

The Church Militant

by Olin Alfred Curtis

The church must be a militant force, working to conquer the world with the gospel, and utilizing the Christian preacher, the home, and foreign missions to achieve this goal.

Scripture: Matthew 28:19, Mark 16:15, 1 Corinthians 7:14, Ephesians 4:11, James 1:27, 1 Peter 2:9

Topics: "Church Ministry", "Global Evangelism"

Description

Olin Alfred Curtis delves into the role of the Christian preacher within the church militant, emphasizing the preacher's significance in the church's mission to conquer the world. He distinguishes the preacher from apostles and priests, highlighting the preacher's essential role in the church's economy and spiritual development. Curtis discusses the importance of the Christian church's engagement with the home, viewing the baptism of infants as a means of claiming them for Christ and emphasizing the church's role in nurturing them within the faith. Furthermore, he explores the profound relationship between the church and the nation, advocating for their collaboration in advancing God's kingdom on earth. Lastly, Curtis addresses the church's stance on socialism, the city problem, and foreign missions, urging for a more profound Christian engagement in societal issues and global evangelism.

Transcript

Having considered the church in its sacraments, in its organism, and in its essential relation to the kingdom of God, we are now prepared to look at the church militant, that is, the church actually at work in the great struggle to conquer the world.

The Christian Preacher. It is with serious purpose that I place the Christian preacher in just this connection, for he has no significance save from the standpoint of the militant aim of the church. The Christian preacher is not an apostle. He has neither the authority nor the inspiration to make any fundamental addition to the word of God. Nor is the Christian preacher a priest, excepting in the sense in which every Christian man is a priest, "to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." The Christian preacher does not belong (as do the sacraments) to the organic structure of the church. There could be a real Christian church without any minister at all. He is not even necessary to preach the gospel. But he is necessary for economical and efficient service. He is an important feature in the economy of Christian conquest. A careful study of the Christian church in the New Testament will convince you that the difference between the clergy and the laity, of which high-church writers have made so much account, was merely a difference in practical service. To accomplish anything, without perpetual

waste, the early church had to have machinery, had to have some sort of government, and had to have regular officers for this machinery and for this government. But these officers did not have any redemptional dignity in the church. Especially note the words of Bishop Lightfoot, who wrote as a master of the early history of the Christian church: "But the priestly functions and privileges of the Christian people are never regarded as transferred or even delegated to these officers. They are called stewards or messengers of God, servants or ministers of the church, and the like; but the sacerdotal title is never once conferred upon them. The only priests under the gospel, designated as such in the New Testament, are the saints, the members of the Christian brotherhood."

This false, unchristian sacerdotal importance once entirely rejected, we are quickly and eagerly to place the largest emphasis upon the worth of the Christian preacher to the church. I would go so far as to say that without him a living, efficient church is practically impossible. He is essential not only to the surface economy of the church, in using its machinery to advantage -- he is essential also, and even more, to the deeper spiritual economy, in advising and developing and uniting and using in service the persons who make up the Christian community. In any church there are almost sure to be many kinds of people, perhaps no two of them in the same spiritual condition perhaps no two of them with the same conception of the details of duty in Christian activity; and there is pressing need of "a master m Israel," who has the time and calling to study the entire situation from the standpoint of the ideal of a Christian church, and then has the definite purpose to lead the people, by preaching and by pastoral method, on toward that churchly ideal. To make out of many elements a living, efficient church; a church in which the sermon and the sacraments are ever quick with the Holy Ghost; a church with the atmospheric expectation of conversions; a church where the tempted are environed with victory; a church where the imperfect are made to see their larger need of Christ; a church where the peculiar consolations of God are given to the afflicted; a church where Christian men begin even on earth to be a Christian brotherhood; a church which constantly bears toward the whole world with sacrifice in its heart and conquest in its purpose -- to make such a church, a church of the long major axis, that is the work of the Christian preacher. For such work in the church the Christian preacher needs at least four things in qualification, namely: First, a Christian experience so deep that it fills the consciousness with urgent reality; second, a comprehensive knowledge of the Holy Scriptures; third, an unflinching grasp of all the peculiarity of the Christian faith as a system of redemptional doctrine; and, fourth, the capacity and the courage for spiritual leadership among men. Other qualifications the Christian preacher may have to advantage, especially for the oratorical phase of his service; but these four things mentioned he must have to build up a living and potent church of Christ.

The Christian Church and the Home. From the beginning it has been a point in what may be called Christian strategy to gain vantage in the home. When Saint Paul teaches (see 1 Cor. 7.14) that "the unbelieving husband is sanctified in the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified in the brother," he is not thinking of personal holiness at all. No unbeliever can be holy by proxy. But a home itself is under the divine plan a little organism, and to get into it even one point of Christian faith lifts the entire home into a new category for the church. The church can treat that home as its own spiritual property, so to speak, and plan for it and even pray for it with a sense of Christian ownership. The question as to the worth of such Christian treatment of people who are not actually Christians in their personal life, should be answered from the standpoint of the philosophy of human influence. While every man's decision must be at last his own self-decision in his own freedom, yet we do influence each other; for we can be instrumental in bringing motive to immediate urgency. Thus there is a true sense in which one can be a means in another's conversion.

On the whole, this is the connection which I deem the most fitting for a statement of view concerning the baptism of infants. My view as to the baptism of infants has very naturally a close relation to my view of the salvation of infants in the intermediate state, for in both views there is involved their personal and moral condition. Already I have given the one view, and the other may be succinctly stated thus:

1. Inasmuch as infants have not yet come to the possibility of personal volition, their baptism has not the meaning which Christian baptism has in the case of adult believers. That is, the baptism of an infant is not a token of personal intention, is not a symbol of an event of grace, and is not a means of grace. Of course, we can say that the parent or sponsor has personal intention and all that; and we can also say that the child is in a spiritual condition which is the equivalent of the regenerate state; and we can also say that later in life baptism will become to the child a means of grace. These things, or some of them, I have myself often said in the past; but they now seem to me to be mere verbal ingenuities made for the defense of a practice; and I deem it much fairer and much more wholesome to place the baptism of infants on a basis of its own.

2. Inasmuch as infants are not personal sinners, they are innocent. It is, I believe, only of this simplicity in innocence that our Saviour was thinking when he said, "of such is the kingdom of heaven;" and his words are not to be taken in a hard and fast doctrinal way.

3. These helpless and undeveloped and innocent children the Christian church has a right to claim as her own wards, to bring them up on the inside of the rich life of the holy catholic church.

4. But the best way (and often the only feasible way) to do this is to do it through the home, which belongs to the church entirely or essentially. And so the church turns to the home and says: "If you will consecrate unto your Lord this child, and act for us until we can get at his personal life, we will baptize him into membership of the Redeemer's church on earth."

5. And so the baptism of an infant is the most forcible recognition and utilization of the home on the part of the Christian church.

6. If now you ask what infant baptism precisely stands for as a rite, the answer should, I believe, be this: It stands for the sacramental acceptance by the church of the consecration unto Christ of a babe by a home. The church officially joins in with the home in dedicating the child unto the Redeemer, and does this by making the child a member of the holy catholic church under the principle of Christian claim. The two rites, infant baptism and adult baptism, are alike only in that both are forms of entrance into the church of Jesus Christ.

The Church and the Nation. "The nation is to work in the realization on the earth of his kingdom who is the only and the eternal King. It becomes, then, no more the kingdom of this world, but the kingdom of Him whose reign is of eternal truth -- the reign in which, in the realization of personality, there is the freedom of man. Its advance is only in his advent; its destination is toward him. Its new ages are the days of the coming of the Son of man. Its freedom is only in his redemptive strength. It is no more the life of the first man, of the earth earthy."

It is certainly fitting that I begin with these seerlike words quoted from the greatest tribute ever paid to the significance of national life; for it was this tribute, in Elisha Mulford's *The Nation*, which, many years ago, started a line of thinking to culminate in my present conception of the profound relation between the church and the nation as two coordinate features in the vast work of God for mankind. But to bring out the

full conception, as it lies in my mind, I will refer again to the family. For these three, the family, the nation, and the church, belong to one divine plan, which through the centuries moves steadily toward the distant goal. This goal is that perfect brotherhood which is to be the everlasting kingdom of Christ, the inner circle of the kingdom of heaven, and the innermost circle of the whole kingdom of God. For this final brotherhood there are these three different ventures in social solidarity. They might properly be called the three educational movements toward human brotherhood. First, there is the family, where, as in a primary school, we learn our first lesson in solidarity. It is the first check on pure individualism. In a home, even in a very imperfect home, the total family must at times become the point of view. Not yet, perhaps, is there any real unselfishness, but there is an escape from the merely individual outlook, and a first exercise in social entanglement. Then, in a finer home, what chances there are to live in each other and for each other, and to form an almost perfect social organism. Next comes the nation; and how all the utilitarians fail to understand the grandeur of its meaning! They seem to think that a nation is a union of men to secure material prosperity. But a nation is a divine institution, like the family; and its purpose is to give another and larger check to pure individualism. Here again one may be selfish; but he must combine with many men and in a measure understand them and think of their interests and yield to their judgment. Thus there is increasing social interlacing all the time. And, in the most noble relation to the nation, in patriotism, there is a complete surrender of the individual to the good of the whole, for a patriot is a man who lives absolutely for his country in feeling and thought and deed. Now, do you not see what a preparation the family and the nation have made for the Christian church? They have introduced and emphasized the very principle of solidarity which the church seizes and applies to all mankind. The church cries out: "Yes, live for each other in the family; live in the entire length and breadth of national concern; but all mankind redeemed in Jesus Christ is the final family and the final nation; let us join together to express that largest social solidarity even in this world."

Holding such a view of the significance of the nation, we cannot tolerate the Romish idea that the nation is subordinate to the church. Nor can we receive the Erastian idea that the church is subordinate to the state. Nor are we satisfied with the idea that each is supreme in its own province, but the two provinces have no relation to each other save as they cross lines in material things. The church and the nation are to be regarded as two allies, each working by its own method, to prepare the way for the kingdom of our Lord. Just as the moral process is a preparation for the full redemptional process, so the nation should be a real preparation for the work of the church. Perhaps we would better say an indirect preparation, as what we mean is that the nation should aim to become a moral brotherhood, where every law and every institution is for the benefit of all and under a moral ideal. This view I myself carry out into many details, some of these details involving action as a citizen; but all I wish to urge upon you is the general conception that the church is to look upon the nation, not as an accident brought about by men, but as a sacred agency of God in working out the plan of his final kingdom.

The Church and Socialism. Some years ago, in one of our great cities, I heard a socialist try to answer the question, "What must I do to be saved?" Substantially stated, his answer was this: "The Christian idea that to be saved a man must be convicted of sin, have faith in Christ, and be converted, and lead a holy life, is altogether wrong. A man is not saved by what he himself does or allows God to do. A man is saved by society. Let society make a man's environment right, and the man can't help being right. Let society make a man's environment wrong, and the man can't help being lost, that is, being bad. Our task, men, is to put about every brother man that which is true and beautiful and good."

Not every socialist would make or entirely sanction this statement as it stands; and yet the statement brings out sharply the main difference between socialism and Christianity, namely, one emphasizes environment while the other emphasizes personality. According to Christianity, the individual person must do something to be saved; and all that is done for him (and Christianity believes that much must be done for him) is done in some under relation to his personal action. According to socialism, the man is a product very completely of the situation in which he is placed. Indeed, I think it is not unfair to say that all unmodified socialism is materialistic either in fact or in tendency. But when we go back to those pregnant times which followed the French Revolution, when the workingman woke up to the astonishing fact that he had not been benefited by that revolution, and then follow the course of socialism through all its intensely interesting history, especially in Europe, we can discover, it seems to me, that socialism has a personal root in spite of all its anti-personal theory. The root of socialism is the personal hunger for brotherhood. The disappointment over the French Revolution was deeper than any question of material advantage. The man with money had shown in the outcome that he did not care any more about the workingman than royalty had cared for him. And from that day until now the workingman has felt that no one has any concern in his real welfare. Surely the Christian church can never go over to the socialistic point of view to any such extent as would tend to weaken our insistence upon personality and personal salvation; but it does seem to me that the Christian church should make a much more serious study of socialism and the whole industrial situation; and should make a Christian contribution to the settlement of such questions as involve a principle of equity; and should find some way to convince the workingman that the church of Jesus Christ is the very brotherhood which he needs. But it is not of much use to try to convince him, until we ourselves more nearly realize the Christian ideal, and actually are such a brotherhood.

The Church and the City Problem. There is no place where, as a Christian man, I come quite so near to dreadful discouragement as I do in one of the great cities of our Christian civilization. I say to myself, "We have preached the gospel here so long, and yet we have not conquered this place!" I have no heart thoroughly to enter into the matter, endeavoring to make you see all that I see. But there is one hopeful sign -- a very hopeful sign, I think -- and that is the new Christian attack upon "the slums." I know very well how superficial, from a Christian standpoint, some of this work is. It is mere philanthropy. But not all of it is so; some of it is as profoundly Christian as any work done by the church anywhere. And the movement, as a movement, has taken the right method, namely, the method of a convincing brotherhood. Even superficial things are no waste, if in the end they make for brotherhood. The greatest thing you can do for a man is actually to lead him to Jesus Christ, but next to that greatest thing is it to love the man and make him believe that you are his brother. And often these two kinds of service are not far apart.

What is now needed is to lift this slum work out of what may be called its sociological stage, and to make it truly Christian by placing it upon the conscience and heart of the entire church. The church should have much the same attitude toward the slum work that she has toward the foreign missionary work -- an attitude of self-sacrifice, determination, conquest. The time shall come when the Christian church will consider the great cities points of such strategic importance that she will master them at any cost.

The Church and Foreign Missions. In the very nature of the case, the supreme work to a thoroughly militant church is, and should be, in the field of foreign missions; for it is this field which most promptly utilizes the aggressive Christian spirit of world-wide conquest. The gospel is not for ourselves alone, but for the whole race. But there need be no antagonism between the work abroad and the work at home. Neither one should be exalted and cultivated at the expense of the other. The truth is that all work really done for Jesus Christ is one and the same thing, and must be done with that aggressive spirit which cries

out, Every human being has been purchased by the death of our Lord, and we must reach them all with his gospel.

I will state the true missionary motives, as I see them; but first I wish to quote a passage from Dr. D. D. Whedon. I have selected this passage from a number, because it expresses in a forcible way that view of the salvation of the heathen which has been current in the teaching of the Methodist church from John Wesley to John Miley:

"Bold assertions in missionary speeches and sermons that all the world without the pale of Christendom is damned in mass never quicken the pulse of missionary zeal. On the contrary, they ever roll a cold reaction upon every feeling heart and every rational mind. Our better natures revolt, and, alas! a gush of skepticism is but too apt in consequence to rise in the public mind, especially where precise ideas in regard to the question have not been formed and fixed. We had far better argue the missionary cause from the danger to our own salvation from that low standard of Christianity which does not subdue the world to the righteousness of faith; from the vast increase of the number saved through a universal gospel; and from the rich reward and unspeakable glory of winning every isle and continent to Christ, securing him the crown of our entire planet."

Our true motives for foreign missionary work are, as I see them, these:

1. A desire to obey our Saviour's command to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.
2. A desire to furnish to all men the present blessings of the gospel.
3. A purpose to keep the church at home so filled with the militant temper of foreign missions as to render all her members unselfish and aggressive.
4. A purpose to keep before the mind of the entire church the size of the plan of redemption.
5. A purpose to begin to realize the idea of a universal human brotherhood in Jesus Christ.
6. A purpose to hasten under all possible Christian pressure the salvation of men, and thus to prepare them for the largest service and the largest destiny in the final kingdom of our Lord.

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