

## Remarks at Tenth Anniversary

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1942

Petersham, MA

The ten years that we have spent together in the common work in this fellowship of religion have been years of ever widening and deepening interest to me. It is hardly possible for me to suggest even the right contribution that you have made to my life, its outlook, its storehouse filled to overflowing with experiences that are worthwhile. The extent to which you have forgiven my blunders, overlooked my serious limitations, and held firmly to your task even when there were many discouragements to confront—these are facts which I deeply cherish. They have been a constant witness to your greatness of mind, and integrity of purpose. Then on top of all that to have you thus recognize the fact that you have suffered me for ten years is quite the fullness of the cup of kindness.

In the world at large, especially when viewed from the point of view of the interests of religion, these ten years have been the most extraordinary that people have the privilege of living through. Certainly not within the memory of men now living, and hardly within the limits of modern history has there been more searching, and more fearless inquiry into the fundamentals of religion than in this period. Hardly has there been a more drastic or a more just criticism of the institutions of organized religion than in this very period. Those criticisms have come both from within and without the churches. Within this period also there has come to definite issue that long-developing question of the social aspects of religion, and the relation of the pulpit, and the congregation to the two great questions of our generation, the question of industrialization, and the woman movement. Finally within the past year the great European war has broken out—an event in history without parallel both in magnitude and in possible consequences. All of these great questions, involving the very foundations of the values of life, I have tried to keep you in touch with, as an essential and integral part of all living men and women. I have tried to have you feel that in addition to, in fact as a part of your individual problems, your joys and sorrows, your personal

defeats and victories, your own intimate pains and pleasures, you should see your relations to the great problems and issues of human life in the large. Sometimes, I fancy you have thought that I placed too much emphasis upon these matters. But I believe now that you find your lives enriched and deepened because I have tried to emphasize the larger relations of life and the deep and searching values involved in them.

But I do not want to dwell on the past. Only those who are dead devote their time on such occasions as this to recalling the past. If you will permit me, I want to say one or two things at this time which touch upon the present situation in matters of religion, and what I consider our proper attitude toward them. First of all, let me call your attention to the fact that many events indicate that just now questions of fundamental importance are being forced upon men's minds for consideration. The profound modification of religious and ethical thought as influenced by the scientific achievements of the last century or more, the equally profound influence as effected by the industrial changes are forcing an issue that must be faced frankly and squarely. Without passing any criticism upon the way other groups than this are facing this challenge of modern life to religious institutions, I must in frankness call your attention to them so that I may point out the attitude that we ought to take.

When people face the fact of profound changes in religious thought and practice, there are three possible lines of conduct open to them. First they may follow the line of least resistance, emphasize form and ceremony, and interpret religion in terms of sacramental ceremony. You are witnessing the tendency of ritualistic development in many branches of the Christian Church. Ceremony is piled upon ceremony, until there is such a burden of it, that the spark of religion and ethical content that is in the background is smothered by the superstructure. There are many people to whom, in their weakness this is a real necessity. They fear to face the real fact of their religious debility, their spiritual and intellectual limitations, and they instinctively cover their retreat

from action by this ever increasing reliance upon form and ceremony. Large sections of the Christian Church today are following this line of least resistance and turning their attention to ritualism. It is the substitute for reality, and satisfies not. Ornateness always goes with decay.

Another possible way of meeting the situation of the present is by trying to revive the past. This is becoming very common, unusually so this year. This community is not free from it. An emotional appeal to dead values accompanied by threat and fear, are characteristic of this method. Because your grandfather used the stagecoach and was not killed in an accident, therefore it follows that the only way to escape accident is to ride in the stagecoach. It is possible to fill up a few old coaches for a short time by this method. But you are not your grandfather, and you do not live his age. You may have a momentary sentiment, increased by fear, that you would like to ride in the stagecoach, but life is not there. It has done its service, and the process of evolution is eliminating it. I want especially to call your attention to this revival method for there will be enough of it and to spare in the immediate future. It is not only futile, but it is dangerous, dangerous not only to the institutions that practice it, but dangerous to society. In times like these we need clear heads, heads that can hold their poise in the midst of turmoil, brainstorm, and fads. So beware of this gush of sentimentality, and fear, which is spreading over the land. It will leave in its wake a real and blasting infidelity for which you must become as the shelter of a great rock in a weary land.

Meanwhile it is your task and joy to follow the other line of conduct, the line which has been the pillar of fire by day and the cloud by night to lead men forwards through history. You have due regard for the past. Just because you are not its slave, it becomes your master, to enlighten you, to inspire you. But you know full well that the problems of life are not met by any attempt to preserve the past. That which is worthy in the past cannot be killed, and that which is unworthy cannot be kept. But your faith is in a living God, whose spirit lives and abides in this twentieth century, still, as of old, leading men to new life and new adventure, from some old Egyptian bondage to some new land of freedom. You see the workings of the spirit of God in the midst of modern life, in the fiery visions of our

modern dreamers, in the searching doubts, and fearless questionings of our present-day thinkers, in the quiet and persistent labors of those whose efforts sustain the present, and of those who build for tomorrow. What a glorious age? How its every breath, even its mistakes, and its errors, pulsate with the spirit and the power of the living God. It is glorious to be alive in this age, to feel the pulse of fearless faith, the splendid achievements, the undaunted thinking, the noble heroism of its uncrowned leaders.

It is not an easy task to leave behind you all conformity, and acquaint men at first hand with a living God. Yet in all humility that is the task you propose for yourselves. By your own fearless thinking, by your own unimpeachable lives, by your own high spiritual values, you are to bear witness to the greatness of human life, to the worth of the human personality in this world and this life. Men will say that you are presuming, conceited and blasphemous. That matters not. You are born into this world to bear this witness in absolute integrity.

In addition to this personal contribution that men ought to make to the religious faith of the times, there is to be noted the group contribution. The world we live in demands of us not only great purposes, and fine aims, but it demands of us sound judgement, intelligent action. Enlightenment is needed. Cold, hard thinking is demanded. Materials must be measured. Thoughts themselves must be criticized. The old commandment declares that you should love your God with all your heart, and Mind and soul. I emphasize here your function as thinking beings. Just so far as you can, without fear you are called upon to make an intelligent contribution to the vast and challenging problems of life.

This fellowship, which we call a Church, means many things to me. It is the center of many dear associations. It is the holy ground of many high thoughts, of many moments of illumination when you have felt the spirit of the living God playing about your own personalities—moments which mark epochs in your lives. You have told of these facts. But one thing more. I hope that during the years that are before us, this place will stand in the eyes of this community, not only as a place of spiritual power, but as a place of keen intellectual influence, a place where great problems, great questions may be presented, discussed with sincerity and freedom, a place where, with malice

towards none, and with charity for all, we may sift the gold of modern thought, as well as ancient thought from the dross, and carry the gold of truth and place our just contribution at the disposal of this community.

Finally to turn again to ourselves. This place here has become something of a living Church to us. It represents not only our formal assent and support, but it represents our personality, our thought, the labor of our hands, the fellowship of achievement of effort. It is dear to us as a place and a symbol because of what we have put into it. This room represents the thought, the taste, the skill of members here. The room recently refinished is likewise the product of your own labor. Almost every corner of the place bears witness to the same intimate close personal touch. In the years that are ahead of us I hope to see this place become a place of great beauty, bearing constant witness, not to your wealth, and ability to purchase the labor and skill of others, but to your personal contributions, expressions of your real life. Furthermore I hope to see the chapel, which we want for our hours together in the presence of the big faith that is in us, added to our present equipment, simple, beautiful, and yet alive from foundation to top with the spirit of life that is in you. That I hope will be our next big task.