

BUSINESS PUT INTO RELIGION

Present Crisis in Nation's Life Should Be Met First by Spiritual Forces

JOASH BUILDS TEMPLE

International Sunday School Lesson For November 7 Is "Joash Repairs Temple"

(By WILLIAM T. ELLIS) If I were czar of this Western world in this present unequalled crisis in human events, there are three or four fundamental things that I would set the people to doing. Chief among these I would require that all the churches and religious societies throughout the land receive fresh attention and that as may be necessary, they be rebuilt in their physical equipment and spiritual organization. Wherever there is a breach in the walls of the Church—literally or metaphorically—it should be quickly repaired. The fashion of young King Joash, of long ago, whose experience in rebuilding the temple is to-day's Sunday school lesson, is a fundamental fashion to follow.

The reason is clear; such crises in a nation's life as the present are to be met first of all by spiritual forces. All the armies and navies that military genius could devise or command cannot safeguard a nation whose people have lost their vision and their noblest purposes. Ideals are ultimately the defense of a nation. No people have lost their vision and their noblest purposes. Ideals are ultimately the defense of a nation. No graver issue is before our time than that of rehabilitating in the minds of the multitude the great old convictions and purposes which first made us strong. Nobody need lose sleep at night from fear of a hostile invasion; but there is real reason for sleepless concern over the steadily undermining of the integrities of faith and duty which may be detected in process.

The nation looks to the Church for spiritual strength and for the vision that will meet the new duties of the high hour that is upon us. What help remains if, in this time of times instead of a Church with a clear, lofty, ringing message to men's souls, we have merely an agglomeration of petty, contending, small-minded and sordid ecclesiastical organizations, so engrossed with trifling politics and the material needs of self-subsistence, that they are deaf and blind to the heroic summons of God and humanity?

Life Mirrors Religion

Like every other national leader who has had wit enough to know anything about his business, Joash understood that the prosperity of Judah was bound up with the welfare and fidelity of religion. No nation ever comes to its height apart from the inspiration and support of a religious faith. Both France and Germany a year ago, were the subject of many articles concerning their religious decline. Now, in the seven-times heated furnace of war both have found their souls. Yet it is because the nations had subordinated spiritual concerns to material values that we have this world war. Life mirrors religion. When religion becomes perfunctory, mechanical or secondary, then we have such collapses of civilization as that which is to-day staggering humanity.

Is it too much to hope that after the awful obligations which this war is creating have been laid upon the survivors, and accepted open-eyed, some nation will deliberately undertake to give religion the right of way in its life? Can we imagine a people dedicated whole-heartedly to God's highest purposes? What could not such a nation do in this re-made world! Occasionally mankind has seen what one wholly dedicated Christian could accomplish. When Dwight L. Moody was a young man he heard a speaker say, "The world is yet to see what God can do with a wholly consecrated man." Moody resolved that he would be that man. And Moody, whose bones are mouldering on Little Round Top in Northfield, still lives as one of the world's greatest forces.

Making a Clean Sweep

If anybody asks why the temple at Jerusalem so sorely needed repairing, there is one sentence in the lesson which makes answer. After the record of Joash's loyalty to God, we read "Howbeit the high places were not taken away; the people still sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places." That is a good picture of modern life. Theoretically, we have a Christian civilization; actually, materialism, pride, arrogance, cruelty, selfishness and avarice have kept the incense burning on their high places. There is no room even in the circumambient ether for the smoke of the rival incense from the altars of Jehovah and the altars of idolatry and self-indulgence. God demands that He be God alone. A queer notion is lodged firmly in certain pious minds that the passive virtues are all that are needed for the bringing in of the kingdom of heaven. Some folk don't want to be disagreeable even to the devil himself. They would not speak ill about even the worst foes of society. This is the more strange when we remember that if anything at all is clear in the program of God, as indicated in both the Old Testament story and the New Testament Record of the life of Jesus it is that wickedness must be overthrown. The Christian is called to be an iconoclast, an idol smasher. There are some men who are church pillars who do not weigh an ounce when it comes to driving corruption out of a community. Yet to fight evil is as surely a part of the Christian program as to proclaim the good. The high places must be maintained in her integrity, for the service of the world. There are a host of evil things that will have to be remedied if we are going to meet the new day in the spirit of the kingdom of heaven.

Overloading the Preacher

For a long time King Joash tried to have the temple repaired, but without success. He was slow in finding out

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the reason, which was nothing more or less than that he had followed a very modern fashion of trying to have the priests do it all. He wanted the priests to provide the money and to do the work, but that was more than even the patient preacher could stand. Not until a business system was introduced, and burdens distributed, and the lay workers called in each to do his own part, was the big job of temple restoration put through. There are a good many objections to the present popular program of overloading all the work of a church on to the preacher. One is sufficient to point out. It does not succeed. There never was a preacher big enough to

carry a whole church; and there never will be. Those congregations who are asking their ministers to be errand boy, parish visitor, property committee, financial agent, church supper organizer, delegate-to-everything, and general factotum and roustabout, are guilty of several blunders, the cardinal one being sheer stupidity. The only way a church is going to thrive is for everybody to bear his part. The minister's tasks ought to be to preach the Gospel, instruct the people and to be a pastor of the flock. The officers of the church should have gumption enough to see that he does this without neglecting it, and that they do their own share of the work with equal fidelity. The priests fitted beautifully into Joash's scheme when Joash came

to his senses, and developed a business-like scheme for the enterprise of temple repairing. It has been said that the quickest way to dampen the enthusiasm of a prayer meeting is to talk money. Nevertheless, as of old, so to-day, money is needed for the work of the Church. To secure it from proper motives and in adequate amount, is one of the greatest single difficulties of organized religion. Somehow, the Church has not as keen a financial sense as she had in the days of Joash. There is more pettiness exhibited in the financial aspect of religion than in any other manifestation of Christianity---and that is saying a good deal. Anybody who has ever sat on a church board has witnessed the

strange phenomenon of businessmen, who are accustomed to doing practical things in a practical way, and to conducting large enterprises in a broad spirit, going about church matters with an entirely new state of mind, which is chiefly characterized by its smallness. Who can explain why it is that when businessmen go at the financial side of the church their ideas immediately become peanut size? Men who pay generously in the chamber of commerce, or in their social clubs, count pennies when it comes to the Church. There is many a man with an income of thousands of dollars a year who is a total stranger to the experience of giving, as much as one hundred dollars in a single year to the church. A whole crowd of epigrams

and stories have arisen, concerning this well-known condition. One is "Some men give according to their means, and others according to their meanness." "Some Christians are so stingy that when the minister gives out 'Old Hundred' they start to sing 'Ninety and Nine' in order to get one per cent. off." If a Christian has not religion enough to give generously, proportionately and systematically to the church he has surely not religion enough to take him to heaven, or to any other Christian goal. The first

evidence of a revival in religion in many a church would be an increase in the pastor's salary, and the repairing of the church, I have observed in heathen lands that at the entrance to the temples there is a large chest---Joash fashion---for the receipt of offerings. The first act of worship in heathendom is to make a gift. Now, as of old, the grave problem is one of putting the church into fit condition on her material side, and in her spiritual strength, to meet the crisis that is now upon the world.

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