

III

BUILDING UPON THE ROCK¹

Matthew VII, 24, 25—"Every one therefore that heareth these words of mine, and doeth them, shall be likened unto a wise man, who built his house upon the rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon the rock."

TWENTY-FOUR years ago representatives from the victorious nations in the World War met to build a house in which two billion people were to live. The paint on the new house was hardly dry when the rains descended, the floods came, the winds blew. The house fell, and great was the fall of it.

Several statesmen who had part in the building of that house gave warning at the time that the foundations contained too much sand. Now that the house lies in ruins, all of us can see that which a few of the builders saw at the time of building.

Let us open the book by Messrs. Hoover and Gibson at the chapter on "The Armistice and Peace Making." The chapter points out that hate, fear, and revenge were substituted for statesmanship. It deplores that the democratic regime in Germany was required to sign a confession that the whole nation was guilty of causing the War. It refers to the wickedness of continuing the allied blockade, even beyond the signing of the Armistice. It further refers to the reparations bill handed to Germany, a bill that no sane economist could have

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expected Germany to pay. The Allies themselves made it impossible for any well-intentioned regime in Germany to succeed.

Some day, God speed it, the representatives of the United Nations are going to attempt to build another house for more than two billion people to live in. Many of these people have passed from childhood to adolescence since the first house was erected. Others have passed from adolescence to adulthood. They are not going to be satisfied with the location and space given them in the first house.

The question is, Will this second house be founded on the sand or on a rock? There is no question as to the rains and the floods and the winds. They are going to be as fierce and as angry as before.

It is not for us here this morning to submit architectural drawings for this new house that is to be erected, but rather to inquire concerning the contributions the Christian religion can make to the foundations of such a house.

“And every one that heareth these words of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand.” What words come to us from Jesus Christ that would be rock in the foundation of our new house?

I. HIS WORD CONCERNING REPENTANCE

The Saviour of the world began His ministry in a society in which there were international, national, racial, and economic problems. Frustrated people, sick people, hungry people, people possessed by fear and hatred, were constantly thronging Him.

According to Mark His first sermon was on the text, “The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye, and believe in the gospel.” Throughout His ministry He called rulers and ruled to repent of wrong attitudes toward

God and man, of wrong scales of value, of wrong ambitions. Repentance was to be the excavation for a new foundation.

Thoughtful men are realizing that our society is not ready to make even a beginning in laying the foundation of a new house for more than two billion people, until it has repented of its attitudes toward God and man.

Four and one-half years ago Christian men and women from sixty nations out of every continent assembled in Madras, India, for a consideration of the mission of Christianity in our world. In their deliverance on the "Faith by which the Church lives" they said:

"But first we must come in penitence to the feet of God. In the presence of these disasters and forebodings, we see the judgment of God's righteousness upon our society; but we see also His judgment upon our churches—so enmeshed in the world that they dare not speak God's full word of truth unafraid, so divided that they cannot speak that word with full power, so sullied by pettiness and worldliness that the face of Christ cannot be clearly discerned in them, or His power go forth through them for redemption."¹

The present war has not weakened this conviction as to the need of repentance. Doctor Walter Marshall Horton, a representative theologian of our day, in a recent book asks whither Jesus is now leading us. His answer is that Jesus is leading us back to God for judgment in order that He may lead us forward.

We could get a well-nigh unanimous verdict on the part of the people of the United Nations that the followers of Hitler and Mussolini and Tojo ought to repent, but the evidence of a conviction on the part of the people of the United Nations that they ought to repent of prejudice and selfishness and greed and a lack of concern for others, is distressingly small. Jesus once said to people who were point-

¹*The World Mission of the Church*, (Madras, 1939), p. 14.

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ing out to Him the terrible things that were happening to others, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." He said to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God." These two texts might well be worn as frontlets between the eyes of the people of the United Nations.

A second word of Jesus that would be rock in the foundation of this new house is that concerning the supremacy of God's will.

II. HIS WORD CONCERNING THE SUPREMACY OF GOD'S WILL

Great boldness is required in diagnosing the world's ills in one sentence. And yet, listen to the message of the Oxford Conference, which preceded the Madras Conference by one year:

"Human life is falling to pieces because it has tried to organize itself into unity on a secularistic and humanistic basis without any reference to the divine will and power above and beyond itself."

The Madras Conference expressed the same conviction when it said: "Yet in the mystery of the freedom which God has given him, man chooses to walk other paths, to seek other ends. He defies his Father's will. He seeks to be a law unto himself. This is the deepest cause of the evil and misery of his life."¹

New Testament scholars recognize that in the teachings of Jesus there is much that is transient. They also recognize that there is much that is of eternal significance. Professor Horton declares that the eternal in the teachings of Jesus is His reference of everything to the will of God, a will that is both righteous and loving.

Let us take only one illustration of Jesus' exaltation of the will of God. We take it from the Lord's Prayer as found in

¹*Ibid*, p. 14.

the Sermon on the Mount. In this lesson on prayer, the highest exercise of which man is capable, Jesus taught that God's name, God's kingdom, God's will, were to be man's first concern. Even man's bread-acquiring activities were to be under the direction of God. Man was to look to God for deliverance from sin, that which keeps man from putting God first.

If there be a God of righteousness and justice and love on the throne of the universe, and this is the belief of theistic religion, an attempt to build a house for His children without any reference to His will, will be no improvement on the original tower of Babel.

Madam Chiang Kai-Shek tells us that "in old Chinese art, there is just one outstanding object, perhaps a flower, on a scroll. Everything else in the picture is subordinate to that one beautiful thing. An integrated life is like that. What is that one flower? As I see it now, it is the will of God. . . . I used to pray that God would do this or that. Now I pray only that God will make His will known to me."¹ China has sent to the United States a Christian missionary. May many more come to this needy field.

A third word of Jesus that would be rock in the foundation of our new house is that concerning the supreme worth of personality.

III. HIS WORD CONCERNING THE SUPREME WORTH OF PERSONALITY

Certain New Testament scholars have gone so far as to say that this is the distinctive teaching of Christianity. They base their claim on the fact that in the words and works of Jesus the individual came before sacred rites and laws. Whenever the rites and laws stood in the way of the needs of men they were by that fact abrogated.

¹*I Confess My Faith*, Mei-ling Soong Chiang, p. 9.

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A list of the parables emphasizing the supreme worth of personality would include: The Two Debtors, The Unmerciful Servant, The Unjust Steward, The Rich Man and the Beggar, The Good Samaritan, The Friend at Midnight, The Importunate Widow, The Lost Sheep, The Lost Son, The Last Judgment. In all of these parables Jesus is saying, Human personality is the thing of supreme worth.

If we turn to the miracles we discover that the vast majority were in behalf of handicapped personalities, personalities that we too frequently have passed by even though we professed to be trying to do what Jesus was trying to do, viz., bring the Kingdom of God near to men.

If these teachings of Jesus have any meaning for our day, He is pleading with us that in the foundation of the new house in which more than two billion people are to live, we shall give large place to the supreme worth of human personality. The needs and rights of the underprivileged in Europe, Asia, Africa, and America must come before the claims of empire or nations or class; else we are building a house whose foundations are of sand, a house that cannot stand against the rains, floods, and winds of tomorrow. The underprivileged people of the world are on the march. On their banners are inscribed the words, "We demand to be treated as persons."

We shall mention one other word of Jesus that would be rock in the foundation of our new house, and that is His word concerning the unity of mankind.

IV. HIS WORD CONCERNING THE UNITY OF MANKIND

What more convincing illustration can we find than in the prayer He taught His disciples. We are to begin our prayer by saying, "*Our Father.*" We are to pray, "Give *us our* daily bread." We are to continue by seeking deliverance from *our* sins, and *our* temptations and the evil that confronts *us*.

The faith which most rejoiced His heart and drew forth His warmest praise was that of a man and a woman both of whom were outside of Israel.

In the Good Shepherd chapter of the Gospel according to John He declared, "And other sheep I have which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and they shall become one flock, one shepherd." In His farewell commission to His disciples He said, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation." According to Luke He said, "Jerusalem, Judæa, Samaria, and the uttermost part of the earth."

One of the strongest chapters on the unity of mankind has been written very recently by our neighbor, Mr. Camargo of Mexico. He bases the unity of mankind on a common human ancestry, a common divine Creator, a common inner image, a common Father, and a common Redeemer. He contends that it is part of the plan of God that mankind be developed according to the family pattern.

Mr. Willkie gave his book the title, *One World*. He might have gone further and called it "One Family," for God is saying to us through what is taking place today, You are one family and will find salvation only as you observe the law of one for all and all for one, the law of self-forgetfulness, the law of service, and finally the law of love.

Members of the graduating class, our morning text is not only for a society called upon to build a more enduring house; it is a text for the individual who would build his life upon a rock. Hear the sayings of the Master Teacher and do them, and you shall experience a new creation within: you shall be numbered among the creators used by God in the building of the "city which hath foundations."

CHARLES L. KING.