

THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE¹

IN one of the most effective sermons ever delivered, Peter the preacher referred to Jesus as "the Prince of life." When Moffatt comes to translate the passage, he uses the expression, "the Pioneer of life."

At first sound the words prince and pioneer seem to suggest almost opposite aspects of living. When we speak of princes, we think of royal ancestry and rich background. When we mention pioneers, we picture men of meagre antecedents and probably simple surroundings. This contrast may be made vivid if we compare the forthcoming coronation of a new English king with the pioneers of Texas, whose heroic exploits are being celebrated during this centennial year. In the former ceremony will be represented the long traditions of the British Empire; in the latter we are reminded of the lonely rugged figures who founded this new southwest.

Differing as they do, both words, however, fit the personality of Jesus. He was the princely figure who fulfilled the ancient prophecies of Israel and gathered up the racial accumulations of his nation's past. He was also the pioneer who started something so significantly original and put such a new motivation into life that we date our calendars from his birth. Jesus of Nazareth was the princely pioneer.

¹Baccalaureate sermon of the twenty-first annual commencement of the Rice Institute, delivered by the Reverend Ralph W. Sockman, D.D., LL.D., minister of Christ Church (Methodist Episcopal), New York City, in the Court of the Chemistry Laboratories, at nine o'clock Sunday morning, June 7, 1936.

In this Baccalaureate service, may we think of the Master Teacher in this two-fold aspect. The duality may suggest certain combinations which our generation needs to make. And the first one is a better blending of the background of experience with the foreground of experiment.

In our day, as in Christ's, there are sharp divisions between those who cling to the past, intolerant of change, and those who disregard the past, impatient with delay. On the one hand are those who look so longingly at what has been that they remind us of the elderly lady who said once to the editor of *Punch*, "Your magazine is not as good as it used to be." The editor replied, "It never was." There are those to whom nothing is as good as it used to be. On the other hand are those who rashly run after the new without looking at what has been.

The follower of the Princely Pioneer goes with neither group, but combines the valid emphases of both. He looks back at what is behind in order to make progress in going forward. The spirit of Christ renders to a man's mind a service similar to that which the chauffeur's mirror gives to the driver of a motor car. The mirror is so placed that it enables the motorist to see the road behind without taking his main attention from the road ahead. And in driving along our crowded highways, it is quite as important to see what is behind us as to see what is before us. We must take a backward glance in order to safeguard our left turns.

Similarly in our personal and social progress, a view of the past is essential to effective advance. Especially is this so when we "turn left," which is our recognized expression for moving toward the new and the liberal. We must beware lest in veering toward novelty we are not run into and wrecked by some old, worn-out fallacy which is coming along carrying a fresh license plate. The true progressive

safeguards his left turns by a survey of what has been tried before.

Successful experimentation is made on the margin of established experience. Progress comes through capitalizing the wisdom of the past. That is the theory on which university curricula are planned. We study the history of our field in order to advance its frontiers. Our American architects, for example, are developing today probably the most dynamically original types of building in the world, but for this creative work, they still study the classic models.

Our American governmental system is not yet perfect and should be kept flexible enough to meet new conditions, but it would be reaction, rather than progress, to turn from democracy to either fascist or communist autocracies, which principles history has weighed in the balance and found wanting. It is well for the United States that in this post-war period of upheaval, the Russian, the Italian, and the Nazi experiments have had time to demonstrate their fallacies before they caught the fancy of our masses.

The Christian progressive acquires a sufficient knowledge of the past to make him creative and not merely critical. To destroy the good in uprooting the evil is as bad as to blight by stagnation. When youth see so much that is wrong with the social order, there is great temptation to spend their major effort in attack. The more cynical they are, the more realistic they often think they are. But our sick world is not to be cured by all surgery and no tonic. We need to preserve the old pioneers' faith in the future.

Some years ago a New York family stopped at Colorado Springs to take the drive up Pike's Peak. Their driver was one of those chauffeurs who seem to measure the skill of their driving by the shrieks of their passengers. And he was having a very good day on this particular occasion. He

took delight in driving as closely as possible to the edge of the precipice. Finally the mother grew so frightened that she could endure the sight no longer and put her head down in her husband's lap, only to find that did not do much good because his knees were trembling so. Father and mother were thus having a very dire time of it. But the seven-year-old boy in the party was enjoying the time of his life. The nearer the car came to the edge of the precipice, the farther over he leaned, thrilled at the sight. That lad was thinking less about the Bible at that moment than his parents were, but nevertheless he was helping them illustrate a truth which appears in this Book. Back in the last chapter of Ecclesiastes it says of people that, as they grow old, "they shall be afraid of that which is high."

One of the tragedies of age is this fear of the high. And one of the secrets of progress is to retain the courage which faces the foreground unafraid while experience enriches the background.

Secondly, the word "prince" suggests government, organization, interdependence. The word "pioneer" suggests individual effort, initiative, exploration. Therefore, the Princely Pioneer would have us make a better combination of our interdependence and our independence.

In our crowded complicated modern world, we cannot be effective without adequate organization. Our idealism must resort to group organization just as our industrialism does. The old voluntary neighborly individual charity would in no sense meet the needs of our national relief situation. Neither can religion be socially effective or morally progressive without organized churches.

This is a truth not recognized by many in our day. They assert a concern for religion but disavow any interest in the church. They feel that they can come closer to God by

The Challenge of Change 199

themselves than in group worship. And there are moods and times when this is quite possible. But in the long run the teaching of experience is that collective action is more effective than individualistic effort. A church service of worship may be likened to the locks of a canal. A ship comes in on the lower level. The sluice gate is closed behind it and the gate is opened in front of it. Then the water pouring under the keel of the vessel lifts it steadily to a higher level. Similarly, a person comes into the house of God for worship with his mind on the lower secular level to which the gravity of earthly interests has drawn him. Then the sluice gates of the spirit are opened and the influences of architecture, music, prayer, and message, begin to flow around him. Imperceptibly perhaps, but nevertheless really, his spirit is lifted and an hour later he sails off on a higher mental level, better able to carry his cargo of private and public responsibilities.

Organized interdependent living is necessary, not only for effectiveness but also for safety. Dean Wickes of Princeton has put the situation very vividly in this citation. Our grandfathers, he reminds us, went to school in small, one-roomed school-houses, in which the doors and windows were all on the ground floor. If a fire broke out in a building of that type, it was only necessary to raise the cry "Fire! Everybody for himself." And everyone could get out. But now our children, in the cities at least, attend school in large buildings several stories high, having perhaps three or four thousand pupils. If a fire were to break out in such a structure and the cry went up, "Fire! Everybody for himself," what would be the result? It would be panic, chaos, probably disaster or death.

No, it is not safe to live in our inflamed and inflammable world on the old, individualistic basis of an earlier day. We

must develop methods of coöperation and coördination. Education must train men to gear themselves into group action.

But we Americans have such a penchant for organization, once we get started, that we often carry it to the point of stifling individual initiative and responsibility. We cannot deny that organized relief has cut the nerve of personal enterprise in uncounted cases. We are also aware of the increasing tendency to pass on to the government functions which ought to be performed by individuals. As cities grow in size, personal participation in civic activities declines. One of our most subtly difficult problems is to preserve individuality while we are curbing individualism.

We must handle our personal independence with a sensitive regard for our social interdependence. We must see that our right of freedom from encroachment rests on the duty to keep from trespassing on others. We need a nationwide education in socialized self-control consonant with the complexities of our crowded world.

The preservation of the pioneering initiative and individual responsibility is necessary for the furthering of social advance. The great movements toward world peace and industrial justice will be pushed ahead only as pioneering individuals take positions in advance of the crowd. Daring personalities will continue to be the spear-heads of social advance.

We face finally a third consideration. When we speak of princes, we think of power to command, power of dominion, power over. When we speak of pioneers, we think of their power to start new movements, power to project ideas, power for. The Princely Pioneer, therefore, suggests a better combination of *power over* and *power for*.

One aim of education is to make men masters of situations. We train them to be leaders. We are a generation

that loves power—power over things, power over persons. The ship's captain who can direct the movements of a "Normandie" or a "Queen Mary" through storm and stress, the surgeon who can cut within a hair's breadth of a vital organ and save life, the lawyer who can keep his poise amid the confusion of a court room, the financier who, like the elder Morgan, could control the turbulent currents of a nation's business—these are the wielders of power whose careers our youth seek to emulate.

We must be taught to see, however, the Master Teacher's basic truth that power through domination is not as permanent as power through service. We can make ourselves masters of others by subduing them but they are restless to throw off our control. On the other hand, we can make ourselves so serviceable to others that they come to depend on us and wish not to be separated from us. The power of Christ continues and grows because "the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister."

Italy has just demonstrated the old worldly way of gaining power by conquest and domination. But Italy's victory will prove an unprofitable one unless she sets herself to serving the subdued Ethiopians. As Lawrence of Arabia saw, and Lord Allenby came to see, power ultimately rests on service. This is a truth which strong individuals as well as strong nations, must learn.

Perhaps I can sum up the pioneering spirit needed for today as it was symbolized for me in a recent experience. A year or so ago I was on a speaking trip through Minnesota. My schedule called for an afternoon address at Duluth, Minnesota, and an evening address at Winona, Minnesota. When schedules were consulted it was learned that there was no available train or plane connection. Wiring for instructions, I received word that a local airplane would come up from Winona and carry me back from Duluth.

Not being very air-minded, I was not particularly keen on local airplanes, but inasmuch as I was speaking on courage, I thought I ought to swallow some of my fears and so I replied that I would come.

On the appointed afternoon we drove to the airport. It was five o'clock, and no plane. By five-thirty it was growing quite dusk and still no plane. At six o'clock, now quite dark, a plane did arrive carrying no lights. The pilot came up to the hangar and explained his delay by saying that he had just completed assembling the machine that afternoon. Under such conditions, it was with fear and trembling that I entered the cabin, a lone passenger on a still incompletely equipped plane, flying over northern Minnesota, which is a denuded forest land, quite devoid of landing places. I was frankly quite frightened.

There was one factor, however, that served to keep up my courage. The dashboard of the plane was luminous in order to make the dials visible. Between the lighted dashboard and myself, I could see the profile of the pilot as he turned from side to side to get his bearings. As long as I could see his face was calm, my fears were allayed. When I landed and had time for some sober second thought, I realized that this pilot was a very good symbol of the position in which a Christian minister stands today. In fact, I think that it is not straining the point to say that the pilot's position is similar to one trained for leadership in an institution like Rice, for you of this class stand between that Master Teacher who was called the Light of the World, and the frightened passengers of a still rather dark day. However, as long as they can see that your profiles appear calm and unafraid, they will take courage and together we shall come through as worthy followers of the princely pioneer.

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