

CHURCH'S ALLIANCE WITH MONEY ALIENATES THE MASSES

Rev. John P. Peters, Rector of St. Michael's Protestant Episcopal Church, Sounds a Warning Note Against the Power of Wealth in Religion.

WHEN you find things in this community that are rotten, it is well to look to the Church to see if there are not things there that are rotten also.

"We are in a condition in this country where many strong men are setting each what he may for himself, with or without law, massing enormous fortunes, grasping huge areas of lands, forests, mines, controlling the lines of transportation. We have amassed enormous fortunes, and immense power amassed in the hands of a relatively few, and the enormous majority living on the edge of want.

"The voice and the wish of the men of large means is potent in the management of the affairs of the church, because we need money. We must have it for cathedrals, church, parish houses, missions, and all those activities which cannot be conducted without money. Therefore money speaks powerfully in the management of the affairs of the church. To a very considerable extent the Church finds itself allied with the money interests. Precisely in proportion as this is the case the Church becomes alienated from the laboring masses."

This was the warning note sounded by the Rev. John P. Peters, rector of St. Michael's Episcopal Church of this city, in an address delivered in Lenox before the Spring meeting of the convention of Western Massachusetts churches, not before laymen. Dr. Peters' object in making it was to show where the church is weak.

The brief telegraphic report of the address printed in the newspapers has aroused so much criticism, favorable and unfavorable, that the rector has secured from Dr. Peters a more extensive expression of his views.

"I find," says Dr. Peters, "that there is a tendency on the part of the Church in dealing with civic matters to attack them from a certain confessional or theoretical, rather than from a real and fundamental standpoint."

"To illustrate my point let us take the Sunday or Sabbath question. Much is said in the pulpits about the increasing laxity of Sunday observance. Societies have been formed to prevent the desecration of the Sabbath, and from these appeals are continually made to the churches to protest against legislation permitting Sunday baseball or to demand of Mayors and police officers enforcement of the Sunday laws as they affect amusements.

"I say that many of these appeals are essentially wrong. I remember the protest which was raised twenty years ago by the Church in New York against the opening of the museums on Sunday. I do not believe that such a protest would be raised to-day. Nevertheless, the appeals to which I have referred are not infrequently based on the same false principle which lay behind that protest.

"It is not, however, with the character of these protests and appeals that I now wish to deal, but with a somewhat different matter.

"There has been within the last quarter of a century vast increase in the amount of Sunday labor. At the present time in practically every city and town and throughout most of the country districts street and trolley cars, and every other mode of public conveyance run on Sunday precisely as in other days. In general this is true also of the railroads. There is an increasing number of factories and industrial concerns all over the country in which labor is continuous seven days in the week.

"The Pittsburgh survey revealed to the country at large—or so much of it as opened its eyes and ears to see and heard—extraordinary and painful industrial conditions.

"This survey revealed men working twelve hours a day seven days in the week in order to secure what was in many cases not a proper living wage.

"Now here is the invasion of Sunday which is dangerous, which is immoral in the highest degree, which the Church ought to have prevented, and which the Church should be thundering to-day.

"It passed almost unnoticed.

"Why?

"Because to so large an extent the Church was out of touch with the great working masses who are particularly affected by such violations of Sunday.

"For these violations the men in the pews of the churches, or whose wives are in the pews of the churches, are largely responsible. The Directors and stockholders of great industrial transportation and public service corporations have been scrupulously strict to the point in the attempt to turn over capital more rapidly—to make more money in a shorter time.

"The Church has told these men and women that on Sunday they ought not to go to the theatre, that they ought not to give dinner parties, or play bridge, or play golf. It has not told them that in damning the souls of the men whom they have deprived of all possibility of mental and spiritual growth by those unnatural conditions of labor they have been damning their own souls.

"These industrial furnaces cannot be put out. They must run on Sunday; the loss created by extinguishing them would be too great. The people must travel on Sunday. Street cars and the like cannot be done away with.

"But this is what can be done, and that is precisely what the Church should have been demanding: that those men who have to keep the blast furnaces running on Sunday, that the men who form the crews of cars that run on Sunday, and others like them, should have another day of rest in the week; that no man should be called upon to labor more than six days in a week.

"But sometimes you will find workmen themselves objecting to interference in this matter, you will hear it said that the workmen wish to work on Sunday because they earn more money by doing so. Unfortunately, in too many instances—the steel industries in Pittsburgh, for example—the men can make ends meet only by working seven days in the week. Their only objection to interference is the fear that their opportunity for a living wage may be taken from them. In well-organized unions as, for instance, in the building trades in New York City, and in most parts of the country, there is a prohibition of Sunday work except in cases of necessity, and a provision for a larger rate of pay in those cases.

"The Sunday question is really part of a bigger question—the question of the opportunity to earn a living wage by a reasonable amount of labor in a reasonable time, the opportunity for the ordinary laboring man to secure recreation, refreshment of mind and soul and body on weekdays and on Sunday, and to earn a living wage, a wage that shall support him and his family in decency and self-respect.

"Are there more vital questions than this? Have we not here a foundation problem?

"We are organizing societies to prevent child labor. We have been bringing the matter up in the churches, though I am sorry to say the Church did not lead in

this matter, but would you have child labor if the parents did not feel the necessity of putting the child to work in order to get enough money to live decently? You have the question of the work of women, especially married women. Why do the married women have to work? Because their husbands cannot earn a sufficient wage to support them and to support the children.

"These are the problems the labor unions are taking up. And labor unions complain, and complain rightly, that the Church is not concerned with these questions which are vital to welfare, morally as well as mentally and physically, of the masses of the people. The people do not hear about these problems which concern their lives and well-being when they attend the churches. They do not find the Church protesting against injustice or unfairness toward them. These great moral issues of their lives are outside of the sphere of the Church. Hence, their alienation from the Church.

"Now, in these problems, the clergy are, on the whole, more progressive than the laity in the Church. A great many of the clergy are stirred with a sense of the injustice of these social conditions. They are full of zeal to amend them, and are anxious for church activity in doing so, but they find the laymen uninterested. When they present from the pulpit problems of this description the men and women whom these problems especially concern are not present. The men and women who are present are not interested in them. These problems are quite outside of their sphere; these problems do not touch them, and they object to these problems being intruded upon them.

"Very likely, they will say: 'We came here to hear the Gospel preached. This is not the Gospel.' They absolutely do not see the relation of those things to Christianity. Their Christianity is a matter of what they call personal religion—going to church, saving their prayers when they get up and when they go to bed, giving to the support of the church and to missions, belonging to an industrial society, missionary society, etc., and attending meetings of these societies once in so often, subscribing to certain charities, and perhaps being on some board or committee.

"Some of the men are apt to oppose the clergy's treatment of these matters from the pulpit on another ground. The clergy do not know anything about business, when they talk about these things they are talking nonsense, such things might very well be done in heaven, but they cannot be done here on earth.

"It is rather discouraging to a well-meaning, if not always thoroughly informed clergyman, to meet with just these conditions. It is going to take a good deal of time and a good deal of patience to awake those that are in the Church to the duties and obligations of the Church, and to convince those that are outside of it and ought to be inside of it, that the Church really does stand for the righting of wrongs, for peace and good-will among men, for the Kingdom of God here upon earth.

"In the early Middle Ages it was the Church which was the protector of the poor and oppressed. The monasteries were the homes of industry, asylums for the poor against the robber barons, for a time in this country curiously parallel to those ancient conditions, where many strong men are seizing each what he may for himself, with or without law, massing enormous fortunes, grasping huge areas of lands, forests, mines, controlling the lines of transportation, and using the lines of transportation to dominate the lines of transportation in the old world, and levy toll on all passers. And even the organs of publicity are passing into the hands of the modern robber barons, so that it is becoming increasingly difficult to present to the masses of the people, which are so judicial to great interests, the papers and the magazines are coming increasingly under their control.

"We have these bloated fortunes—immense power amassed in the hands of a relatively few—and the enormous majority live on the edge of want, always dependent, so that even if they are now in a condition of well-to-do classes, they stand in dread of loss of employment through coming old age or through sickness, which will reduce them and those dependent upon them to poverty and misery.

"The Church needs to become again the champion of the poor and needy under these new and changed conditions, precisely as she was in the olden times. The conditions are changed, and the work has to be done in a somewhat different way.

"But at the present time the Church is, on the whole, allied with the great interests. It is their ally and not the defender and protector of the poor.

"So far as the lay management of our churches is concerned, it is in the hands of the well-to-do classes. The voice and wish of the men of large means is potent in the management of the affairs of the Church, because we need money. We must have it for cathedrals, churches, parish houses, missions, and all those activities which cannot be conducted without money. Therefore money speaks powerfully in the management of the affairs of the Church. To a very considerable extent the Church finds itself allied with the money interests. Precisely in proportion as this is the case has it been alienated from the laboring masses.

"Without going further into details here, let me call attention to the attitude of the Church and churchmen toward labor unions. I suppose that nothing has tended toward the uplift of laboring men and women as have the unions. They have been the effective agents to secure better living conditions, better wages, shorter hours, more protection for life and limb in various manufacturing, transportation, and mining interests; more protection for girls and women against hurtful moral conditions of labor. They have been the leaders and the most influential agents in securing protection of children. They have been a great educational influence among the men themselves in raising the general standard of morality, in educating them in self-government and self-control. They have taught and enforced the obligation of a man toward his brother, compelling the laborer to consider not himself alone, but also his fellow-laborers. They are also quite benevolent and charitable associations.

"But in spite of all this—the general



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attitude of the Church and churchmen toward them has been one of unkindness. Instead of making common cause with them to attain those very desirable things which they were organized to attain the tendency has been not merely to stand aloof, but to treat them as enemies, or at least to look upon them with distrust, dwelling upon all their faults, their shortcomings, their blunders, and misdemeanors. So much for the industrial situation.

"Let me turn to another question in which the Church has shown great interest—the liquor question. We have ourselves a Church Temperance Society, which is a useful organization, doing good work in New York and Massachusetts—of which I can speak with personal knowledge—and I presume elsewhere, also. There are other organizations, undenominational in character, representing the Church in a broader use of the term, like the Women's Church Temperance Union and the Anti-Saloon League.

"The general attitude of these organizations, outside of our own Church Temperance Society, which is much less of a slimmer in this regard, is apt to be extreme and narrow. I have been inclined in some cases to think the cure which they offer is worse than the disease for which they prescribe.

"Most ministers are ready to preach on demand on the temperance question, and most churches are ready to take part in passing resolutions or doing something to promote the temperance cause. They have gone into the Legislature and secured legislation compelling

instruction in schools on temperance, and they have seen to it that text-books, frequently of the most extreme, not to say rabid, character, are provided for its teaching. They have succeeded in passing laws and even Constitutional Amendments for the prohibition of the sale or manufacture of intoxicating liquors in town, county, and State.

"In this direction the churches have developed their greatest civic activities. But because they have concentrated all their energy upon this they have tended to view it out of proportion. Intemperance in the use of liquor has seemed to them the greatest of vices and the parent of all misery. If this curse be removed a host of other evils will cease of themselves. So, viewing the situation, they gauge the morality of men by their attitude on the liquor question.

"The latest of these organizations to deal with the liquor question, an organization which has attempted to band the churches of all denominations throughout the country together in an effort to suppress the liquor traffic is the Anti-Saloon League. This league has gone very actively into politics. In New York State, and I believe the same is true in other States, where it is well organized, it has been the practice of the Anti-Saloon League to go into the Legislature to seek legislation, and also to follow the legislators into their electoral districts, commending to the voters those legislators seeking for re-election who have voted for anti-saloon bills and opposing for election those who opposed.

"In New York State, so far as its in-

fluence is concerned, and the churches influenced by it, the great question to be determined in the selection of an Assemblyman or Senator to represent the voters in Albany is whether he has voted or will vote for or against the anti-saloon bills. This is vicious and pernicious political activity on the part of the Church and must ultimately produce political corruption.

"Some years ago there was in the Legislature at Albany a smooth and plausible Assemblyman of gentlemanly and persuasive appearance, who was one of the chief tools and agents of the 'interests', that is, of those public utilities and other corporations which have been corrupting the voters and Legislatures of the State for years for the purpose of securing special grants and privileges of public properties or public franchises on terms particularly favorable to themselves and detrimental to the public weal.

"Over and over again such bills were introduced or engineered by this man; but he had the certificate, as it were, of the Anti-Saloon League, because he voted for its pet measures. You cannot in the end secure virtue by supporting vice, and really what the Anti-Saloon League in that case was doing was to support vice in the vain hope of securing virtue thereby. Men of honesty, good purpose, and wisdom might and did vote against its bills; but there was no question whatever that the man who introduced and engineered bills of the sort I have described, as this man was doing, was a corrupt and dishonest politician.

There were no two sides to the question there. The fundamental principles of honesty are more important than any specific measures or policies.

"While brewers and distillers and saloon keepers may be distressed in bad liquor laws and bad enforcement of those laws, were they the only enemies to be dealt with, the situation would be simple. When the other day the representative of a certain National society wrote to me if I had anything to say in regard to the manner in which this society should approach the liquor problem, I replied that I felt a sort of hopelessness in dealing with the liquor question as such, that the roots of the evil lay in the political needs of great business interests, public service corporations, and the like, on which theme I enlarged somewhat. He responded that he believed I was correct.

"Some years ago we were locally engaged in cleaning up a certain section of the city which had been suddenly invaded by dives and dance halls. With one dance hall we could do nothing. The rest we put out of existence. Against this one we contended in vain. We brought every possible influence that we could to bear to compel the authorities to suppress it. Ultimately we learned that the proprietor had the political backing of a great public service corporation.

"What is true of the saloons is true of gambling places and brothels also.

"Once upon a time a certain Judge was conducting an energetic campaign against gambling halls. Money was contributed for that purpose by distinguished citizens in the city where this campaign was being conducted. The Judge accomplished his purpose, but he struck the vitals of the system, when suddenly his backers, men of high position, prominent in the financial world, withdrew their financial support.

"I attended a little dinner given at this time in which this condition was the topic of the evening. The toast to which the toastmaster called on every one to speak was in substance this: 'Why is it that in every reform movement in this city, when you begin to do the real thing, the pious magnates who have supported your reforms always calls a halt?'

"If you want to know the answer and have not the personal experience which enables you to answer for yourself read Judge Lindsay's account of his experiences in reform in the City of Denver, published under the title, 'I believe, of 'The Beast and the Jungle.' Perhaps you already read it, if so, you will remember that, speaking generally, Judge Lindsay does not seem to have felt that he received very real support in his struggle to save the boys from the Church or from the Y. M. C. A. Both of them seemed somehow tangled up with the system.

"And here we come to the corruption of politics, the commercializing of politics for the promotion of business. We have been shocked and startled, until we have become almost callous to such things, by the revelations of political immorality, the venality of the voters, on the one side, and on the other side of the ingenuity and boldness of business interests in purchasing votes and controlling Legislatures, administrative officers, and courts. The scandals are too numerous and too frequent to require mention.

"Perhaps to many persons the most astonishing of all has been the revelation of the wholesale corruption of a rural county in Ohio, where it seemed almost as if every citizen had been in the habit of selling his vote. This was bruited in the papers as a new and startling thing, as if I chance to be a man, I have supposed that this county in Ohio was exceptional in its conditions.

"I think not.

"Speaking of these Ohio revelations to a distinguished political leader in New Jersey about the conditions in his home county, which I chance to be a former resident, I asked him what would be the result in his own home county if a similar confession could be exacted. He replied that, so far as he knew, there were only two men in the county who had not sold their votes, and those were himself and a wealthy leader on the other side.

"Literally, that was doubtless an exaggeration, but it was, unfortunately, very close to the truth. I think I can say without serious contradiction what is true of that county in Ohio is true also of the rural parts of New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Ohio, Indiana, New Jersey, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Maine. Of these, I have learned the conditions either through residence, personal inquiry, or by the publication of the results of investigation, and I suppose what is true of them is true of other States also.

"This is a condition which has grown up slowly, but which could not have grown up, I think, if the Church had been conscious of its civic duty and had been setting forth through its appointed leaders high standards of civic righteousness as a part, and an essential part, of true religion.

"This is not, be it remembered, a question of the alien population which comes to our shores from countries having lower political and religious standards. It is, primarily, a question of our American church-going religious population with which we have here to deal, a population which can be reached by and is amenable to the teaching and preaching of the churches.

"And now, what should be the relation of the Church to civic problems? Or rather, what can we do to establish a proper relation of the Church toward civic problems? First, we must be teachers and preachers of civic righteousness. That is part of the gospel committed to our charge. We are not preaching Christianity unless we carry the gospel to the every-day affairs and the essential affairs of daily life. We must make the men and women in our care hear the truth about these matters. We must make them understand that civic duty is an essential part of their religious obligation. We must make them understand that to play the part of brothers is required above and beyond all charity.

"And surely the Bible and the preaching which it contains is our sufficient warrant for this attitude. Jesus preached the gospel of social reform in his Parables, and indeed, to this day, some of his preaching seems so radical that I have known even clergymen of the Church to endeavor to seek to interpret it away. Take the parable of Dives and Lazarus. Can anything more forcefully depict conditions which exist in New York, in Boston, in Springfield, in every city and

town in this country? Or has any more wide-reaching social proposition ever been presented to the world than is contained in the opening and fundamental wishes of the Lord's Prayer, which we have adopted as the model of all prayers, teaching our people to say it at all their devotions, public and private, Our Father? Or, if you wish to turn from the New Testament to the Old, is there any more spiritual and lofty portion of the Hebrew Scriptures than the utterances of the Hebrew prophets, whose sermons are largely concerned with the interpretation to the people of God's law in relation, not so much to what we commonly call personal religion, as to corporate righteousness and corporate obligation, their duty to their fellow-men in the city and the State?

"I think we have tended to move away from these standards, and to conceive of religion as a personal emotion or sentiment, and to make our preaching accord with this idea; and as I have said before, I think that the laity of our churches in this matter stand somewhat behind the clergy. They are apt, when a clergyman deals with these things, to regard it somehow as an impertinence. It is not religion. They want 'evangelistic' preaching or ritualistic preaching, according to their stripe of churchmanship.

"But there is a greater mass which are calling for God's word about these things, and who are not in the churches because it has seemed to them that the churches are not dealing with the real problems of life.

"Well, this is repeating what may be generalities, and what, I think, is a little bit tired of hearing. We think it is a little overdone and a little exaggerated. Very well; let us pass on to another line: our corporate relation as a Church to civic problems.

"In its corporate capacity the Church has in the latter years, I am happy to say, shown an increasing tendency to give these problems the place which they deserve. The Lambeth Conference recommended that each diocese should create something of the nature of a Social Service Commission, and we are in the course of carrying out this suggestion. We have not yet made the work very effective, it is true. We have not yet seen our way to make it a part of the great mission work of the church, as the Presbyterians have done. In later years, also, our churches, either through the Presiding Bishop, the Bishops, or the General Convention, has shown a greater interest in large questions of life than theretofore. As Presiding Bishop, Bishop Tuttle addressed himself to the head of the Russian Church, calling upon that functionary as a Christian brother to use his best endeavors to protect the Jews and to prevent their persecution. His predecessor as Presiding Bishop, Bishop Williams, called on all the Bishops of the Church in this country to join with him in letters addressed to our own Government and to the Governments of Russia, Germany, Austria, Italy, and France, urging them to put a stop to the massacre of the Armenians by the Turks, and he also urged the Archbishop of Canterbury to take similar action on behalf of the English Church. Matters of similar large import were introduced and action taken upon them in the last General Convention.

"And these things indicate movement along the right line. Much more of the same sort remains to be done, and doubtless will be done. The protection of the children of our own country is as important as the saving of the little children in China for which we send out missionaries. We must fight for the protection of the children and to secure proper laws preventing his exploitation in factories, mills, telegraph offices, and the like before he is physically, mentally, or morally fit to work. It is as important to save our women from degradation, and to prevent their persecution, as it is to save the women of India by Zenana Missions from the degradations of the harem life. We must fight to secure proper laws and proper enforcement of those laws in the Nation and in the State, to prevent women from being overworked, worked under maternity approaching conditions, and under conditions which tempt or force them to sell their honor for a living.

"These things are part of the mission of the Church which it is only beginning to realize. We need paid secretaries, a thorough and hindered in its handling of these social problems, just as much as we need it for missions, city missions, seamen's missions, church temperance societies and the like.

"It seems to me that each church parish has a distinct local responsibility which it must assume, and in which acceptance lies a good part of the proper settlement of the relation of the Church to civic problems.

"Here, for instance, is a child grown to the age of fourteen or fifteen who does not know how to read. The church in whose parish that child grew up this hampers and hindered in its mental and moral development, in its opportunities for earning a living and playing a proper rôle in life, but must bear a heavy responsibility for such a condition. Educational facilities are matters of immense importance to moral development. The question of desecration is more important than that of Sunday schools. I do not mean the question of establishing religious day schools. I mean merely the problem of seeing that there are educational advantages. Religion on the formal side will take care of itself if religion is attended to first on the fundamental, practical side.

"If in a parish there are women or girls working under conditions for a wage which almost drive them to shame in order to maintain themselves in reasonable comfort, it seems to me that that is a horrible indictment of the church in that district. It must organize itself to change these conditions.

"If for lack of healthy amusement and recreation young lads and young girls are tempted to go to saloons and low dance halls, with the results of drunkenness and debauchery, wrecked and ruined lives, because they have sought that which every healthy young life seeks, recreation and amusement, and could not find it in any other place, I think that in God's sight a great responsibility must rest upon the church in that neighborhood for its failure to recognize the needs of these young people, to save them from such temptation, to guide and guard them who were committed to its care.

"I believe that the Church has a responsibility for all these and other conditions. It may be that the best way to fulfill these responsibilities is not through some specific church organization, but rector and people alike have a responsibility to relieve these conditions or to substitute better ones. The Church stands to represent and to realize the Kingdom of God upon earth as well as to prepare those who are in it for the Kingdom of God in heaven, and its first and primary duty is the matter of the Kingdom of God on earth. Let the Church attend to the first, God will take care of the latter."