

EQUALITY THROUGH AGENCY

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SCRIPTURE READING: Doctrine and Covenants, Section 56, Par. 5,6.

Woe unto you rich men, that will not give your substance to the poor, for your riches will canker your souls; and this shall be your lamentation in the day of visitation and of judgment and of indignation; The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and my soul is not saved! Woe unto you poor men, whose hearts are not broken, whose spirits are not contrite, and whose bellies are not satisfied, and whose hands are not stayed from laying hold upon other men's good, whose eyes are full of greediness, who will not labor with their own hands! But blessed are the poor, who are pure in heart, whose hearts are broken, and whose spirits are contrite, for they shall see the kingdom of God coming in power and great glory unto their deliverance ..

In your temporal things you shall be equal, and this not grudgingly, otherwise the abundance of the manifestation of the spirit shall be withheld.

We live in a world which is intensely concerned about social and economic justice and equality. Frightened and sobered by a great depression with its unemployment, its broad lines, and its human suffering, the people of the United States a little over twenty years ago embarked on a program of social reform. The time was ripe, and the need was great. Legislation was enacted guaranteeing the laboring man the right to bargain with his employer through trade unions, providing through taxation some protection against the perils of old age, disability, sickness and unemployment. Other legislation was designed to break up or prevent monopoly, to guarantee a minimum wage, to prevent the restraint of free trade. We have accepted the principle of the income tax and the inheritance tax which are based upon the individual's ability to pay, and which in practical operation break up and re-distribute large estates at the death of the owner, and make it almost impossible for any one man to accumulate a new fortune.

Other nations of the world have felt this scorching unrest, and have likewise tried to solve the problems of social and economic equality. Immediately following the last war, the people of England tried for a time the experiment of the complete social state, which socialized many important industries, and provided complete social security to the individual from cradle to grave, with free state medicine, sick and unemployment benefits, and a paternalism which made the government responsible for almost every need and want of its citizens. Within a few years, the socialists were voted out of power in England, but socialism remains, and the problem is not yet settled. Men everywhere are still concerned with the problem of how to share the wealth of the world so that no man shall lack for the necessities of life.

Within the present generation we have seen the rise of three dangerous "isms," all of which are based to some extent on the idea of social and economic justice and equality, through basic social and economic reforms. We should never allow ourselves to forget that Fascism arose in Italy, and Naziism in Germany, because the people were hungry, because they lacked jobs, because they saw no hope for the future, because they were obsessed with a sense of injustice, and because they grasped at any ideology which promised them security and a more equitable distribution of wealth. The basic appeal of Communism to the underprivileged, the downtrodden, the dreamers and idealists of the world, though it is basically and diabolically false, is the appeal to their desire for a better social order in which equality and economic justice shall hold sway.

The basic problem of the world today is the problem of social and economic equality and justice. The races and nations and individuals who have been denied a proper share in the natural resources, the rights, the freedoms, the privileges, the wealth of the world, are stirring in revolt. They see the wealth which other men have amassed; they see others enjoying the rights and privileges of free men, and they are demanding a share in these good things for themselves. The day of empire and exploitative colonialism is over. Old citadels of privilege, of monopoly, of pride, of wealth, of exploitation, of empire, have toppled, never to rise again. But in spite of this, new and deceptive means of exploitation have been seized upon by ruthless, selfish, godless men, who in the name of justice and equality have fastened the fetters of slavery even more tightly upon great masses of the world's population. Wherever Fascism, Naziism, or Communism have gone, the blight of poverty misery, slavery, and woe has gone with them, eventually leaving the people who sought for freedom and prosperity and justice many times worse off than they were before.

Fascism, Naziism, Communism, Socialism, or any other "ism" which fails to take into consideration one basic fact, will fail. That fact is the sacredness and inviolability of human personality, and human agency. Men have an inherent, God-given right to be free, to make their own choices, to own and control property, to exercise their stewardship over that property. There can be no stewardship unless men are free to order their own lives, to control their own property, to exercise their own agency. It is not right, it is not even natural, that one man should be in bondage to another. Neither is it right that any man or group of men should take by force that which belongs to another. This is the basic fact which is denied and flouted by all four of the "isms" which would bring reform by compulsion and force, promising men greater freedom while plotting their enslavement.

There are social, economic, and political inequalities and injustices in the world; we might as well admit it. The nations and the men of the world are divided into the "haves" and the "have nots." When such division exists, it is inevitable that there should be envy, strife, violence, and hatred. But suppose that this leads to open revolution, warfare, or drastic compulsory legislation which takes away from the "haves" and gives everything to the "have nots." Does this solve the problem, or stop the envy and hatred, or put an end to the strife? Far from it. It only reverses the direction of the hatred. Those who once had, but now have not, begin to lay plans to gain back their rights and their property, and in due time the warfare is renewed with new violence. Or suppose that in the battle the "haves" defeat the "have nots" and push them back into their old place, maintaining the status quo. That does not solve the problem either; it only postpones the solution of it, while hatred and resentment build up to another inevitable explosion. All over the world today, in India, in Indo-China, in China, in Africa, in Latin-America, and in Europe, men are sitting on the lid of a seething volcano, trying to maintain the status quo, and thinking that as long as they can hold the lid down, they have solved the problem of social and economic reform.

The problem of how to achieve justice and equality in social and economic relationships without violating man's agency is a live one at the present moment. The laws which have been passed in the United States and in England, setting up some very much needed social and economic reforms, involve a degree of compulsion. True, these laws were passed by the representatives of the people in democratic assembly, but their object is to compel men to share the wealth. If the government -- even representative democratic government -- has the right to confiscate forcibly, though lawfully, the wealth of the rich man, it also has the right to confiscate forcibly the more moderate wealth of the middle class man, or even the meager wealth of the poor man. If the government has the right to confiscate a man's wealth or liquidate his estate, the next step is to liquidate the reluctant or uncooperative man himself in the name of security for the state. The Communists in Russia first confiscated

the wealth of the nobility, then liquidated the nobility. Next they confiscated the wealth of the Kulaks, the well-to-do peasants; then they liquidated the Kulaks themselves. Now even the humble peasant who will not turn over his crops to the government in iron curtain countries is conscripted for salve labor, or shipped off to a concentration camp. Taxing you and me under threat of compulsion, in order to pay subsidies or special un-earned benefits to some special pressure group or vested interest, or any sort of taking away from one group to give to another which has not earned it, creates vastly more problems than it solves, even though there are undisputed needs in the group that receives.

Inequity is iniquity. Basically, the two words are the same, coming from the same word roots. Inequity is inequality; iniquity is failing to treat your brother as your equal -- as you would like to be treated yourself. Iniquity is demanding special privilege, special treatment for yourself or your friends, or your political party, or your race, or your nation, at the expense of someone else. "It is not given that one man should possess that which is above another; wherefore the world lieth in sin....." (Doctrine and Covenants 49:3)

We repeat -- that greatest problem before the world today is this problem of how to bring about social and economic justice and equality without doing violence to that God-given principle of free moral will and agency, that right of free self-determination and free choice, which is one of the inalienable rights of man. God's way is one of equality, of equity, not of inequity, iniquity, and inequality. God is not respecter of persons. It is not his will that one man should possess far more than he needs or can possibly use, while another lacks for the necessities of life. There can be no segregation, no denial of human rights and freedoms, no needy, impoverished, starving poor; no idle, grasping rich, in the kingdom of God. Neither can there be idle, grasping, envious, covetous, lazy poor men, who hope by violence to lay hold on other men's goods for which they have not labored.

The kingdom of God will be a kingdom of equality -- equality of opportunity, equality of material wealth, equality of spiritual things; but also an equality of work, of sweat, and toil, and responsibility. Only as men assume the obligations and responsibilities of the kingdom, as well as its rights and privileges, are they entitled to equality. No one can force any man to assume his obligations and responsibilities on an equal basis with his fellow man. This equality must come from the voluntary action of men who are free agents, who are capitalists in the sense that they are owners and controllers of private property, men whose lives have been regenerated, who have been born again, who have cleansed themselves of selfishness and pride and greed and lust for material things, who are diligent workers, who are good stewards under God of all things entrusted to their care. This levelling off into equality must be the result of an inner, not an outer compulsion.

"The poor shall be exalted in that the rich are made low" does not mean that we shall simply divide up the wealth of the rich, and distribute to the poor. That would make everyone poor. Equality is not so much a matter of giving each man the same number of dollars and cents, but is a matter of seeing that each man is allowed to earn and to have as much as he needs to manage his stewardship, as much as he can manage and use profitably and successfully. If one man is handling a series of vast enterprises as a good steward, he may need a bank balance of several million to finance these operations and meet the weekly pay roll. Taking away that bank balance to distribute it to the workers would only mean that there would be no pay checks the next week, and no jobs two weeks after.

The principle is that each man shall have equal claims on the means of production; and on the natural resources necessary to production; that each man is entitled to have whatever will benefit him in his stewardship and help him to produce more for

the common good. But man can claim these rights only so long as he does all things in the spirit of love and brotherhood and Christian stewardship. The man who lays claim to any of God's creation in order to hoard it for himself, ignoring his obligations to society and his obligations as a steward of God, is a wicked man and unprofitable servant, whether he be rich or poor.

The equality of the kingdom of God must be a voluntary equality; it must be desired by men and women who have felt the changing power of Christ's love and Christ's gospel, and who as a result of this change within, desire to express their new attitudes in terms of material things. The spiritual fellowship of the kingdom depends on this kind of equality. The poor man who feels that he is oppressed by his neighbor, and that he is being unjustly deprived of his rights, cannot have any true spiritual fellowship with the man whom he envies and hates. The rich man who knows that he is ignoring the needs of his brother, and selfishly administering that over which God has placed him as a steward, can have no true fellowship in spiritual things with those whom he ignores in temporal things. "If ye are not equal in earthly things, ye cannot be equal in obtaining heavenly things....." "In your temporal things you shall be equal, and this not grudgingly; otherwise the abundance of the manifestations of the Spirit shall be withhold."

There must needs be some force, some compulsion, behind every government, for the restraint of the willfully wicked who would appropriate the property, or destroy the lives, the peace, or the rights of others. But the kingdom of God will never come by force. The task of the church is to bring about such a change in the lives of men that they will desire, work for, and willingly accept the kind of equality we have described. The task of the church is to supply the organization and the framework within which the Christian stewardship of regenerated men may be integrated and implemented, and made effective.

We shall discuss the subject IMPLEMENTING SOCIAL RIGHTEOUSNESS, and give some of our beliefs about the social and economic organization necessary to successful group and individual stewardship, at this same time next Sunday morning. We invite you to be listening.