

COLLEGE VOLUNTARY STUDY COURSES

FOURTH YEAR—PART I

THE SOCIAL
PRINCIPLES OF JESUS

By

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COLLEGE VOLUNTARY STUDY COURSES

"The Social Principles of Jesus" takes seventh place in a series of text-books known as College Voluntary Study Courses. The general outline for this curriculum has been prepared by the Committee on Voluntary Study of the Council of North American Student Movements, representing the Student Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Associations and the Student Volunteer Movement, and the Sub-Committee on College Courses of the Sunday School Council of Evangelical Denominations, representing twenty-nine communions. Therefore the text-books are planned for the use of student classes in the Sunday School, as well as for the supplementary groups on the campus. The present text-book has been written under the direction of these Committees.

The text-books are not suitable for use in the academic curriculum, as they have been definitely planned for voluntary study groups.

This series, covering four years, is designed to form a minimum curriculum for the voluntary study of the Bible, foreign missions, and North American problems. Daily Bible Readings are printed with each text-book. The student viewpoint is given first emphasis—what are the student interests? what are the student problems?

INTRODUCTION

This book is not a life of Christ, nor an exposition of his religious teachings, nor a doctrinal statement about his person and work. It is an attempt to formulate in simple propositions the fundamental convictions of Jesus about the social and ethical relations and duties of men.

Our generation is profoundly troubled by the problems of organized society. The most active interest of serious men and women in the colleges is concentrated on them. We know that we are in deep need of moral light and spiritual inspiration in our gropings. There is an increasing realization, too, that the salvation of society lies in the direction toward which Jesus led. And yet there is no clear understanding of what he stood for. Those who have grown up under Christian teaching can sum up the doctrines of the Church readily, but the principles which we must understand if we are to follow Jesus in the way of life, seem enveloped in a haze. The ordinary man sees clearly only Christ's law of love and the golden rule. This book seeks to bring to a point what we all vaguely know.

It does not undertake to furnish predigested material, or to impose conclusions. It spreads out the most important source passages for personal study, points out the connection between the principles of Jesus and modern social problems, and raises questions for discussion. It was written primarily for voluntary study groups of college seniors, and their intellectual and spiritual needs are not like those of an average church audience. It challenges college men and women to face the social convictions of Jesus and to make their own adjustments.

PART I

THE AXIOMATIC SOCIAL CONVIC-
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CHAPTER I

THE VALUE OF LIFE

Human Life and Personality are Sacred

Whatever our present conceptions of Jesus Christ may be, we ought to approach our study of his teachings with a sense of reverence. With the slenderest human means at his disposal, within a brief span of time, he raised our understanding of God and of human life to new levels forever, and set forces in motion which revolutionized history.

Of his teachings we have only fragments, but they have an inexhaustible vitality. In this course we are to examine these as our source material in order to discover, if possible, what fundamental ethical principles were in the mind of Jesus. This part of his thought has been less understood and appropriated than other parts, and it is more needed today than ever. Let us go at this study with the sense of handling something great, which may have guiding force for our own lives. Let us work out for ourselves the social meaning of the personality and thought of Jesus Christ, and be prepared to face his challenge to the present social and economic order of which we are part.

How did Jesus view the life and personality of the men about him? How did he see the social relation which binds people together? What was the reaction of his mind in face of the inequalities and sufferings of actual society? If we can get hold of the convictions which were axiomatic and immediate with him on these three questions, we shall have the key to his social principles. We shall take them up in the first three chapters.

DAILY READINGS

FIRST DAY: *The Worth of a Child*

And they were bringing unto him little children, that he should touch them: and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was moved with indignation, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me; forbid them not: for to such belongeth the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in no wise enter therein. And he took them in his arms, and blessed them, laying his hands upon them.—Mark 10: 13-16.

The child is humanity reduced to its simplest terms. Affectionate joy in children is perhaps the purest expression of social feeling. Jesus was indignant when the disciples thought children were not of sufficient importance to occupy his attention. Compared with the selfish ambition of grown-ups he felt something heavenly in children, a breath of the Kingdom of God. They are nearer the Kingdom than those whom the world has smudged. To inflict any spiritual injury on one of these little ones seemed to him an inexpressible guilt. See Matthew 18: 1-6.

Can the moral standing of a community be fairly judged by the statistics of child labor and infant mortality?

What prompts some young men to tyrannize over their younger brothers?

How does this passage and the principle of the sacredness of life bear on the problem of eugenics?

SECOND DAY: *The Humanity of a Leper*

And when he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. And behold, there came to him a leper, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And

he stretched forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou made clean. And straightway his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go, show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.—Matt. 8: 1-4.

Whenever Jesus healed he rendered a social service to his fellows. The spontaneous tenderness which he put into his contact with the sick was an expression of his sense of the sacredness of life. A leper with fingerless hands and decaying joints was repulsive to the æsthetic feelings and a menace to selfish fear of infection. The community quarantined the lepers in waste places by stoning them when they crossed bounds. (Remember Ben Hur's mother and sister.) Jesus not only healed this man, but his sense of humanity so went out to him that "he stretched forth his hand and touched him." Even the most wretched specimen of humanity still had value to him.

What is the social and moral importance of those professions which cure or prevent sickness?

How would a strong religious sense of the sacredness of life affect members of these professions?

THIRD DAY: *The Moral Quality of Contempt*

Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: but I say unto you, that every one who is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; and whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of the hell of fire.—Matt. 5:21, 22.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus demanded that the standards of social morality be raised to a new level. He proposed that the feeling of anger and hate be treated as

seriously as murder had been treated under the old code, and if anyone went so far as to use hateful and contemptuous expressions toward a fellow-man, it ought to be a case for the supreme court. Of course this was simply a vivid form of putting it. The important point is that Jesus ranged hate and contempt under the category of murder. To abuse a man with words of contempt denies his worth, breaks down his self-respect, and robs him of the regard of others. It is an attempt to murder his soul. The horror which Jesus feels for such action is an expression of his own respect for the worth of personality.

How is the self-respect and sense of personal worth of men built up or broken down in college communities?

How in industrial communities?

FOURTH DAY: *Bringing Back the Outcast*

Now all the publicans and sinners were drawing near unto him to hear him. And both the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.

And he spake unto them this parable, saying, What man of you, having a hundred sheep, and having lost one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and his neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that even so there shall be joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine righteous persons, who need no repentance.

Or what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a lamp, and sweep the house, and seek diligently until she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth together her friends and neighbors, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I had lost. Even so,

I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.—Luke 15: 1-10.

Every Jewish community had a fringe of unchurched people, who could not keep up the strict observance of the Law and had given up trying. The pious people, just because they were pious, felt they must cold-shoulder such. Jesus walked across the lines established. What seems to have been the motive that prompted him? Why did the Pharisee withdraw, and why did Jesus mix with the publicans?

What groups in our own communities correspond to the "publicans and sinners," and what is the attitude of religious people toward them?

What social groups in college towns are spoken of with contempt by college men, and why?

Is there a Pharisaism of education? Define and locate it.

FIFTH DAY: *The Problem of the Delinquents*

For the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost.—Luke 19: 10.

Here Jesus formulates the inner meaning and mission of his life as he himself felt it. He was here for social restoration and moral salvage. No human being should go to pieces if he could help it. He was not only willing to help people who came to him for help, but he proposed to go after them. The "lost" man was too valuable and sacred to be lost.

How does the Christian impulse of salvation connect with the activities represented in the National Conference of Charities and Correction?

How does a college community regard its "sinners"? Suppose a man has an instinct for low amusements and a yellow sense of honor, how do the higher forces in college life get at that man to set him right?

SIXTH DAY: *Going Beyond Justice*

For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that was a householder, who went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the laborers for a shilling a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing in the marketplace idle; and to them he said, Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing: and he saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He said unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard. And when even was come, the lord of the vineyard said unto his steward, Call the laborers, and pay them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a shilling. And when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received every man a shilling. And when they received it, they murmured against the householder, saying, These last have spent but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat. But he answered and said to one of them, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a shilling? Take up that which is thine, and go thy way; it is my will to give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? or is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last.—Matt. 20: 1-16.

Judaism rested on legality. So much obedience to the law earned so much reward, according to the contract between God and Israel. Theoretically this was just; practically it gave the inside track to the respectable and welltodo, for it took leisure and money to obey the minutiae of the Law. In

this parable the employer rises from the level of justice to the higher plane of human fellow-feeling. These eleventh-hour men had been ready to work; they had to eat and live; he proposed to give them a living wage because he felt an inner prompting to do so. In the parable of the Prodigal Son the father does more for his son than justice required, because he was a father. Here the employer does more because he is a man. Each acted from a sense of the worth of the human life with which he was dealing. It was the same sense of worth and sacredness in Jesus which prompted him to invent these parables.

Do we find ourselves valuing people according to their utility to us, or do we have an active feeling of their human interest and worth? Let us run over in our minds our family and relatives, our professors and friends, and the people in town who serve us, and see with whom we are on a human footing.

SEVENTH DAY: *The Courtesy of Jesus*

And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them. And the scribes and the Pharisees bring a woman taken in adultery; and having set her in the midst, they say unto him, Teacher, this woman hath been taken in adultery, in the very act. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such: what then sayest thou of her? And this they said, trying him that they might have whereof to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground. But when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down and with his finger wrote on the ground. And they, when they heard it, went out one by one, beginning from the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman, where she was, in the midst. And Jesus lifted up himself, and said unto her, Woman,

where are they? did no man condemn thee? And she said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said, Neither do I condemn thee: go thy way; from henceforth sin no more.—John 8: 2-11.

Was there ever a more gentlemanly handling of a raw situation? This woman was going through one of the most harrowing experiences conceivable, exposed to the gaze of a leering and scornful crowd, her good name torn away, her self-respect crushed. Jesus shielded her from stoning by the power of his personality and his consummate skill in handling men. He got inside their guard, aroused their own sense of past guilt, and so awakened some human fellow-feeling for the woman. When he was alone with her, what a mingling of kindness and severity! Surely she would carry away the memory of a wonderful friend who came to her in her dire need. Why did Jesus twice turn his eyes away to the ground? Was he ashamed to look at her shame?

Such a sudden, tragic happening is a severe test of a man's qualities. It brought out the courtesy of Jesus, his respect for human personality even in its shame. *How can we train ourselves so that we may be equal to such emergencies?* Would continued spiritual contact with Jesus be likely to make a difference?

STUDY FOR THE WEEK

The passages we have studied are inductive material. Can there be any doubt that Jesus had a spontaneous love for his fellow-men and a deep sense of the sacredness of human personality? Physical deformity and moral guilt could not obscure the divine worth of human life to him. To cause any soul to stumble and go down, or to express contempt for any human being, was to him a horrible guilt.

I

This regard for human life was based on the same social

instinct which every normal man possesses. But with Jesus it was so strong that it determined all his viewpoints and activities. He affirmed the humane instinct consciously and intelligently, and raised it to the dignity of a social principle. This alone would be enough to mark him out as a new type, prophetic and creative of a new development of the race.

Whence did Jesus derive the strength and purity of his social feeling? Was it simply the endowment of a finely attuned nature? Other fine minds of the ancient world valued men according to their wealth, their rank, their power, their education, their beauty. Jesus valued men as such, apart from any attractive equipment. Why? "The deeper our insight into human destiny becomes, the more sacred does every individual human being seem to us" (Lotze). The respect of Jesus for every concrete person whom he met was due to his religious insight into human life and destiny. But how did he get his insight?

Love and religion have the power of idealistic interpretation. To a mother her child is a wonderful being. To a true lover the girl he loves has sacredness. With Jesus the consciousness of a God of love revealed the beauty of men. The old gods were despotic supermen, mythical duplicates of the human kings and conquerors. The God of Jesus was the great Father who lets his light shine on the just and the unjust, and offers forgiveness and love to all. Jesus lived in the spiritual atmosphere of that faith. Consequently he saw men from that point of view. They were to him children of that God. Even the lowliest was high. The light that shone on him from the face of God shed a splendor on the prosaic ranks of men. In this way religion enriches and illuminates social feeling.

Jesus succeeded in transmitting something of his own sense of the sacredness of life to his followers. As Wundt says: "Humanity in this highest sense was brought into the world by Christianity." The love of men became a social dogma of the Church. Some other convictions of Jesus left few traces on the common thought of Christendom, but the

Church has always stood for a high estimate of the potential worth of the soul of man. It has always taught that man was made in God's image and that he is destined to share in the holiness and eternal life of God.

II

What effects has this registered on social conduct? Has the Church intelligently resisted social forces or conditions which brutalized or shamed men?

It is most difficult to estimate accurately the historic influence of religious ideas. They are subtle and hard to trace. But we can justly reason from our own observations in evangelism and foreign mission work. Those of us who have gone through a clearly marked conversion to Christianity will probably remember that we realized our fellow-men with a new warmth and closeness, and under higher points of view. We were then entering into the Christian valuation of human life. In foreign missions the influence of Christianity can be contrasted with non-Christian social life, and there is often a striking rise in the respect for life and personality as compared with the hardness and callousness of heathen society. This is one of the distinctive marks of the modern and Western world compared with the ancient and the Oriental. Those individuals among us who have really duplicated something of the spirit of Jesus are always marked by their loving regard for human life, even its wreckage. That sense of sacredness is the basis for the whole missionary and philanthropic activity of Christian men and women.

It is also an important force in the social movements. Have there been any widespread, continuous, and successful movements for social justice outside of the territory influenced by Christianity? Was there any causal connection between the historic reformation and purification of Christianity since the sixteenth century and the rise of civil and social democracy? Does the spread of Christian ideas and feelings predispose the powerful classes to make concessions? What contribution