
The Hope of the World

Sermons on Christianity Today

By

HARRY EMERSON FOSDICK

PUBLISHERS
HARPER & BROTHERS
NEW YORK AND LONDON

THE HOPE OF THE WORLD

Copyright, 1933, by Harper & Brothers
Printed in the United States of America

TWELFTH EDITION

K-T

Contents

FOREWORD	vii
THE HOPE OF THE WORLD IN ITS MINORITIES	I
CHRISTIANITY AT HOME IN CHAOS	II
CHRISTIANITY'S STAKE IN THE SOCIAL SITUATION	21
THROUGH THE SOCIAL GOSPEL INTO PERSONAL RELIGION	30
MODERN CIVILIZATION'S CRUCIAL PROBLEM	39
THE SERVICE OF RELIGIOUS FAITH TO MENTAL HEALTH	49
THE CONQUEST OF FEAR	59
HANDLING LIFE'S SECOND-BESTS	69
KEEPING ONE'S FOOTING IN A SLIPPERY TIME	78
IS OUR CHRISTIANITY APPEALING TO OUR SOFT- NESS OR OUR STRENGTH?	87
THE PERIL OF WORSHIPING JESUS	96
FACING THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE	107
MAKING THE BEST OF A BAD MESS	117
SIX WAYS TO TELL RIGHT FROM WRONG	126
SUPERFICIAL OPTIMISTS, THE PERIL OF A SERIOUS TIME	136

CONTENTS

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT	145
CHRISTIANITY'S SUPREME RIVAL	156
CHRISTIANITY MORE THAN DUTY—NOT WEIGHT BUT WINGS	167
RELIGIOUS FAITH: PRIVILEGE OR PROBLEM?	176
GETTING OUT OF US THE BEST THAT IS IN US	186
THE FINE ART OF MAKING GOODNESS ATTRACTIVE	195
BEING GOOD WITHOUT TRYING	204
BEAUTIFUL IDEALS AND BRUTAL FACTS	214
CRUCIFIED BY STUPIDITY	222
THE SOUL'S INVINCIBLE SURMISE	231

*The Hope of the World
in Its Minorities*

ONE of the most arresting statements recently made by a public man was made by Mr. Einstein when he said that if two per cent of our population should take a personal, resolute stand against the sanction and support of another war, that would end war. Whether or not this estimate of Mr. Einstein's is as accurate as his cosmic mathematics, I presume no one of us can say, but there is no doubt about the historical evidence on which the principle of his judgment rests.

The creative ideas destined to remake society have always been the possession of the minority. History has depended, not on the ninety-eight per cent, but on the two per cent. Far from being a matter of sociological and political interest alone, this principle gave Christianity its start. When the Master in Palestine began calling out his first disciples from the mass of their countrymen, he was interested not in quantity but in quality—in seed, though but a few kernels, which, if carefully sown, might multiply itself. He was thinking not primarily of the ninety-eight per cent but of a germinal two per cent. To use his own figure in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew's Gospel: "The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till it was all leavened." Quantitatively small, vitally active leaven—that is a true simile of the method of Christianity's transformation of the world.

But is Christianity working like that now? Take the measure of our American churches. Are we the germinal two per cent on which the future of mankind depends? Are we the little group of forward-looking men and women on whom, as on the first disciples of our Lord, has fallen the vision of a new world-order so that we are custodians of prophetic principles that shall remake society? Are we the

THE HOPE OF THE WORLD

minority ready to sacrifice fame or fortune or life itself for those ideas which shall some day permeate mankind with their healing and their truth?

You see, we do not answer to that description. Too frequently forgetting the mission that the Master left us and the way of working he committed to us, we have become a majority movement standing for the status quo, so that many are even startled when they hear a man like Mr. Einstein say that if two per cent should take a personal, resolute stand against war it would mean the end of war. What if, however, something like that is true? What if the future of mankind is in the hands of a minority? What if a little leaven hid in three measures of meal can leaven the whole?

There is no need of elaborating the historical evidence regarding this matter. In every realm the pathfinders have been few and the truths that at last triumphed were at first the possession of a minority. We all know that, but in our thought and life are certain factors which frequently prevent the full force of it from reaching us.

For one thing, we live in a democracy, where the only way of carrying on public business is to accept the voice of the majority. In consequence, the notion naturally prevails that the majority in the end probably is right and that, anyway, the majority rules. But neither of those ideas is true. The majority is almost certain to be wrong on any matter of fine taste or sound judgment, and, whether or not the majority is right, it certainly does not rule. The dominant influence in every situation is a militant minority. The decision of public policy in this country now is largely determined by resolute, militant, compact, closely organized minorities that want something and get it.

Look at this city. Is Tammany Hall a majority? Upon the contrary, it is a self-seeking, highly organized minority and it runs the metropolis. The majority are apathetic, careless, attending to their own business, not the city's, with no very strong convictions one way or the other, and that gives a resolute minority its chance. There is no use fooling our-

THE HOPE OF THE WORLD IN ITS MINORITIES

selves that the majority rules. The United States today is ruled by organized minorities.

If, therefore, at first some were inclined to think that the doctrine of the two per cent is impractical idealism, let us disabuse our minds of that supposition. The serious truth is that the controlling power of the minority, so far from being impractical idealism, is most practical politics. Even in a democracy the minority rules.

The full force of this truth which Jesus put into his figure of the meal and the leaven is deflected from many modern minds also by our inveterate habit of romanticizing history. When we start in to glorify our ancestors for some outstanding achievement, such as, for example, the winning of the American Revolution, we make a thorough job of it and glorify all our ancestors. What a splendid outpouring of co-operative and unanimous zeal it was, we think, that all those colonists put their lives, their fortunes, their sacred honor at the disposal of the cause! That sounds splendid but there is not a word of truth in it. There were probably more Tories than Revolutionists among the colonists and more than either were the men who see-sawed back and forth, who stood first on one side, then on the other, who had no strong convictions either way, and only hoped they were betting right on who was going to win. I venture that more than one family is represented here this morning who wanted to join the Sons or Daughters of the Revolution and so looked up their ancestors—and have kept still about it ever since.

The Revolutionary War was won, the government established, and the Constitution put in force by a compact, highly intelligent, loyal minority. Do you remember John Adams' apostrophe to his posterity? "Posterity! you will never know how much it cost the present generation to preserve your freedom! I hope you will make a good use of it. If you do not, I shall repent it in heaven that I ever took half the pains to preserve it."

Such is the situation with every gain humanity ever made. It was the two per cent who fought for popular education, for religious liberty, for freedom of scientific research,

THE HOPE OF THE WORLD

against the majority. Always the majority has been dough, the few have been leaven; so that out of history there rises an admonition—in any cause that concerns the progress of mankind, put your faith in the creative minorities!

Again, this truth of Jesus is deflected from many modern minds because of our worship of bigness. One of my friends calls it "Jumboism." Especially in this country many people are impressed by nothing that is not big—big cities, big buildings, big corporations. We all are tempted to worship size. But size is an utterly fallacious standard when we are trying to estimate power. Could any one, at the height of Rome's colossal power, have thought of anything much smaller than Paul in a Roman prison writing his few letters? But the result! Whoever would have dreamed that that little man with his brief epistles would dig down so deeply, take hold so strongly, penetrate so powerfully the thoughts and motives of men? The things that are big are utterly misleading as to the location of the ideas that are powerful.

We have in our modern time a vivid illustration of this truth. Whatever else we may think about it, there are few more dramatic incidents in mankind's history than Gandhi confronting the British Empire. The greatest empire in history stands over against one man trying to make terms with him, while he will not fight with outward weapons, is ready to die if his followers use violence, and employs nothing but the ideas of a minority and a certain quality of soul to set them aflame. There are few things that we American Christians need much more to learn than the lesson of that. Bigness is not power. Power is in the ideas to which the future belongs, and they always have been the possession, not of the ninety-eight per cent, but of the two per cent.

Looked at from one angle, this truth is encouraging. When one thinks of the causes that are on our hearts today,—peace rather than war, industrial welfare rather than this desperate situation we are in, better education for the nation's children, or whatever it may be,—we should welcome the good news that we do not have to wait for the majority. Wherever a true idea is born and a creative minority rallies around it,

THE HOPE OF THE WORLD IN ITS MINORITIES

there is the beginning of victory. That is encouraging and it is true. It is not, however, a truth to go to sleep on. We Christians were intended to be that minority. We were to be the salt of the earth, said Jesus. We were to be the light of the world. We were to be the leaven in the lump of the race. There is no possibility of misunderstanding his meaning, my friends. When a man becomes a real Christian he is supposed to move over into that small, creative, sacrificial minority seized upon by visions of a better world and standing for them until they shall permeate mankind with their truth. That does make being a Christian serious business! That is more than believing in a creed. That is more than partaking of the sacraments. That is more than the comfort of worship or the use of beauty as a road to God. That is joining the real church in the original Greek meaning of the word "church," *ecclesia*—called out—a minority selected from the majority to be leaven.

Only as we succeed in getting more Christians like that will power return to the Christian movement. When was Christianity most powerful? Shall we select some scene like that at Canossa, when the Pope bestrode Europe with his rule and even an emperor waited three days in the snow at his doorsill begging for audience and pardon? That seems powerful, yet even a scene like that, when time has worn its meaning off, loses its glamour. There was a time, however, when Christianity was very powerful. Little groups of men and women were scattered through the Roman Empire—"not many mighty," said Paul, "not many noble." They were far less than two per cent and the heel of persecution was often on them, but they flamed with a conviction that they represented truths to which the future belonged.

Do you remember what Paul called them in his letter to the Philippians? "We are a colony of heaven," he said. The Philippian Christians would understand that figure, for their city of Philippi was a Roman colony. When Rome wanted to Romanize a new province, it took Roman people and planted them as a colony in the midst of it. There, as a powerful minority, they stood for Roman law, Roman justice, Roman

THE HOPE OF THE WORLD

faith, and Roman custom, leaven in the lump of the province, until the whole province was leavened. Rome understood the art of government. When, therefore, Paul said to that little group of Philippian Christians, "We are a colony of heaven," they understood. They were a minority thrown out, as pioneers, in the midst of an unchristian world to represent the ideals, faiths, and way of living of a nobler realm until the earth should be the Lord's and the fulness thereof.

In those days Christianity was very powerful. It stopped ancient curses like infanticide. It put an end to the bloody shambles of the gladiatorial shows. It laid hold on an old polytheism that had been glorified in literature, extolled in art, established in custom, and supported by government, and ended it in the interests of one God revealed in Christ. Then Christianity was very powerful. It was a minority movement with nothing to lose, with everything to gain, joining which a man pledged his very life as a forfeit. At last it became so powerful that it captured the Empire, entrenched itself in wealth and worldly prestige, stopped challenging the world, began compromising with the world, went on to defend the status quo of the world, and never again, I fear, on so vast a scale has exhibited such creative, superhuman power.

Let us, therefore, for our own sakes and for the sake of our generation, see if we can recover even a little the meaning of that saying of Jesus, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till it was all leavened."

In the first place, this clearly applies to our churches themselves. Not infrequently one is asked in these days whether or not one believes in the church. Just what is meant by the "church" in that question? These sectarian organizations that carry over from old political quarrels and theological debates denominational divisions that have no pertinency to modern life—are they the church? These sects so often splitting and overlapping their labor in our American communities, absorbed in their self-maintenance until they hardly think of the real issues on which the future of mankind

THE HOPE OF THE WORLD IN ITS MINORITIES

depends, so that the best citizens often feel that they must pull up the church rather than be pulled up by it—are they the church? And by having faith in the church does one mean that he stakes his hope of the future of the race upon this inherited network of denominational organizations? Then let an honest answer be given: How can a man believe in the church?

My own faith is not in these formal organizations. Personally, I think most of them will have to die. Their lines of division and their points of emphasis have no just claim upon contemporaneous interest even, much less on permanency. My faith is in the church within the churches, the two per cent, the spiritual leaven, the inner group of men and women who have been genuinely kindled by Christ's spirit and are today living and thinking above the average and ahead of the time. Always the real church has been not the dough of the mass but the leaven of the few.

As for these formal organizations, let not the lesson of Russia be forgotten. The Greek Church in Russia allied itself with the status quo. It surrendered its prophetic mission and became the religious right arm of the most despotic government on earth and, becoming thus the defender and ally of a political and social régime that could not last, it went out with the system it was tied to. Religion is not dead in Russia. It will not die. Though it seems to die, it will have its resurrection day. But the church as a whole could not save it. Once more in Russia history will have to repeat itself—a little leaven beginning again to work in three measures of meal. My friends, whether by violence or by slow starvation, that is the fate of every ecclesiastical organization that allies itself with a dying order. Church of Christ in America, with all your wealth and your prestige, beware! Could Paul say of you, "Ye are a colony of heaven"?

If some one protests that the real church, then, must forever be standing for new ideas only and never for old ones, so that in consequence the real church becomes merely a radical, iconoclastic group, I am glad to answer that protest as a constructive contribution to our thought. Being a saving

THE HOPE OF THE WORLD

minority is a much deeper matter than that protest understands.

Vital experience of God, for example, as a living force in daily life, has always been the possession of a minority. The faith of most men in God has been inherited, picked up from superficial education, assumed as a plausible explanation of the universe. But that inner flame of spiritual life which burns upon the high altar of a man's soul because of himself he can say, "O God, thou art my God," always has belonged to the few. The many have occasionally borrowed it.

So, too, a living faith in Christ, which enables one in some deep sense to say, "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me," has always belonged to a minority. The majority have worshiped Christ, indeed, have recited resounding creeds about him and made obeisance at his altars, but to live Christ in private quality, in social life, in sacrificial devotion, has that belonged even to the two per cent?

This matter, therefore, of being a saving minority is not cheap and superficial; it goes deep. Indeed, in the Bible there are two kinds of religious minorities: first, Paul's "colony" thrown out as pioneers in an unchristian world, and, second, Isaiah's "remnant," the little group of the true Israel which, in a time that is surrendering old sanctities, clings to them and despite the pressure of an alien generation preserves them for children yet unborn. How much we do need both—minorities that pioneer and minorities that keep the high values of the faith amid a time that popularly surrenders them!

My friends, I am jealous for the church. So much of our Christianity is dough; I want the church to be leaven.

Our truth applies also to social problems. Men today, making their characteristic reactions to the social, economic, international difficulties which beset us, fall into three classes: first, those below the average—lawless, criminal, anti-social; second, those on the average, who play the game according to the rules with a fine sense of honor for observing them; and, third, those above the average, who ques-

THE HOPE OF THE WORLD IN ITS MINORITIES

tion the rules. Are the rules themselves fair? Is the game itself equitable? Does it not minister to the advantage of the few against the many, and cannot the rules be altered so that the game itself will be more just? The hope of the world depends upon that third class.

The truth of this classification can be clearly seen when it is applied to a social problem of the past like slavery. In the days when slavery was in power there were: first, the dishonorable slaveholders, the Simon Legrees, below the average; second, the honorable slaveholders who accepted slavery and the rules of slavery's game and played it like gentlemen, caring for their slaves, ministering solicitously to their physical and spiritual welfare; but, third, both north and south, the people who questioned the whole game of slavery. The rules themselves were not right. The game itself was wrong. High-minded and honorable as the second class was, the future depended upon that third two per cent.

Often in these trying days, as your preacher, I think of you business men. You face heavy burdens, practically complicated and ethically difficult. The more I know of you the better I appreciate the fine code of honor with which you handle your responsibilities. Yet, after all, with you as with me, the final test of a social attitude is at this point to which our thought has brought us. Not for all the world would you run your business in lawless disregard of the rules. You have a careful sense of honor about observing them. But are you dedicating your brains—and the best brains of America are in the business world—to this third matter: Cannot the rules be improved? Cannot the whole game be made more just?

Only the other day I was talking with my friend, a representative of a great corporation. This spring that corporation is casting off into unemployment, absolutely unprovided for, thousands of its men. My friend told me that the corporation had built up a surplus of many millions of dollars to protect the stockholders against emergency. The stockholders are safe against crisis for years to come but not one cent of financial responsibility has that corporation taken

THE HOPE OF THE WORLD

for its employees, now cast off into unemployment. The only hope I found in the situation was that my friend himself belonged to the two per cent. He saw that that policy would never do, that it did not fit this new industrial order into which the machine has introduced us, that business must take financial responsibility against emergency, not simply for investors of money but for investors of life and labor.

This test of social attitude is the same in my realm as it is in yours. Suppose I should accept the present situation in the churches, settle down in my churchmanship to make myself as comfortable as I could, get what I might for myself out of it, and be undisturbed by it; you know that for me that would be a betrayal of trust. The least that a minister of Christ, if he is in earnest, can do today is to stand above the alliance of the church with this dying order and try to help bring forth that new church in which the spiritual life of the future can find its home.

That same test applies to all of us. Wanted in church, business, statesmanship, and international relationships men and women who are not simply playing the game according to the rules but who are trying to better the rules and make the game more just!

Of course, the fact that a man happens to be a member of a minority is no guarantee that he is right. There are all sorts of minorities, good, bad, and indifferent, and not simply every saving idea but every foolish fad can be a minority. That fact, however, argues not against but for our plea. Just because today there are so many uninformed, irresponsible, even violent minorities, let the forward-looking and responsible citizens the more assume their obligations!

As for being Christian, I suppose that, reduced to simplest terms, it means answering Christ's two-worded appeal, "Follow me." Where do we think it takes a man when he does follow him? Never into a majority. I wonder where you and I are this morning—three measures of meal or leaven?,

*Christianity at Home
in Chaos*

MANY people feel that this is an exceedingly difficult time for Christianity. Even under fortunate circumstances, they say, it is not easy to hold Christian ideas about the love of God, the value of the human soul, and a new society of goodwill among men, but in distracted days like these how can such unworldly faiths seem true?

That mood comes to all of us. The unpromising qualities of human nature, dismay at wide-spread destitution, collapse of confidence, and the confusion of world affairs frown down upon the fragile, unearthly, idealistic faiths of Christianity. Nevertheless, if we look at history we shall find that the eras when Christianity was most certainly believed and sacrificially supported, when it made its great advances and won its resounding victories, were not prosperous times but chaotic days like these.

So, in the familiar story, Brer Rabbit persuades his enemy, Brer Fox, to throw him into a brier-patch on the supposition that that would be the worst thing which could befall him, but now, thrown into it, Brer Rabbit runs happily away, saying, "Bred en bawn in a brier-patch, Brer Fox—bred en bawn in a brier-patch!"

Similarly Christianity, far from feeling strange in a troubled time, was born and bred in a brier-patch like this. It started with a cross. The first Christian from Nazareth lived through difficult days. The early Christian community won its amazing victory against the opposition of a pagan world and the first church established itself amid the ruins of a collapsed empire and a wrecked civilization. We children of the Reformation would better not forget the travail out of which we were born, with Calvin crying about the people of his time: "Their wickedness has, however, reached such a

THE HOPE OF THE WORLD

pitch, that I hardly hope to be able any longer to retain any kind of position for the Church, especially under my ministry. My influence is gone, believe me, unless God stretch forth His hand." Especially we American Christians display a strange forgetfulness of our history with its struggle to plant the gospel in the wilderness of this new continent, if we accept a weak picture of a fragile, unearthly, idealistic Christian faith unfitted to deal with trouble. It ought to be wholesome to say to ourselves today that Christianity was born and bred in a brier-patch.

Indeed, it would be strange if I were not now speaking to some one who is persuaded that Christian faith is only an idealistic dream. It is beautiful and comforting, you think, if one can believe it, but it fails to take account of the tragic nature of the world. It turns its eyes away from the dark, cruel aspects of life, you say, to center its regard on what is cheering and comfortable, and so constructs theories of God and man and the possibilities of a new society incredible to one who honestly grapples with the terrific facts of human life. When you see a disbeliever like Bertrand Russell saying that there is no God, no unity or purpose in the universe, no human hope except temporary ameliorations of our earthly fate, and that at last on man "and all his race the slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark," there, you say, is one who candidly faces the ruthless processes of nature and the essential tragedy of life.

My friend, we are not debating the whole question between theism and atheism, but this surely is certain: whatever else one may say about the historic Christian faith, one may not thus claim that it has failed to grapple with tragedy. The symbol of Christianity is the cross. Christianity started with tragedy, took tragedy for its very password and countersign. Open the New Testament anywhere and you will find, I think, not so much idealistic dreamers as men and women who, as the Epistle to the Hebrews says, were stoned, sawn asunder, tempted, slain with the sword, going about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated, of whom the world was not worthy. Look at Chris-

CHRISTIANITY AT HOME IN CHAOS

tian history anywhere and you find Christianity grappling with tragedy, sometimes causing tragedy, often suffering tragedy, and, at its best, learning lessons from tragedy, changing the situations which produced it, and getting a new grasp on the meaning of faith because of it.

"In the world ye have tribulation," said Jesus to his disciples that last night before he died. That does not sound as though he were blinking difficulty. "In the world ye have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

Consider, then, some of the ways in which the historic Christian faith has faced difficult eras—ways that in these times we might well emulate and reproduce.

For one thing, repeatedly in desperate, dangerous times Christians have caught a new vision of the value and indispensableness of Christ's moral principles. Why does moral character in individuals and society find the test of long-continued material prosperity so difficult? We all know what poverty does to people, how it can shut doors of opportunity, wreck families, and leave bedraggled and distressed countless lives that might have been radiant and happy. Poverty is one of the major curses of mankind and we must wage tireless war against it. Nevertheless, it is also true that one of the severest tests which moral character in individuals and societies ever faces is the long continuance of material prosperity. Said Andrew Carnegie, "As a rule the 'almighty dollar' bequeathed to sons or daughters by millions proves an almighty curse."

That is not simply true about individuals but about generations. In Jewish history, out of which our Christian faith emerged, where shall we look for the outstanding eras of moral and religious insight? In Solomon's time? Judah was prosperous then but we seek in vain for great spiritual truths discovered or moral ventures undertaken. The outstanding eras of moral and religious insight were times like the Exile. Torn from their native land, impinged upon by the brilliant paganism of Babylonia, stabbed every day by antagonistic faiths and morals, shaken by an international earthquake