make Christianity function—even after lying dormant for two thousand years. You can't put it into operation by next Tuesday, but if it is ever to be done, we'll have to make a beginning. Read Henry George's book, "The Condition of Labor." If you do, if you will read it without prejudice and with a mind open to conviction, such a light will flood the darkness that you will never again say: "What is it all about, why are we starving in a land of plenty?" You will see God's justice as you have never seen it before. You will believe with Henry George, a great philosopher and a great economist, that:

"God's laws do not change. Though their applications may alter with altering conditions, the same principles of right and wrong that hold when men are few and industry is rude also hold amid teeming populations and complex industries. . . .

"God cannot contradict Himself nor impose on His creatures laws that clash.

"If it be God's command to men that they should not steal—that is to say, that they should respect the right of property which each one has in the fruits of his labor;

"And if He be also the Father of all men, who in His common bounty has intended all to have equal opportunities for sharing;

"Then, in any possible stage of civilization, however elaborate, there must be some way in which the exclusive right to the products of industry may be reconciled with the equal right to land."

Civilization has gone down into the Valley of the Shadow of Death, but Christian *did* get out of the Valley and up into the Delectable Mountains, didn't he?