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**THE CHRISTIAN CENTURY AS A SPOKESMAN FOR
LIBERAL PROTESTANTISM IN THE EARLY
DEPRESSION YEARS, 1929-1933**

**A Research Paper Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for elective
H-199**

by

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May 1970

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Research paper

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INTRODUCTION

Walter Rauschenbusch was dead. The war had dampened idealism. Normalcy, isolation and materialism ruled the day. Religion and its voice in society waned. Rauschenbusch's influence, his idealism, his voice of prophecy to society, however, survived. The social gospel he advocated survived. They survived in men and institutions which would not let them die. They picked up the banner of the Christian critique of society and carried it through the disinterested twenties and bewildered thirties. Foremost among them were Charles Clayton Morrison, and the weekly magazine he edited and published, The Christian Century.

Dr. Morrison began as a Disciples of Christ minister. He was a pacifist, a politician, an ecumenist, and a prohibitionist. In 1908 he bought at auction a defunct paper of his denomination, and refounded it as a voice of Christian concern for the affairs of the church at large, the nation and the world. He anchored the paper firmly in the social gospel tradition with the conviction that "the Christian gospel must affect all of man's relationships."¹

Harold E. Fey, a contributing editor of the Century, said in a 1964 tribute to Dr. Morrison,

He thought of the Christian Century as having a personality. This journalistic personality had no time for trivialities, entertainment, or small talk, for petty purposes. He often said that the Century must deal with major issues and that it must "speak with authority."²

Mr. Fey remembered Morrison saying that it was the Century's business to impress the importance of issues upon the public if they did not recognize them as important. Dr. Morrison further believed that an editor had to "greaten" every subject he touched.³ Fey concluded his description by saying,

If the subject did not admit such enlargement, it did not belong in the Century. If the subject was important but the editor could not convey his awareness of its meaning, he was in the wrong business.⁴

Robert Miller, in a study of Protestantism and social issues, characterized the Christian Century as "Protestantism's most influential periodical."⁵ He stated that its editorials "were not designed to please the complacent and contented citizen."⁶ Morrison himself, he continued, "was nothing if not bold, and counted courage a higher virtue than caution."⁷

This was also the Century's stated editorial policy. In an editorial prospectus for 1929, the editors commented on what would guide their outlook. They said they had made a fundamental decision many years before by which the journal had been and would continue to be steered. The editorial stated,

Our task, we then said, is not merely to stand on the side lines and analyze and describe the actors and factors in the great game of social and religious progress. . . . Our task . . . is to be an actor in this vast game, to be a factor, however humble, in determining the outcome of this struggle.⁸

The editors had determined to sacrifice cool, disinterested objectivity if need be in order to write from the arena and not the grandstand. The statement continued,

In other words, the Christian Century will never be content to act as a mere mirror of the battle which heroes wage; it insists in taking its own part in the battle itself; and it does so with the hope and a prayer that its effort may affect, however faintly, the outcome. If this is not journalism, our critics may make the most of it.

The social gospel for which the Century spoke led it to just such active involvement. It brought its Christian commitment to bear on every important facet of American life. These facets fall into three broad classifications. They are social issues, economic issues and political issues. Attention will be focused on these to determine just how the Christian Century put its creed into practice.

CHAPTER I

SOCIAL ISSUES

Very little of society escaped scrutiny in the Century during the period under consideration. Manners, mores and morals received endless comment. Editorials ranged from denunciation of the vulgar to rapture over the virtuous. Three of the more prominent, and certainly the most interesting issues to draw the Century's attention were the mass media, race relations and prohibition.

The mass media, in forms old and new, expanded rapidly in the twenties and thirties. Newspapers had been around for as long as the country was old, and their influence was continuously potent. Movies were a more recent development, especially the "talkie." Storms continued to rage over them, particularly storms of a Protestant moral nature. The radio was a comparatively recent technological advance. The first broadcast was made only eight years prior to the stock market crash. In its short life, however, radio had mushroomed to a position of such importance and centrality in American life that an estimated 14,000,000 families listened nightly by 1931.¹⁰ The preeminence of these media and their unmeasured but powerful ability to sway public opinion caused the Century to look long and hard at them. It looked to see if they measured up to the social responsibility their positions demanded.

Consideration of newspapers was based on attitudes toward prohibition, and on sensationalist reporting. Usefulness to the community was, for the Century, determined by whether it was wet or dry. An editorial in 1929 went so far as to ask, "How Patriotic Is the Newspaper?"¹¹ It pointed out that while it was often considered among the most patriotic elements in any community, a blase attitude toward prohibition or its enforcement certainly called that judgement into question. "The prohibition law . . . represents the active will of the majority of Americans today." the editorial maintained. Yet many papers "heap obloquy in that law," its administrators and supporters, and thereby aid and abet those who flout it. How, then, can a paper be patriotic when it scorns federal law? The writer continues,

Americans want to believe in the patriotism of the daily newspaper which they read. They want to feel confident that it is a believer in American institutions, American government, American principles.¹²

Therefore they must watch the treatment of prohibition closely to know just how patriotic their newspaper is. Similar editorials continued throughout the prohibition period.

The same question was asked in 1930 regarding peace. The approaching London naval disarmament conference was the occasion to ask, "Does Your Newspaper Want Peace?"¹³ The editorial urged its readers to search the columns of their paper to determine the answer. The criteria were simple. Support of the conference meant the desire for peace, and opposition meant openness to war. The Century urged its readers to

support only those newspapers which worked for peace.

The issue of sensationalism in reporting related to the question of self-interest versus social responsibility. An editorial in June, 1931, raised the question most strikingly.¹⁴ Chicago newspapers had soft-pedaled a serious financial condition in several large banks, and played only the positive aspects of ensuing mergers. Why the display of responsibility here but not in crime, scandals and other sensational items? The answer was that the papers were tied to the financial community. "If it crashed, they crashed. . . . In contrast, the newspaper simply does not hold the same sense of responsibility to or implication in the moral community."¹⁵ The principle is applicable to all papers, not just those in Chicago. The public, therefore, "has a right to demand of the entire newspaper profession a raising of the standards of social responsibility."¹⁶

If the demands were ever made, they were not met. When the Lindbergh kidnapping occurred in March of 1932, the nation's newspapers fell all over themselves to sensationalize it, according to the Century. In an editorial entitled, "The Newspaper Degrades Itself,"¹⁷ the writer lambasts the Hearst papers for capitalizing on the crime. Their treatment was more than a journalistic stunt. It was "a deliberate attempt to debauch the public morale." Goodwin B. Webster, a Lindbergh neighbor in New Jersey, substantiates this charge by describing how "The Press Invades Hopewell"¹⁸ to get news of any kind and at any cost to area residents as well as the

Lindbergh family.

Social irresponsibility could be silence as well as sensationalism, however. The Century accused the newspapers of sunning a conspiracy of silence on the unemployment issue. As the depression deepened and unemployment increased, the Century pleaded for the papers to take up the cause of the unemployed and what to do about them. "Unemployment's Grim Reality,"¹⁹ an editorial of February, 1930, is but one which dealt with the problem of silence when voices were needed.

The use and misuse of the radio for public benefit was less an issue than newspapers, but still received periodic attention from the Century. The main thrust came in 1931 in a series of seven articles by Paul Hutchinson, managing editor of the Century. Under the general title of "The Freedom of the Air,"²⁰ Hutchinson addressed himself to the monopolistic aspects of radio manufacture and broadcast, especially RCA; mind control that was possible with radio and its danger in the hands of a few men; the problems of small and independent broadcast units; the use and misuse of radio as a tool for education; and a concluding article on whether the airwaves could be kept free or allowed to slip entirely into monopolistic hands.

Hutchinson's entire argument was based on the fact that radio is far too important a public tool for dominance by one small group which was not noted for its social mindedness. Radio had to be kept free that minds might remain free. To

this end he proposed specific forms of government intervention and regulation of the industry, and tactics for "socially alert organizations" to aid in the battle. They were to watch which facilities they used for their programs and not exclusively utilize RCA chain stations. They were to "cultivate the habit of watching with care proceedings before the federal radio commission and the decisions of that body,"²¹ and protest publicly when it favored monopolies. Finally, such organizations were to participate in the support of non-commercial stations as part of their public service.

When it turned its attention to the movies, the Christian Century condemned them vigorously. Nearly every other issue in the period surveyed dealt with the problems surrounding movies in society. The major criticism centered on morality. There was no doubt in the Christian Century the movies were immoral and had to be cleaned up. They were corrupting the minds and morals of youth and adults, thereby weakening the fabric of society. One Will Hays had become the "czar of the movies" in 1922, and seven years later, in an editorial of November 6, 1929, the question was asked, "Has Will Hays Made Good?"²² The amusing answer was, only according to his own publicity office. Morality, or rather the lack of it, had not changed.

In 1930, Fred Eastman, professor of religious drama at Chicago Theological Seminary, wrote a five part critique on "The Menace of the Movies."²³ He discussed ownership, control and distribution of movies and concluded that monopol-

istic control of the industry was largely responsible for the current situation. The industry's influence, moreover, extends beyond this country. He summarizes his criticisms when he says,

The movies have been educating in bad manners, bad morals, and bad philosophy. They have had harmful effects upon our children. They have misrepresented America abroad and helped to bring about an anti-American movement which extends throughout Europe and Asia.²⁴

His concluding article suggests six points to remedy the situation. They include no longer trusting Mr. Hays and what the industry itself says; breaking up of monopolistic control; making motion pictures a public utility; the state department controlling of films sent abroad; reforming of movie advertising which was as bad if not worse than the movies themselves; and parental help in the selection of the movies their children may see.²⁵ The influence of Dr. Eastman's analysis and suggestions was apparent in the Century's reproduction of the series in a pamphlet form which sold 100,000 copies by June 30.

In 1932 the magazine itself began running a weekly column of evaluation of recent releases based on that of the National Film Estimate Service. Movies were briefly summarized and then rated in terms of acceptability for adults, youth and children. In April of that year, Clifford G. Twombly asked in an article, "Have the Movies Cleaned Up?" with the answer, not in the least.²⁶

Dr. Eastman again turned his attention to the movies in

1933. In a seven part series he directed his attention to "Your Child and the Movies."²⁷ He discussed the effect of movies on health, emotions, conduct and delinquency, and found it to be harmful in all cases. He concluded by again urging massive support for controlling legislation, and firm parental guidance of children's selections in movies.

As important as the developing media were to the country, there were other social issues of greater import and farther reaching consequences. One was the problem of race relations, a continually festering sore in American society. It was not a popular subject and invited violent reaction when discussed. The Century nonetheless met it head on. Robert M. Miller says in his study of this era,

the Christian Century displayed a sensitivity toward the Negro probably unmatched in any papers in the country, religious or secular. . . . The most influential Protestant periodical in the country, it devoted scores of items to the race question. Without exception, these editorials and articles were characterized by courage, candor, and compassion.²⁸

Several examples serve to illustrate this point. In a 1929 article, W.W. Alexander wrote about "Dealing With the Thinking Negro."²⁹ He said that the church was largely responsible for educating the Negro who as a result refused to accept the inferior status given him by whites. This, however, created an even greater educational problem. "The church must now prepare the mind of white America to accept this thinking, independent, self-respecting human being. . ." He sees this as a most difficult task, likening it to "train-

ing a chamber of commerce to think accurately about Russian communism." But the task must be faced head on, and the churches must take the lead in facing it.

A new congress was seated in Washington in March of 1929. A largely Negro district of Chicago elected a black representative. When in June Mrs. Hoover invited the wives of congressmen to the White House for tea, the black representative's wife was included. The Texas legislature immediately passed a resolution condemning her for this action, and bowed their heads for one minute in shame for the President's wife. The Christian Century did the same for the Texas legislature. "As one reads such utterances stigmatizing the plain Christian courtesy of the President's wife, every true Christian and patriot must blush for shame."³⁰

Harlan F. Frost, in an article entitled, "Piercing the Wall Between the Races,"³¹ makes the insightful comment, "The truth is, race prejudice hurts us who hold it equally with those against whom we direct it." Only recognition of this fact, he maintains, can begin to pierce the wall.

In 1931 the Century was elated when the Federal Council of Churches passed a resolution not to meet at or patronize in any way any facility which discriminated against Negroes. Here, indeed, was a step in the right direction by the leadership of the churches who for too long had remained passive on this issue.³²

These are but a few examples of the Century's "courage,

candor, and compassion." It was before its time in confronting this issue openly and honestly. Its conviction, however, that Christianity was nothing if it could not be brought to bear on the evils of society led it to speak as forthrightly on the problems of race as on any others in society.

The issue of prohibition in the pages of the Christian Century can only be mentioned in passing. It is no overstatement to say that not a single issue during the period surveyed failed to discuss some aspect of prohibition or the Volstead Act and its enforcement. The Century fervently supported prohibition, and opposed any person, party or event that threatened to reduce or do away with it. The basic problem as the Century saw it was that with the Volstead Act, prohibition passed from the hands of its friends, who were responsible for the passage of that act, into the hands of politicians. They, the Century said, could care less and used the issue as a political football. An editorial of October 8, 1930, rehearsed all of this as a prelude to castigating President Hoover for his failure to assume leadership in enforcement. The editorial maintained,

Nine-tenths of the problem consists in the creation of a willing acceptance of the law and obedience to it by the decent citizenship of this land. Mr. Hoover is failing at this point. He is not giving the moral leadership which the nation has a right to expect. . . . If the people feel that their President is indifferent, that his own heart is cold, or his conviction weak, or his will uncertain, their own mood will be an easy prey to the unsleeping forces of reaction and nullification.³³

Prohibition for the Century was the will of the people, and

all efforts at all levels of societal life had to bend to the task of observing and carrying out that will.

One side effect of this narrow passion for prohibition was to lessen the effect of the voice of religious leadership in other areas of national life. Paul Carter, in a study done on the social gospel maintained that the energies expended in this campaign withdrew from those directed toward more basic ills of society. Moreover, "the general prestige and moral influence of the churches suffered unprecedented damage, so that all of their teaching, religious as well as social, was rendered less effective."³⁴ If this was true, and it seems reasonable that it was, the Christian Century must take its share of blame for its unrelenting support of prohibition.

CHAPTER II

ECONOMIC ISSUES

No subject was too complex for the Century to discuss. If it affected human life, it required attention from the perspective of Christian commitment. Economic issues, therefore, received this attention as frequently and as forcefully as did social issues. This concern was continually operative in the Century, and not just at times of economic crisis. It was expressed in the period being surveyed in terms of materialism, the depression, and the basic economic structure of society, distinct but closely interrelated topics.

Materialism was understood as a national mania, an endemic evil in American culture, and through culture in religion. The basic element of materialism was greed. An editorial entitled "America's Enemy - Greed" stated,

If America is threatened by a subsidence of its moral foundations, the cause is to be found in the failure of its people to subject their greed to the discipline and control of a vigorous social conscience.³⁵

This was especially the case in the late 1920's when the spate of consumer goods was flooding the country and advertising convinced Americans they had to have one, if not two of everything coming off the assembly lines. This, in turn, spurred the famous stock market boom which itself further spurred more and more people to try for a piece of the economic action. An editorial early in 1929 on "Playing the

Stock Market" said of this wild speculative spree, "It is gambling . . ."36 Reinhold Neibuhr, in an article that same year, said that "We Are Being Driven" by our economic machinery rather than our controlling it. The desire for goods and wealth was in the driver's seat of America.37

This materialism, furthermore, did not leave the churches unscathed. They were supposed to be the moral conscience of society, pointing out the blighting effects of national greed. Instead, they were being caught in the same trap. An editorial in February of 1929, entitled "The Skyscraper Church," questioned the practice of churches building commercial space with worship centers incorporated into the structure. True, this assured the church of a healthy and continued endowment, but that was not the problem.

To put the matter very bluntly, how far will a church, involved in the obligation to supply profits, question or disturb the premises and practices of a profit-seeking, profit-taking society?38

This question continued throughout the period surveyed. In January of 1931, Vida Scudder raised the same issue in asking, "Can the Church Be Saved?"39 Editorializing later that year, the Century asked, "Is the Church Financing Its Own Defeat?"40 This attacked annuity agreements with wealthy members as well as direct church investments, wondering how this could take place when "there is anything but agreement between the aims of the church and the aims of the industrial or political order." A 1932 editorial on "Religion As a Ferment" commented that religion seemed too complacent in what ought

to be intolerable conditions. It said,

It is unduly concerned with statistical success. It wants to succeed as kingdoms succeed, or as banks and department stores succeed. . . . It is not content to succeed as yeast, which is the way of the kingdom of heaven.⁴¹

The churches, then, had largely been sucked in when they should have been prophetically crying out.

And then came "The Cold, Gray Dawn" of October 24, 1929, the beginning, as the Century saw it, of "the process of a national sobering up. . . ."42 The wind was out of the market's sails, and the country waited to see where new winds would blow. The economy not only failed to recover, but became worse with each passing month. The questions became those of what had gone wrong, what effects it was having, and what could be done to hasten recovery.

The Century knew perfectly well what had gone wrong. A system based upon increasing supply irregardless of demand could not but fail. The editors re-echoed the theme of greed in saying,

Our old world, built upon greed, has smashed. The ruin that has come upon nations, upon classes, upon institutions, upon the dearly-held hopes of men is ruin that - ultimately - is wrought by greed. Man's greed has proved man's ruin.⁴³

Men had been seeking only their own welfare with no thought or concern for society as a whole. As a result, society as a whole was suffering. Throughout the depression years surveyed, this was the unrelenting theme of the Century's analysis.

One of the most moving statements on this theme was an

editorial early in 1932 entitled, "Have We Repented?".⁴⁴ The editorial reported on a prayer drafted by the bishops of the Church of England for use in all of its churches. It was a prayer of repentance for selfishness in business, self and class interest above that of the common good, arrogance, satisfaction in power over others, and other manifestations of greed. A national furor met the prayer as might have been expected. The Century editorialized that this was because the bishops had fingered the right sore spot. The tragedy was a spiritual one, and a restoration of the health of society waited upon society's repentance. The editors continued,

We have all sinned. . . . by our reliance on brute force
 . . . by our complacency in the face of social injustice
 . . . in permitting what should be a brotherhood of man
 to be divided into compartments of color and caste . . .
 by setting up self-seeking as the norm of men and nations.
 . . . The archbishops of the Church of England were dead
 right. . . . "Forgive us our trespasses." That is the
 word which a spiritually quickened religious leadership
 should be speaking now to a spiritually baffled society.⁴⁵

What had gone wrong was not as important, however, as the effects it was having. The suffering of millions was the most immediate concern. Unemployment spread and with it desperation. The need for work became a dominant Century theme. Frequent stories were carried of the tragic effects of unemployment on families. Editorials pleaded with the government to face up to the crisis and begin dealing with it. As was pointed out above, newspapers were admonished to treat the situation in all of its stark realities.

By 1931 the situation was a national emergency. Already

in January an article offered suggestions on "What We Can Do for Unemployment."⁴⁶ An editorial in the summer entitled "Next Winter," warned the churches to be prepared for an even greater demand on their charitable works than the previous year. More than that, they must become deeply involved in the struggle to overcome the conditions which had created the situation. "The church should begin now to prepare the minds and even more the hearts, of its people for coming, deep, and widespread social change."⁴⁷ Only this could relieve the gravity of the situation. Another editorial severely criticized the business establishment for trying to effect recovery with more of the same tactics which caused the depression initially.⁴⁸ In addition to this, some businesses had devised new ways of fleecing the unemployed of even the few dollars they did have. Some employment agencies advertised available jobs. The throngs which answered did get jobs, for a few days, only to be fired to make room for the new throngs, each new group paying for the privilege of a few days work.⁴⁹

The winter came, and the Century's predictions weren't wrong. The desperation became so bad that the Illinois National Guard issued a pamphlet to its members instructing them in how to deal with public riots. The Century found this intolerable, editorializing that it was "One Way to Deal With Starving Men."⁵⁰ By April of 1932, humanity was "At the Breaking Point," spiritually as well as physically. Churches

were urged to even greater efforts for physical aid as well as to "shoulder the responsibility of demanding the establishment of a sane social order."⁵¹ Spiritual ministry was pointless if men died of starvation amid the glut of food and factories of an insane society.

Churches, communities, and even states, however, could only do so much. Ultimately the responsibility for recovery resided in the federal government, the only resource agent with powers to deal effectually with the crisis. In October of 1931 the Century commented that "the time has come when a policy should be adopted based on . . . three foundation stones." These were: 1. recognition of the conditions as a national emergency; 2. as such the burden of sustaining the nation should be distributed with equity over the entire population; and 3. the analogy for "such an equitable and efficient method" was the way the nation dealt with the war situation, universal taxation and conscription.⁵²

The following October was the wrap-up of the national campaigns with the depression the dominant issue. The week before the election, on October 26, the editors of Christian Century discussed "The Stakes in the Election."⁵³ The confusion evidenced in the editorial were those of the nation as a whole. Commenting that there was little difference between the two major parties, the editors nevertheless dismissed the socialist party and its "radical and remote goal of reconstructing the whole social system." Those were strange words

for a magazine which had been calling for just such a goal. But the gravity of the crisis "is the only instrument available for relieving the present human woe." Reforms could come later, but suffering had to be attended to now. As ineffectual as Mr. Hoover had been to that point in dealing with the crisis, Mr. Roosevelt would be changing horses in mid-stream and thus confusing. It was a question of public confidence.⁵⁴ Paul Carter sums up the Century's position by saying,

Thus, moved by no enthusiasm for either candidate, yet constrained to choose between them by the gravity of the situation, the Christian Century delayed taking a stand as long as possible. . . . Professing to see in the Republican candidate 'a sense of responsibility and a high quality of intellectual integrity which can hardly be claimed for his opponent' its editors despairingly announced their support of the candidacy of Herbert Clark Hoover.⁵⁵

Roosevelt was elected, however, and the Century immediately took its place in support of him. On the eve of his inauguration in March, 1933, the Century wished him well in all of the complex difficulties he faced, and cautioned their readers not to expect too much too quickly.⁵⁶ Succeeding editorials generally approved the first tentative measures such as the banking holiday. They were delighted with the inaugural address and the confidence it established.⁵⁷ The editors even regained some of their old reforming zeal which had flagged just before the election. One issue alone contained two editorials entitled "Towards a New United States"⁵⁸ and "What Shall We Do About Money?"⁵⁹ which proposed reforms

built into recovery. Another article in the same issue called for a modern constitution together with a fourteen point program for economic liberty for all citizens.⁶⁰ Other editorials and articles continued to offer constructive suggestions for recovery and reform, and to comment on what the government was doing in these areas.

The basic aspect of the Century's view of recovery was its attitude to the economic structure as a whole. Only a new philosophy and a new economic system could guarantee that recovery would not just reproduce the system which had collapsed. The kingpin of the old order, the profit motive, therefore had to be abandoned. It was the profit motive, which resulted in the materialistic greed described above. It was the profit motive which led to overproduction, ignoring the laws of demand. It was the profit motive which allowed the few untold wealth while the many suffered with too little. It was the profit motive which had thrust the nation into the abyss of an intolerable depression.

Harry F. Ward wrote in an article in 1932 that the American experiment was declining because "the moneymaking spirit can give no continuous energy."⁶¹ What was needed was a creative passion to make a new man and a new society. Another article told the preacher of the social gospel that he had to make war on two fronts. "He must fight against the heresy of the profit motive . . . and engage in hand to hand combat with the age old enemy of individualism."⁶² Paul Hutchinson, the managing editor, once commented that hundreds

of church bodies had declared that religion demands a society purged of the profit motive.⁶³

If capitalism and the profit motive were not the answer to a just social order, what was? The Century had always flirted with socialism. It reported and commented favorably on individuals and groups who were socialist and advocated a socialist order for the country. John C. Bennett asked in an article, "Can Christianity and Socialism Make Terms?" and proceeded to point out why they need to. He comments,

In their essential principles both seek the same social goal - a cooperative and just society. . . . (They) need to influence one another if either is to be healthy. Christianity without socialism loses contact with reality. . . . Socialism without Christianity is in danger of becoming secular, hard, narrow. . . .⁶⁴

Reinhold Niebuhr commented similarly in an editorial on "Socialism and Christianity."⁶⁵

Reporting on an Ohio protestant ministers convention in 1932, and editors called the conference "A Charter for a Christian Social Order." The conference adopted what amounted to

a declaration that the capitalistic order is in opposition to the principles of Jesus and that only a socialist society can be consistent with the ethical requirements of the kingdom of God.⁶⁶

In the campaigns of that year Paul Hutchinson editorialized favorably on the Socialist Party nomination of Norman Thomas.⁶⁷

This fascination with and approval of socialism and its goals was not followed through, however. It was pointed out above that the editors dismissed the Socialist Party in the

election. If for all of its appeal socialism was not the answer, what then was?

Donald Meyer, in a study of Protestantism and politics during this era, said, "the socialists believed the political public had to be reconstituted. The Century did not."⁶⁸

What the Century proposed was Christian economics, and order with firm moral roots in Christianity and social concern, not profit, as the driving mechanism. Donald Meyer in speaking of the Century's program comments,

Social-gospel logic argued that a system bred men in its own image; capitalism depended upon the profit motive, its men were bred selfish and grasping. A cooperative system would call out men of cooperation and good will.⁶⁹

The Century also had the answer of how this new cooperative order was to come about. The Christian church had to preach forth the new economic man, or else the old economic man would not let him come forth. The following quote from an editorial on economic planning is typical:

It is time for the preaching of a new evangelism--the evangelism of the voluntary liquidation of the competitive system in order that there may be a planned economy which shall insure to every person in the nation an adequate supply of the goods of life. It is neither right nor reasonable that people should go hungry, should go without work, should live in terror of old age in the United States. This nation has resources, mechanical equipment and technological service to do away with such scandals. What is needed is a moral awakening among those now in control of the industrial machine.⁷⁰

It was the social gospel program of Christian leaders in business and politics infusing the institutions with a Christian spirit to work for social justice and benefit of all citizens which would set the country aright and keep it there. The

Century may not have called it the Kingdom of God on earth, but all of the rhetoric implied just that. It would not raise a standard of rebellion or revolution, but it would loudly demand an economy and a society in harmony with Christian morality.

CHAPTER III

POLITICAL ISSUES

The third major area to which the Christian Century directed its attention was political issues. While these were involved in both social and economic discussion, they are broader than that and require investigation separately. Political considerations in the Century follow the general classifications of domestic and international issues.

Every issue of the magazine carried several editorial comments and at least one article on political affairs. Morrison expressed the philosophy of this treatment in an editorial at the inauguration of Mr. Hoover. Entitled, "An Open Letter to the President," it read in part,

Your presidency comes at a time when Christianity is beginning to press hard against the walls of political, economic and social conventions, national and international, behind which crass, unregenerate paganism has long and securely entrenched itself against the influence of religion. Those walls will someday go down, and the mind of Christ will become the mind of state.⁷¹

An operative philosophy such as that invited comment on any and every issue of the day. Two domestic areas representative of this philosophy in action are elections and conscientious objection.

The most representative treatment of an election was the Illinois senatorial campaign between incumbent Charles S. Deneen and Mrs. Ruth Hanna McCormick. The Century began its

discussion of the election in March and continued until the November national elections. Basic policy decisions were United States adherence to the World Court and prohibition, both of which Deneen supported but on which Mrs. McCormick equivocated. If Mrs. McCormick should be elected, the Century said, it would mean two things:

It would be said that the people of the state were against an honest administration of the prohibition laws and in favor of complete isolation in all international affairs. . . . The church members, the members of civic clubs, the responsible citizens of the state must see that this does not happen.⁷²

Another editorial on "The First Woman Senator" said that she should not be Mrs. McCormick, for that was all she would be and not a good senator.⁷³

On April 16, 1930, the Century regretfully announced that she had won the primary, and launched a campaign against her final election. The editors took her to task in June for the huge amounts she had spent in winning the primary, and hinted at unsavory connections for the source of the funds.⁷⁴ September and October issues of the Century continued to urge against her election. The editors accused her of dishonesty in shifting from a "dry" in the primary to a "wet" if the state referendum indicated the voters favored that position.

On November 12, the editors were pleased to report she had lost the election. Elaborating on the implications of the election the following week, the editors commented,

The Christian Century takes as a compliment the condemnation which Mrs. McCormick's few remaining loyal friends heap upon it as the most potent single factor

in discrediting her candidacy. It points with gratification to the fact that in these pages first appeared the classification of Mrs. McCormick as the betrayer, not only of her dry constituency, but of the republican party in the state.⁷⁵

When it came to matters of political implications of Christian convictions, the Century threw its whole weight behind what it considered right and against what it thought wrong.

Conscientious objection, on the other hand, was directly a matter of Christian morality vis-a-vis the state. Several cases came up during the years surveyed which drew extensive comment from the Century. The first was that of Madame Rosika Schwimmer, a Hungarian by birth, and a speaker for the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. She was an avowed pacifist, and when she applied for citizenship, she was denied it on those grounds. The Supreme Court sustained the denial.⁷⁶ The Century, adamantly pacifist, was outraged. By extension of that principle, it editorialized, Quakers and Mennonites must also have their citizenship revoked.⁷⁷

In December of 1929, the Supreme Court again denied citizenship to an avowed pacifist. Mrs. Margaret Dorland Webb, a Canadian and a Quaker, was refused citizenship. At this the Century replied, "Only Killers Need Apply!"⁷⁸

The cause celebre was that of Professor Douglas Clyde Macintosh, Yale Divinity School professor and a Canadian by birth. It began in 1929 and continued for many years. At issue was refusal of citizenship because he would not subscribe to submitting unquestioningly to declarations of congress in matters of warfare. He reserved the right to refuse par-

icipation in an unjust war. He stated,

I have not promised, explicitly or tacitly, to accept an act of congress as the final interpretation of the will of God, and I will not do so. In my allegiance to my country I withhold nothing, not even my life. But I cannot give my conscience. That belongs to God.⁷⁹

On June 24, 1929, the United States District Court of New Haven, Connecticut, refused his citizenship application because of this statement. In June of 1930, the circuit court of appeals reversed this decision and granted him citizenship. The government, however, carried the decision to the Supreme Court. In May of 1931, they again reversed the decision by a five to four vote. An editorial likened the decision to the Dred Scott decision in outrage and implication. It commented,

The Christian Century, on its part, takes its place beside Dr. Macintosh. We refuse to accept the constitution as interpreted by this decision of the supreme court. Our conscience is not for sale. We give to no government power to conscript our religion. We refuse to bear arms or to aid in any way a war which we believe contrary to the will of God.⁸⁰

Another editorial flatly stated, "The Supreme Court Violates the Constitution."⁸¹

Dr. Macintosh applied for a rehearing, but the court denied his petition. At that point, Morrison called native born citizens to rise up and deny this doctrine of unquestioning citizenship, and the premise that they support congress in any and all matters of war. He spearheaded a drive by the religious press to seek a redress of this grievance. The Century and twenty-seven other journals simultaneously ran

a "Declaration of an American Citizen" which the reader could sign and send to congress.⁸² Signing the declaration meant refusal to be bound by the court's decision, refusal to take the oath of allegiance "until this intolerable restriction upon conscience and religion has been removed," and active work to have the decision set aside.⁸³

Thousands of the declarations were returned and forwarded to congress, but unfortunately with little effect. The case was mentioned again occasionally in the Century, but was never resolved. The editors may have been capable of swinging a senatorial election, but congress and the Supreme Court were more than it could sway, try as it did.

Closely related to the domestic issue of qualifications for citizenship was the international problem of disarmament. The Century's pacifist views led it to strong, vocal support of efforts to reduce arms. It had led the fight for the Kellogg-Briand treaty outlawing war, and for Senate ratification of the treaty.⁸⁴ It deplored the concept of using force to implement and keep the treaty. Whenever squabbles arose between nations, the Century hastened to call attention to the treaty and its provisions for settling disputes.

One example of how the Century sought to influence international affairs was an editorial on January 1, 1930, entitled, "An Hour of Destiny!" It stated the three decisive international choices before the country as the approaching London naval disarmament conference, the impending decision

to join the world court, and the Pan-American arbitration treaty. After discussing the implications of these issues, the editorial concluded,

Every Christian group should be a center of intense watchfulness and activity during the opening months of 1930. Does the President, do the delegates to the London conference, do the senators know what the Christians of America hope, pray for, expect from the approaching decisions? They must be made to know.⁸⁵

The Century pleaded and urged the United States to take the lead in steps toward peace and disarmament, but the world situation never improved. It never stopped trying, however. Herbert Gray wrote an article in 1932 with a novel, if idealistic proposal. He suggested an unarmed army of Christian pacifists to stand between the combatants in a conflict, at the time referring to skirmishes in China. The proposal included a plan for a permanent peace army made up of those willing to stand between, and another group willing to render peace service in other ways or to help send others if they could not go. He concluded his proposal by saying,

It is time that Christians showed in some fresh and adventurous way that the power of action has not wholly deserted us. . . . It is time that a mobile Christian force should come into existence ready to be sent anywhere and to express by its united action that faith and good will is stronger than military power, and that the methods of peace are the only roads to justice and common good.⁸⁶

The policy of letting politicians know what Christian attitudes were on international affairs applied to nearly every crisis the world faced. Gandhi and the non-violent, passive resistance movement against British colonialism in

India received editorial comment and article investigations throughout its duration. China's rejection of treaties imposed upon her by the west and her resistance to western influence also received frequent discussion. Both India and China were treated sympathetically, especially Gandhi's methods.⁸⁷ The Century demonstrated an understanding of why the two countries were rising up against the west, and found their actions justifiable.

Other events which drew comment were the marines in Nicaragua; internal power struggles in Spain; the papal-fascist concordat in Italy; Philippine independence; war between Paraguay and Bolivia; and the Canadian handling of liquor traffic. The two issues which dominated international affairs comments from 1931 on were Japan and its aggression in China, and Germany and the Nazi rise to power.

CONCLUSION

The social gospel had recaptured a long overlooked element of Christianity. Personal, individualistic faith, while it was the necessary foundation, had for too long been the dominant motif of Christianity. How it was lived out in society and brought to bear on the problems of society had long been neglected. The social gospel sought to overcome this neglect. Faith was nothing if it was not operative in the lives of the faithful as they confronted the problems of their surrounding culture. The social gospel offered means to that end.

The Christian Century stood firmly on this philosophy. It was dedicated to an ongoing critique of society from the vantage point of the Christian faith. It was dedicated to infusing the social, economic and political spheres of man's activities with a Christ-like spirit, social justice and moral responsibility. It was dedicated to assisting its readers in their individual and corporate activities of speaking to and working to overcome the problems of their communities, nation, and world.

Conflicts and inconsistencies nevertheless existed. The time and energy devoted to prohibition, for example, seem out of proportion to its importance in relation to the magnitude of other problems of the era. The question of why the Century was strongly socialist oriented and yet refused to endorse

Norman Thomas and the Socialist Party requires further intensive investigation. Why, if the journal was a Christian critique of society, did it do so very little theological reflection in making its critique?

Questions do indeed remain. Even they, however, help to underscore the important role the Century played. In speaking to the confusing issues of the period surveyed, it could itself be susceptible to the confusion. But it never stopped speaking. The Christian Century was a leading voice of liberal Protestantism as it struggled to influence American life and society with the Christian faith.

FOOTNOTES

¹Harold E. Fey, "Charles Clayton Morrison: A Personal Memoir," The Christian Century, 83(March 16, 1966), 326. Hereafter the journal is abbreviated CC.

²Harold E. Fey, "Charles Clayton Morrison at Ninety," CC., 81(December 2, 1964), 1488.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Robert M. Miller, American Protestantism and Social Issues, 1919-1939 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1958), p. 40.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸"The Editorial Outlook for 1928," CC., 46(January 24, 1929), 105.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Paul Hutchinson, "The Freedom of the Air: This New and Untamed Giant," CC., 48(March 11, 1931), 340.

¹¹"How Patriotic Is the Newspaper?" CC., 46(January 3, 1929), 6.

¹²Ibid., p.7.

¹³"Does Your Newspaper Want Peace?" CC., 47(February 5, 1930), 167.

¹⁴"The Newspaper and Social Responsibility," CC., 48 (June 24, 1931), 830.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 832.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷"The Newspaper Degrades Itself," CC., 49(March 23, 1932), 371.

¹⁸Goodwin B. Webster, "The Press Invades Hopewell," CC., 49(April 27, 1932), 543.

¹⁹"Unemployment's Grim Reality," CC., 47(February 26, 1930), 271.

²⁰Paul Hutchinson, "The Freedom of the Air," CC., 48 (March 11, 1931-April 22, 1931).

²¹Ibid., p. 549.

²²"Has Will Hays Made Good?" CC., 46(November 11, 1929), 1365.

²³Fred Eastman, "The Menace of the Movies," CC., 47 (January 15, 1930-February 12, 1930).

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid., p. 204.

²⁶Clifford G. Twombly, "Have the Movies Cleaned Up?" CC., 47(February 12, 1930), 204.

²⁷Fred Eastman, "Your Child and the Movies," CC., 50 (May 3, 1933-June 14, 1933).

²⁸Miller, p. 312.

²⁹W.W. Alexander, "Dealing With the Thinking Negro," CC., 46(February 28, 1929), 295.

³⁰"Texas Solons Bow Their Heads in Shame," CC., 46 (July 3, 1929), 860.

³¹Harlan F. Frost, "Piercing the Wall Between the Races," CC., 47(April 30, 1930), 557.

³²"Ridding Christian Gatherings of the Color Line," CC., 48(December 23, 1931), 1613.

³³"Prohibition Turning a Corner," CC., 47(October 8, 1930), 1206.

³⁴Paul A. Carter, The Decline and Revival of the Social Gospel, 1920-1940 (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1954), p. 41.

³⁵"America's Enemy - Greed," CC., 47(August 6, 1930), 959.

³⁶"Playing the Stock Market," CC., 46(February 21, 1929), 255.

- 37 Reinhold Niebuhr, "We Are Being Driven," CC., 46 (May 1, 1929), 578.
- 38 "The Skyscraper Church," CC., 46 (February 5, 1929), 193.
- 39 Vida Scudder, "Can the Church Be Saved?" CC., 48 (January 21, 1931), 84.
- 40 "Is the Church Financing Its Own Defeat?" CC., 48 (April 29, 1931), 568.
- 41 "Religion As a Ferment," CC., 49 (March 6, 1932), 343.
- 42 "The Cold, Gray Dawn," CC., 46 (November 6, 1929), 1365.
- 43 "We Can Have A New World If We Want It!" CC., 48 (September 16, 1931), 1134.
- 44 "Have We Repented?" CC., 49 (January 20, 1932), 82.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 "What We Can Do For Unemployment," CC., 48 (January 21, 1931), 88.
- 47 "Next Winter," CC., 48 (July 8, 1931), 895.
- 48 Harry F. Ward, "The Handwriting on the Wall," CC., 48 (March 4, 1931), 306.
- 49 Carl Knudsen, "Protecting the Unemployed," CC., 47 (May 14, 1930), 622.
- 50 "One Way to Deal With Starving Men," CC., 49 (January 27, 1932), 108.
- 51 "At the Breaking Point," CC., 49 (April 20, 1932), 505.
- 52 "A National Emergency," CC., 48 (October 28, 1931), 1335.
- 53 "The Stakes in the Election," CC., 49 (October 26, 1932), 1294.
- 54 Ibid., p. 1295.
- 55 Carter, p. 164.
- 56 "The New Pilot Comes Aboard," CC., 50 (March 1, 1933), 278.

- 57 "Finding Bedrock," CC., 50 (March 15, 1933), 350.
- 58 "Towards a New United States," CC., 50 (March 22, 1933), 382.
- 59 "What Shall We Do About Money?" CC., 50 (March 22, 1933), 383.
- 60 William Kay Wallace, "Wanted: A Modern Constitution," CC., 50 (March 22, 1933), 390.
- 61 Harry F. Ward, "Religion Confronts a New World," CC., 49 (February 3, 1932), 148.
- 62 Carl Knudsen, "And What Shall This Man Do?" CC., 49 (February 10, 1932), 188.
- 63 Miller, p. 64.
- 64 John C. Bennett, "Can Christianity and Socialism Make Terms?" CC., 48 (March 11, 1931), 338.
- 65 Reinhold Niebuhr, "Socialism and Christianity," CC., 48 (August 14, 1931), 1038.
- 66 "A Charter for a Christian Social Order," CC., 49 (February 24, 1932), 248.
- 67 Paul Hutchinson, "The Socialists Offer Norman Thomas," CC., 49 (June 8, 1932), 733.
- 68 Donald B. Meyer, The Protestant Search for Political Realism, 1919-1941 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1960), p. 319.
- 69 Ibid.
- 70 "When Will America Begin to Plan?" CC., 48 (March 4, 1931), 336.
- 71 Charles Clayton Morrison, "An Open Letter to the President," CC., 46 (March 21, 1929), 385.
- 72 "Deneen Versus Mrs. McCormick," CC., 47 (March 26, 1930), 390.
- 73 "The First Woman Senator," CC., 47 (April 2, 1930), 425.
- 74 "Buying the Right to Govern," CC., 47 (June 4, 1930), 710.

75 "A Candidate Without Convictions," CC., 47 (November 19, 1930), 1407.

76 "The Case of Madame Schwimmer," CC., 46 (June 12, 1929), 769.

77 "Quakers Are Now Excluded From Citizenship," CC., 46 (June 19, 1929), 795.

78 "Only Killers Need Apply!" CC., 46 (December 4, 1929), 1493.

79 "No Christians Need Apply," CC., 46 (July 10, 1929), 889.

80 "An Astonishing Decision," CC., 48 (June 10, 1931), 767.

81 "The Supreme Court Violates the Constitution," CC., 48 (June 17, 1931), 798.

82 "Declaration of an American Citizen," CC., 49 (January 20, 1932), 75. This entire issue was devoted to the Macintosh case.

83 Ibid.

84 Charles Clayton Morrison, "The Treaty is Ratified!" CC., 46 (January 24, 1929), 99.

85 "An Hour of Destiny," CC., 47 (January 1, 1930), 9.

86 Herbert Gray, "An Unarmed Army of Peace," CC., 49 (April 27, 1932), 544.

87 "The Orient is Not Bluffing!" CC., 47 (January 15, 1930), 72.

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