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"THE FELLOWSHIP OF SERVICE"

A Radio Address by DR. RALPH W. SOCKMAN

Some months ago the suggestion was made that we devote a sermon to the Service Clubs of America. While this National Radio Pulpit has never directed a special sermon to any single organization, we believe that the Service Clubs, such as Kiwanis, Rotary, Lions and the others represent something tremendously significant and potential in contemporary life. As we speak today we are therefore thinking especially of those half million or more men who will sit this week, as every week, at the luncheons of the Service Clubs throughout the communities of this country and of Canada.

And I choose to do it this day because February has been designated by the churches of America as Brotherhood Month. In a world broken by war it becomes doubly imperative to strengthen every bond which unites. Our purpose and prayer are that the members of the Service Clubs may realize the opportunities of their privilege and rise to the responsibilities of their leadership. And I should like to hold before them, and before all our citizens through them, the purpose which Paul set before the church at Ephesus. It is this: "To keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

God imparted to all men something of his divine spirit. It is the "light which lighteth every man coming into the world." God made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth." And yet men have broken this unity of the Spirit, and though brothers of one blood they have turned to the business of butchering. Certainly the race can outgrow such insanity. And in the Service Clubs we see manifested some of the factors which I believe will serve to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

The first of these bonds of peace which I see manifested by the Service Clubs is the high personal idealism that they seek to inculcate. We cannot make bricks without straw. However beautiful the architect's drawings, we cannot build a house with faulty materials. Likewise, however perfect our blueprints of social theory, we cannot make a strong and stable society out of weak characters.

This is a simple old truth but we need ever to keep stressing it, for our modern era seems to have the impression that improved organization can make up for individual lack of character. We have such a fondness for multiplying organizations that as the late and beloved William Allen White said, if three Americans fell out of an airplane they would be organized before they reached the ground into a president, a secretary and a treasurer. But no improved methods of organization can provide a substitute for individual integrity, initiative and idealism.

And if personal idealism is to be preserved, it must be cultivated. Suppose you have a garden surrounded by fields filled with weeds. How long will your garden remain clean and productive if you leave it untended? Only a very short time. The seeds from the weed patches adjoining will blow over on your ground. And soon your garden will be a weed patch too. And remember, it will do no good to build your fences higher, for fences do not keep out weeds. Our minds are like gardens. And into them are blowing steadily the seeds of evil suggestion, from the news of war and its attending cruelties, from reports of crime and vice which headline our papers, from the rumors spun of prejudice which, like the spider, lives everywhere and seems to thrive where there is nothing to live on. Yes, suppose we left our minds untended and let our casual thoughts run wild, how long would it be until our ideals were smothered in a jungle of weedy doubts and evil suggestions? We must ever be alert to the apostolic warning: "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

Because we need this cultivation of our ideals, we go to church. There we lift our thoughts from the bad news of men's misdoings to the good news of God's merciful providence, from the earthy and transient to things invisible and eternal. There we test our lives by the One altogether perfect and renew our faith in ourselves, in our fellowmen and in our God.

And it is also because we need this continuous cultivation of ideals that men gather in their Service Clubs during the week. There they listen to recognized interpreters of the art of living. There they get new social outlooks and see their own work in new perspective. There they catch new moral insights which help to bring the application of the old personal virtues up to our new social frontiers. And how much we need this! We need to see, for instance, what honesty involves in our complex organized world, for it is one thing to have integrity enough to be honest in the simple man-to-man dealings of a village store, while it is quite another to have integrity enough to be honest in the long range and involved transactions of corporate business. It is one thing to obey the commandment, "Thou shalt not bear false witness," in simple personal relationships; but it is quite another to keep from bearing false witness in our day of high pressure advertising and high-powered propaganda. Oh, no the Ten Commandments are not out-of-date; but their applications must be brought down to date if they are to convict men of sin and correct the corrupt practices into which life drifts without them.

To bring the old personal virtues up to overcome the new social evils, to illumine minds with new moral insights, to keep faith in our ideals, to brighten the daily round with light from above and leave men looking up - those are among the services rendered by the churches, the synagogues and the Service Clubs.

We are, of course, concerned about maintaining our high American standards of living. By that we mean the material conditions of work and wages and homes. But we should be even more concerned to maintain our high standards of life. Life itself has been held more valuable along the Mississippi and the

St. Lawrence than along the Ganges and the Yangtze and the Volga. Let us see that it remains so. If we are "to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace", we must cultivate high personal ideals, for bonds of peace can never be made lasting on the lower levels of life.

The second of the bonds of peace symbolized by the Service Clubs is fellowship. This high personal idealism, which we have just said is so necessary to a good society, cannot be developed without comradeship. Think how just one friend can fortify our courage and reinforce our ideals. One person to whom you can trust yourself completely, to whom you can unpack your heart with words - what a boon! When Charles Kingsley was once asked the secret of his strong, joyous life, he replied, "I had a friend." Yes, man is made for fellowship, and without it his soul shrinks and his temper sours.

James Truslow Adams in his new book, "The American" points out how poignant was the loneliness on the early American frontiers. He pictures the homesteads of the settlers so widely separated from one another, the women of the household deprived of the social contacts they had known back home. It took heroic hearts to endure such loneliness. And out of such loneliness was born the trait of hospitality for which our western country became famous. I wonder if we are losing some of that old personal friendliness in the bustling crowded life of modern America. We live closer together physically, but farther apart socially and spiritually. Especially in our cities, life tends to grow more impersonal. What our forefathers did by personal kindness, we now commit to professional agencies. Of course, we have to organize our philanthropy, secure trained social workers, set up community chests. We cannot leave the relief of our neighbors' needs to mere personal impulse. Nevertheless no organizations, voluntary or governmental, can be a complete substitute for old-fashioned personal neighborliness. We must keep the personal touch, lest our life grow too hard to be worth living.

And if ever this spirit of human comradeship needed to be cultivated it is in these dark days of war. A few years ago while crossing the Atlantic, I took a turn around the deck before retiring. It was a dark and ominous night. And as I looked over the rail at the waves rushing off angrily into the inky blackness, I thought how dreadful it would be to be out in that deep alone. When I turned back into the lighted cabin of the ship, how secure and friendly and restoring it seemed. So is it today. This is too dark and stormy a time to be out in alone. We need the touch of shoulder with shoulder. We need the handclasp of friendship to sustain us in the sacrifices which we all must share for our country. And if some of us are called to walk through the valley of the shadow of death in these days of casualty lists, we need the Divine Shepherd to comfort us with his rod and staff; but we also need human fellowship to strengthen us with sympathy and understanding.

For remember, human fellowship is a part of God's plan of salvation. Love of God and love of man are inseparably linked together in our Bible. The first commandment is "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind," and the second is like unto it. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." And when we turn to the new Testament, we read, "How can we say that we love God whom we have not seen if we

love not our brother whom we have seen." Oh, this matter of human fellowship is not just a little side issue of religion. It is an integral part of the divine plan of redemption. Therefore, if we are to save our own souls as well as "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace", we must strengthen the links which bind life to life in noble comradeship.

And now a third of the bonds of peace which I see symbolized in the Service Clubs is the principle of service. This human fellowship which we have just been discussing can be preserved at its best only by service. When I was a little fellow I enjoyed the teeter board. I spent many a pleasant hour teetering up and down with boyhood friends at picnics and on playgrounds. But now that I have become a man I have put away such childish playthings as teeter-boards. I should find it very dull teetering in the same spot, talking to even a good friend, balancing his ups and downs. Well, that is a homely parable of life. Sometimes we try to maintain fellowship, yes, even the love between husband and wife, on the teeter-board principle. We just try to balance each other's ups and downs. That is a childish way of seeking fellowship. Whole-some friendship is preserved when the partners to it are united in service to something bigger than themselves.

This is the sound principle on which the Service Clubs are organized. Their fellowship around the luncheon table is a means to the end of service. And I am told that wherever the service motive is allowed to lapse, the club dwindles. Only a reading of God's own ledger would reveal the service rendered by Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions and others to the underprivileged and the handicapped, the crippled and the blind. Only the all-seeing eye can compute how many youth have been guided in their vocations and aided in their education through the resources of the Service Clubs. Thus these clubs form a league of service between strength and weakness, and between maturity and youth. Such leagues are a bond of peace within a nation.

In a day when we are praying so earnestly for peace between nations, let us remember that the community provides the local laboratories in which the principles of world peace are developed in miniature. About a year ago there passed away one of the great geniuses of our age, Dr. George Washington Carver, the distinguished Negro scientist, honored with the highest academic awards of England and America. When asked about the way he unlocked the secrets of nature, Dr. Carver would modestly describe his experience by saying: "I asked the Great Creator what the universe was made for. He replied, 'Ask for something more in keeping with that little mind of yours.' Then I asked, 'What was man made for?' And the Creator replied, 'Little man, you still want to know too much. Cut down the extent of your request and improve the intent.'" Acting on that principle, Dr. Carver concentrated his work on two lowly products, the peanut and the sweet potato, and from each of those humble products of nature, the great Negro scientist developed over a hundred by-products of the most amazing usefulness.

That principle of Dr. Carver holds a lesson for us in our search for peace: "Cut down the extent of your request and improve the intent." Peace, like charity, begins at home. We must learn to live together in the unity of

the Divine Spirit in our neighborhoods and in our churches. The roots of the race problem which will confront the world's peacemakers run under the thresholds of our own churches and communities. The principles of treaty-making between nations are but the projections of the principles of making and keeping our agreements as man to man. If we will not stand by our own word, how can we expect nations to keep their treaties? If we will not serve the neighbors whom we know, how can we expect to develop the spirit of service between nations that we do not know?

Noel Coward in his picture "Cavalcade" depicted the life of an English family during the first two decades of this twentieth century. He showed the young husband going off to the Boer War at the turn of the century. Then one of the sons was lost on the ill-fated Titanic which struck an iceberg and sank in 1912. A second son was lost in World War I just on the eve of the armistice. Then the picture shows London on Armistice night 1918 with its marching throngs and imperial songs. The grief-stricken mother walks to the window and looks out on the crowds singing "Britannia Rules the Waves", and then turns back to her family and says, "But mine is a little world." At first, that statement sounds ignoble, for you cannot live worthily today unless you live in a big world as well as your small world. But on the other hand, it is equally true that we cannot live worthily in the large world of affairs unless we live effectively in the small world of our own family and community.

Good citizenship today calls for a bi-focal vision. We need to see the long-range objectives of our world problems; we must also see the close-up duties of our community relationships. That, it seems to me, was part of the genius of Lincoln whose birthday we celebrated yesterday. When he was a young lawyer in Springfield, Illinois he could sit with his neighbors back of the stove in the local store and see how slavery affected the farthest reaches of the Republic. Then when he later sat in the White House as president, he could see how the war touched the humblest boy back home. His long-range view gave him perspective; his localized interest gave him sympathy. And as God knows, we need both today.

And may I say, it is this bi-focal vision which the Service Clubs, and the churches must seek to preserve. They are international in membership and outlook, yet local in application and intensity.

Prayers for peace are on the lips of all godly souls today. Only by high personal ideals, reinforced by human fellowship and sustained by the spirit of service - only thus can we "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." And may God bless and prosper all who seek these ends.

PRAYER: Our Father, at the beginning of this another week, we would be still and know that Thou art God. From Thee we came and to thee we must return. Help us so to walk with Thee through this world that we shall be worthy to dwell with Thee in the life eternal. May gratitude for Thy manifold and great mercies inspire us to deeds of mercy. May the love which Thou hast shown to us through Thy Son, beget in us a deeper and wider spirit of brotherhood; illumine our ignorance with wisdom, quicken our hearts with hope, heal our sorrows with comfort. And, O God, speed the triumph of righteousness and the coming of peace. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

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 297 Fourth Avenue - New York 10, N. Y.