

The Modern Crusade

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THE DYNAMIC THAT IS TO SAVE THE WORLD.

By REV. JAS. I. VANCE, D. D., of *Newark, N. J.*

What the church needs in this conflict is not more machinery but more power; something to drive the machinery and organization we already have; I am to speak to you about the power.

By the quiet waters of Gallilee, as the first flush of the morning sun cast its glory over the landscape, the Risen Christ met a man who was to do almost as much as any man of that, or any age, to save the world. There by the seaside, Christ indicated to this man that which would make him a saviour of his fellow man. He asked him one question, and this was the question: "Lovest thou me?"

The man was unpromising material out of which to make a world leader. He had been neither constant nor courageous. He had been blessed with great privileges and opportunities, but he had denied all. At the crisis he had repudiated his Master. This is the man Jesus picked up out of shame and humiliation, and set him to the task of saving the world. It is the biggest business in the world and a small dynamo will not suffice. There is needed the mightiest motive that can play upon a human soul without consuming it. Jesus supplied the motive. He charged the man's personality with the dynamic that is to save the world. He said to him: "Do you love me?"

Jesus did not say "Simon Peter, are you sorry for having denied me? Will you promise to be good? Will you promise never to do so again?" He might have said, "Yes," to all this and been worth no more for the uses Jesus proposed to make of him than so much sawdust. For Christ was not after a little figure of human perfection. He was not after a piece of pious statuary to set in some niche in glory. He was after a man to save the world. So He said to him, "Simon Peter, do you love me?" He charged that man's personality with the dynamic that is to save the world. The dynamic is Love.

Jesus did not say to Simon Peter, "Do you believe in Me?" A correct and adequate faith in Christ is, of course, important, but one may have that and take very little interest in his fellow man. Something more than orthodoxy is needed. One may be theologically sound and as cold as ice and indifferent as death.

He did not say to Simon Peter, "Will you confess Me, will you promise that you will not be ashamed of me?" That, too, is important, and yet one may make an adequate confession of Christ and be little interested in his fellow man. Something more is needed than spectacular religion or pious exhibits.

Jesus did not say to Simon Peter, "Will you preach Me?" That is important, too. Nothing is more important, and yet He must be preached in the right way. It is possible to preach Him, so as to conceal Him. There are preachers who never strike fire, whose pulpits are ice packs and whose sermons camp by the frozen sea. Jesus said to this man, "Do you love Me?"—this is the dynamic that is to save the world.

It is a heart motor. It is not a dynamic of thought, or of volition, or of conduct. It is a passionate devotion so intense that it masters the intellect and drives the will and controls the conduct. It makes of the heart a flaming conviction, and of the will a fiery furnace of zeal, and of the conduct of shekinah, aflame with the Divine presence.

Jesus said, "Do you love Me?" If love is to flame, it must be fed, and the fuel it must be kindled with is love for God Himself. So Christ said, "Do you love Me?"

What is love for Christ?

Let me say in the first place, that it is not to be confounded with a passion for humanity. There are some people who have very little interest in Jesus Christ, but who have passion for humanity, and who start out to save the world because of the passion they have for humanity. A passion for humanity is not an ignoble passion. It is better to be interested in people than in things. It is a great deal better to love people than money. People can love you in return. They do not always do so, and when they fail to do so, a man who is interested in people because of his passion for humanity finds his zeal dying out and his interest waning, and his enthusiasm growing cold, and finally he becomes disgusted with the whole business, and he finds himself saying, "These people are ungrateful. They are not worth helping. I wash my hands of the whole business."

Now there are things to be done for humanity. People need much. The streets are full of peril. They need decent houses to live in. There are women and children at the mercy of godless landlords. There are lots of things to be done for people. And it

is a fine thing for one to follow in the footsteps of Abou Ben Adam and say, "Whether or not you write me as one who loves God, write me as one who loves his fellowman." That is good as far as it goes. But, I tell you that will never save the world. It may clean up a few plague spots; it may open some recreation centres; it may get a child labor law passed; but it will not save the world. You might as well try to purify a dirty river by planting flowers along its banks, as to try to change the world by changing the surroundings of the people. If we ever are to lift this world there must come down from God the motive power that will enable us to do so. A man can't raise himself by pulling at his boot straps.

Let me say that love for Christ is not to be confounded with genius for organization. There are some people who do not have a passion for humanity, but who do have a genius for organization, and they start out to save the world with machinery. There are some good people all of whose altruistic impulses run to machinery. If they have a new spasm of pity they organize a stock company to handle it. If they have a fresh wave of enthusiasm, they call their friends and neighbors, adopt a constitution and by-laws, elect a president and secretary, and fix dues. They believe in saving the world that way. They would save the world by red tape—they worship method. Is that what Christ had in mind when he said to Simon Peter, "Do you love Me?" Did he mean to say to him, "Simon Peter, have you got administrative ability? Do you think you could keep a dozen stenographers and an army of clerks busy, sending out good literature?" Far be it from me to be such a pagan as not to see the beauty of saving this poor old sin-sick world scientifically. If we are going to give a beggar a dime, let's give it to him scientifically. If we are going to give him a dime, let us spend twenty-five dollars, if necessary, in having his record searched and that of his forbears unto the tenth generation, and if, after all this investigation, he is found to be worthy, and we are sure it will not damn him for time and eternity, in God's name, let him have his dime, or at any rate let him have the chance to earn it. I am afraid that our benevolent work is getting so scientific that it has lost its heart beat. Let us remember that even poor people have some feelings. There is a charity which pauperizes, because it is indiscriminate, and there is a charity which damns, because it is heartless. For my part, if I must choose between the two—

the charity that pauperizes and the charity that damns—give me the charity that pauperizes.

In the next place, love for Christ is not to be confounded with a political, industrial or economical enthusiasm. There are some people who have no love for Christ but who have an industrial, or an economic, or a political enthusiasm, and they are starting out to try to save the world with their enthusiasm. No doubt there is something for these gentlemen to do. There is always something wrong, and always something for the reformer. We would like to have the tariff question settled right. We would like to have the currency question settled for all time, and the labor question adjusted, and the drink question removed from politics. There is always something wrong. Here the men with a theory take the platform.

The last class of people to offer us a panacea for all our ills is the political socialist. He comes forward like Cervantes' hero, Don Quixote, who accompanied by his silly squire, and seated on his raw-boned steed, Rozinante, levels his lance against every innocent windmill on the horizon. And so the modern political socialist mounts the steed of his various vagaries, hurls himself against every windmill that offends the skyline of our political life.

Is that what Jesus had in mind when he was talking to Simon Peter by the seaside? Did He mean to say, "Simon Peter, are you sound politically, and have you got the right view on the labor question? Are you absolutely orthodox on all economical matters?" Is that the way Jesus approached this question with Simon Peter? By no means.

I am not saying that there is nothing for these gentlemen to do, for there is a great deal for them to do. I am not saying that there is no merit in the positions that they occupy, but they will never save the world that way. I will tell you why. They are thoroughly selfish. What is the political question to-day? Why, the political question is simply a question of how to get in and stay in. What is the labor question to-day? Why, the labor question is simply how to make the man who employs you pay the wage you think you ought to have. I am not saying that there is no merit in that question. I think there is a great deal. But, I am saying that it is a selfish question, and that we will never save the world that way. What is political socialism stripped of all high sounding rhetoric? What it amounts to is simply a question of trying to get the man

who has something, to share with you. Probably this is not entirely just, but this is a story illustrating, to a certain extent, the attitude of socialism. Some said to one of these men, "Do you mean, if you had a thousand acres of land, you would give five hundred of it away?" He said, "Yes sir, certainly." "If you had a thousand dollars, would you give half of it to your fellow man?" "Most assuredly, I would." "And, do you mean to say that, if you had two suits of clothes, you would give one of them away?" "No, I have two suits of clothes."

Do you know that socialism is the antipodes of Christianity? The watchword of political socialism is "to get all you can," and the watchword of Christianity is "to give all you can." Do you mean to say you can save the world that way? Even a grain of wheat could not save itself that way. Christianity is not an industrial or political or economic enthusiasm. What is it? It is just love for Christ. This is the dynamic that is to save the world. It is passionate devotion to the person who is the Saviour of the world. It is unswerving allegiance to Christ. It is that sort of a passion resident in a human heart, and that is the only place between earth and the skies that a passion like that can find a resting place. You cannot find a house for it in a piece of machinery. It has got to be a heart beat; it has got to be a soul throb. When that sort of a passion takes hold of us, every other question will have been solved. There will be no longer any lack of either courage or constancy.

Follow Simon Peter from this hour on, and see how his enthusiasm glows, like a million burning suns. Follow St. Paul through all his tribulations and hardships. What sustained him? He tells us. He says it was the Love of Christ. He had become charged with the dynamic that is to save the world.

Now, when this passion takes up its abode in our hearts, and we look out on our fellow men, we see in a man precisely what Jesus saw. The man who looks out with passion for humanity, sees only the human product of a process of evolution, a creature slowly climbing up the scale of being, and he works for him as a man. When he looks out at him through genius of organization, he sees the victim of vicious surroundings. He tries to change his vicious conditions. When he looks out through an industrial or a political or an economic enthusiasm, he does not see the man at all. He sees only the mob, the mass, and he begins to talk of eras, and epochs. But when he looks out on his fellow man through love of

God, he sees the soul of man, the divinity that is locked up inside the man; and he says, "He is my brother. He is brother of mine by right of Christian fellowship with my Saviour, and if he is poor he must be helped, and if he is weary he must be refreshed, and if he is in sorrow he must be comforted, and if he is lost he must be saved."

When we look out on our fellow man from love of Christ, we feel towards him precisely as Christ felt, and we begin to love him as Christ loved him, and I tell you that is the only thing that will ever lift a man. You will never transform the character of a man until you bring to play upon him this wondrous thing called "love."

"Fold the banners, smelt the guns,
Love rules, her gentle purpose runs."

When you look out on your fellow man with love for Christ, you not only feel for him as Christ did, but you begin to do for him precisely what Christ did. What was that? In a word, it was laying down his life. When we love our fellow men enough to make a sacrifice for them, and to die for them, and live for them, then there is no longer any conflict. The victory has been achieved.

Is it not perfectly evident that what the church needs to-day more than anything else is a new baptism of devotion to Christ? We have been trying all sorts of things, resorting first to one thing and then another, to anything to get a congregation. Might it not be worth while for us to go back to the Apostolic standards, and try love for Christ, and see what that will do? I will tell you what it will do. It will save the world, and it is the only thing that will. There is a story that comes down from the early days of Christianity. It goes on to say that one day news came to the Roman Emperor that all of the gladiators, forty in number, had accepted Christ and had made a profession of their faith in Him as their Saviour. The Emperor was enraged and immediately gave orders that these men be required to recant. In the event of their failure to do so, they were to be transported to the bleakest and dreariest spot in all the bleak and dreary Alpine mountains of Northern Italy, and there, without food or shelter, they were to be turned out to die. The message was carried to the men, and to a man they declined to disown their Saviour. In company with a guard of Roman soldiers, they were taken north up among the Alpine summits, among the eternal snows, and there, in the bleakest, dreariest and wildest

spot that could be found, without food or shelter, the poor wretches were turned out into the wintry night to die of starvation and exposure. That night, as the Roman officer lay in his tent, he was disturbed by a chant that seemed to be borne in upon him by the night winds. Listening, this is what he seemed to hear, "Forty wrestlers, wrestling for Christ, ask of Him the victory, and claim for him the crown." He sat up and listened again. There was borne in more distinctly "Forty wrestlers, wrestling for Christ, ask of Him the victory, and claim for Him the crown." He began to think about the devotion of these men for their leader. He knew something of the devotion of a Roman soldier for the empire, but he knew that the breast of a human soldier was a stranger to a devotion like this. As he marveled at it, suddenly a poor wretch came stumbling through the flap of his tent and fell on his knees and begged permission to recant. The officer looked down on him and said, "Art thou the only one of thy number that durst ask this?" and he said, "The only one." Tearing his cloak from him, he threw it over the poor wretch and said, "Then, by the gods, I will have thy place," and out into the night he went, and the chant unbroken again arose, "Forty wrestlers, wrestling for Christ, ask of Him the victory, and claim for Him the crown." Oh, my brethren, that we could have a devotion for our Saviour like that! Then the salvation of the world would be easy and it would be soon.