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MATERIALISM, THE ENEMY OF PEACE*

I have chosen the topic "Materialism, the Enemy of Peace," as I feel certain that at the present time the destructive influence of materialism is so great, and has gone so far, that it is necessary to close our eyes to an almost blinding light in order to deny the great harm that has already been done to the present generation of men and women, and which continues unceasingly to be done by spreading the poison into the minds and hearts of children, who receive therefore the saddest of all answers to their yearning for truth, which is a characteristic of the human soul.

In a work which I wrote some time ago, I stated that materialism is in itself a potential cause of war, as it exalts the passions of men instead of teaching them to control and master such passions. It breaks in a subtle way the resistance to evil, which is born in the conscience of men as a gift of God, designed to keep them from becoming slaves of their own passions.

Materialism is to such a large extent responsible for the evils that afflict mankind in the present day that it seems to overshadow all other destructive influences which bring misfortune and hatred to men and nations.

*Address delivered at the University of Notre Dame, January 10, 1938.

I have an old friend, who once told me that he was "a materialist all the way through," and I said to him: "Sorry, because from now on I am going to trust you less than I did heretofore." "Why," he replied, "do you think that materialists have no morals?"—"They may have," I answered, "as a custom, or a habit, as something that may lead to a good reputation, and even as a faint token of respect for the advices or memory of one's mother or father, but these sentiments are not deep-rooted and may be easily cast away. Anyhow, these sentiments are not a worthy substitute for the unyielding moral position of a man who knows that he has responsibilities towards God, and that all his actions and even his innermost thoughts are to be accounted for."

The pursuit of happiness is a natural tendency of human nature. Therefore, in this respect men only differ from one another in their conception of what happiness itself means, and also as to the proper way to attain it. The logical difference between a man who believes in God, and in things that belong to the spirit, and a man who is a materialist, who has no such belief, is that the former will be ready to sacrifice his pleasures on this earth when he feels that they menace his everlasting reward, while the latter will never find any reason to do so; and, moreover, in the mind of the materialist, the shortness of life and the eagerness for pleasure will determine his behavior. Whether he likes it or not, material pleasure will be the sole purpose of his life, and although he may occasionally advocate endeavours that seem to be noble and uplifting, he will find a void in his own purposes that will not permit him to see in what he does anything else than a profitable opportunity to be well regarded by others, and thus to increase the possibilities of leading his life in his own way. He will be an opportunist at heart, and I cannot venture to say how long he will be on the side of law and order. This will depend upon the circumstances surrounding him in this life; but whatever the case may be, we have the right to assume that not fearing any responsibilities

outside of those which are merely human, he has broken a most powerful cause for restraint that the other man, the spiritualist, respects more than his own life: his responsibilities towards God. Materialism and Opportunism are two terms that complete each other, and it could not be otherwise when our mortal life is considered the only opportunity for happiness.

But, materialism does not content itself with overindulgence in the pleasures of this life. It is a school of thought that has the definite purpose of having its bearing in all human affairs. It wants to command respect through the false assumption that it is a fruit of science, or in other words of human research for truth. Materialism, being as it is a negative doctrine that simply denies the existence of spiritual or supernatural things, does not take any pains to prove its premises; and yet, it wants to assume control of education and to shape the destinies of the whole world. In the first place, it aims at the destruction of its most powerful foe: Religion.

There is scarcely any important movement against orderly life within the boundaries of a country, or against international peace in the community of nations, that cannot be traced back to materialism. Should such a movement succeed in the first instance, you will see its devastating effects in the morals and in the normal life of the unfortunate country which becomes its prey. Religion will be persecuted, and those men who used to take advantage of every right and liberty guaranteed by law, will be the first to deny to others such rights and liberties in order to exercise ruthless intolerance and to suppress the freedom of conscience and expression. *This is the real danger of democracies: They are an open field in which their foes may build their own strength and spread with impunity their propaganda until they feel that they are strong enough to fight democracy into discard.*

And in the field of international relations we see the same picture. Under guise of friendship, systems that have

brought misery and hatred within the frontiers of the lands where they prevail will pour their propaganda in friendly nations, misconstruing the story of their own life by means of a well-paid press. They will try to invade the field of education by continuous efforts to instill their doctrines in the minds of those who are responsible for the welfare of the younger generation. And they will not even stop here. Like an octopus of tremendous power, they will endeavour to control the radio, the theater, the moving picture shows, and even the fashions, but above all the school, the news services and the press.

At this point of my address, I feel that it is not an untimely remark to say that whenever the body of laws has not enough power to fight with success a disturbing factor, it is up to the public to react against the common evil, such as you did with such a great measure of success in dealing with indecent films.

When the school, the press, the radio or any other means of public information becomes subservient to influences that are alien to the best interests of the nation, it is the action of the public which is most likely to check the abuse; but the most elemental condition in order that such an action may prove to be both useful and efficient is that the public itself should not ignore the danger. The "camouflage" of the press, which is so frequently given to its readers and which tends to distract public attention from the real perils of a situation by causing alarm on account of quimerical foes, should no longer fool the intelligent reader. We should not act any more like the great protagonist of an immortal work of Cervantes who fought against windmills believing them to be powerful enemies of his romantic errands. When they speak of systems that have grown in foreign lands as the result of peculiar conditions, and which they picture as the actual foes of our nations, let us consider the real possibilities of the existence of such a danger, but above all let us observe carefully if there are not some other systems that are

a thousand times more dangerous to our national life, and which are nevertheless left in silence.

With special reference to the Western Hemisphere, I gave a few months ago, in a previous lecture, a brief account of the development of the materialistic trend in this part of the world. As I feel that this account contains some very timely remarks, I take the liberty to reproduce here a few paragraphs of the lecture which I have just mentioned to you.

With the so-called "liberal tendencies," which gave a characteristic to the last century, we find in this side of the earth that in one country after another the State separated itself from the Church, and that, as a consequence, education given in the public schools, that is to say in those which are supported by the national or the local government, became secularized. As a next step, and following what seems to be a tendency of human nature, which seldom contents itself with being in the so-called happy medium, and which rather goes to one extreme or the other, the teachings in the secularized schools have very frequently been directed against religion, as I have already pointed out. What we call "Laicism," or "secularism," has not been that neutral profession which is supposed to be indifferent towards religion, but on the contrary it has afforded a propitious field to all materialists who want to obliterate religion from the face of the earth. These men, who pretend to be the apostles of new ideas and the promoters of a so-called better order, are continuously trying to engage the cooperation of the governments in their respective countries to enact laws which may enable them, or their groups, to carry out more openly their work of spiritual destruction. These men take sometimes, most unduly, the name of "liberals," and still they try in every country to substitute liberty by the most brutal intolerance. Instances of what I say are so abundant that I need not take pains to single out any one for your information.

We should most naturally react against these men and groups of men who take advantage of all liberties guaranteed

by the laws of their countries, and which they use to open campaign against the right which others have to share such liberties. And we should react now by compelling "secularism" to keep itself within its own limits and to show respect for God and religion in the classroom, in the textbook and in every activity of the public school.

Although the exceptions are becoming more and more frequent, we may still say, speaking in a general manner, that subversive doctrines are not yet openly taught in a large majority of the countries of the world.

In the same way, it should not be tolerated that atheism and materialism, of which subversive doctrines are only a natural consequence, continue poisoning the education that children and adults receive in the public schools and universities of many quarters of the globe.

Textbooks should be carefully revised. They very often carry so much poison, and so capable of direct action, that many times even the hand of an unscrupulous teacher is unnecessary to inoculate it.

The last nineteen centuries, and that part of the twentieth century which has already elapsed, are usually known as the "Era of Christianity," and we understand by this expression the moral progress attained by humanity during all this time, and which is revealed by the laws and the customs of the civilized world. However, we are so far from living in accordance with the Christian principles that the remark may be justly made that we do not seem either to practice or to understand the rules of behaviour contained in such principles. This shows how far the current of materialism has deviated us from our way to Christian perfection. It is now necessary for us to give these principles their full meaning and to sow the seeds of the Christian doctrine more deeply into the hearts of men.

Let us recognize therefore that materialism, in all its forms and with all its implications, is the first obstacle that

we find in our path when we endeavour to make education serve the interests of every people and to promote good understanding between nations.

Let us now consider some other factors, besides the school, that work in the field of education. It is proper to begin with our daily press, which is supposed to keep us faithfully informed of all events that occur in the locality where we live, in the nation where this locality belongs and in all other nations of the world.

The picture that now presents itself before our own eyes is by no means more promising than that which the secularized school has shown.

When we think of the press as one of the most important means of public information, we have to make the severe comment, which may be applied to a great number of daily papers and to many news services, that the information given to the public is very often polluted by external influences that seem to control such services and papers. Such information received by the public, who pays for it, is already painted with the peculiar colors of such controlling influences.

We very frequently find that when an important issue, whether local, national or international, is finally decided, the outcome is so unexpected that we cannot fail to recognize the fact that we have been misguided and led to believe that such a happening could not possibly occur.

Organs of the press and such news services as conduct their business in this way are serving purposes and aims which are alien to the public's interests. They are not helping to promote the cause of education, neither are they favoring the cause of peace which can only be advanced in the nations of the world through mutual understanding, based on faithful information regarding their problems, and through a sincere desire to cooperate with one another in the proper solution of such problems. Misinformation is incompatible with good understanding; the former brings with

itself distrust and lack of cooperation, which are the most disturbing factors in the field of international relations.

What has already been said brings us to believe that our democratic development has only reached the point where the press is free from the action of the government; but we must recognize that this is a conquest of a very relative value if the press and the news services from which it is dependent for information may become mere agents of some influences which work against the best interests of the people. It is true that these influences always move in a surreptitious manner, but the fact is that they are widely known the world over.

When the press is enslaved in the way I have referred to, it will be inclined to justify the most atrocious happenings if they are perpetrated by the interests it endeavors to defend; and it will become indignant to the point of crowding its columns with the strongest words of denunciation when anything which is open to unfavorable criticism happens in the other field. It will accept as true that which is doubtful, and sometimes anything that is decidedly false if at a certain moment it may serve the purpose of causing great harm to their foes. It will not refrain from giving large headlines to the scandals that it wants to make known; and it will not hesitate to hide in those columns where no one expects to find any interesting reading all the reports that are adverse to its own aims. It will suppress or delay news, so that their natural effect may not be produced, or at least delayed.

This is not a free press, notwithstanding the fact that the government does not interfere with its operation; and let us say that such an interference is many times less harmful than the influence of so many subversive agencies which through the whole world endeavour to control the press, to keep peoples blindfolded and to make them serve their ulterior motives.

This, of course, is not to be applied without discrimination to all organs of the press, but unfortunately the exceptions

are rapidly decreasing in number, and their work is becoming more and more difficult due to their limited means and to the fact that their foes are united against them.

If the press is a public service, it should never betray the interests of the public. If it happens to do so, it should be treated in the same way as any other branch of public service which defeats its own purposes.

But, there are some other factors that have a decided effect on the education of the people.

Radio should follow the same rules of proper conduct that the press is supposed to follow, because it is also a very important means of public information. And let me say that radio is in many instances more important because it goes farther and more rapidly than the printed word may go.

Radio and the press, as well as the school, should always take their proper places in the education of the people and in the promotion of peace, but they could never succeed in this endeavour if they in any way become subservient to influences which are directed against every principle which has been heretofore regarded as a safeguard of morals and of the public order.

The campaign against indecent films, which has been successfully carried out in the United States of America, is a palpable proof that there is also a way for the public to give their final judgment regarding the conduct of every agency of popular information, whether it be the press, the radio, the school or any other.

I have mentioned moving pictures, in passing. The remembrance has come to my mind of a film which was presented in all parts of the United States a few months ago.

The name of the film is "The Life of Louis Pasteur." It tries to portray the life of this great man, to whom humanity owes so much for his discoveries regarding the transmission of diseases through germs, for the rabies vaccine and for many contributions to science in the important field of the

prevention of disease. Pasteur was a man of religious convictions, a good, sincere and devout Catholic, and only God knows the relief and inspiration that he found in his faith during the trials of his life, which were almost continuous and which are otherwise faithfully presented in the picture. We may in all justice pay him the tribute of saying that in his great mind Religion and Science were united in a most harmonious manner. However, in the picture to which I am referring the religious side of the man has entirely been removed from his life, as we do not find anything there that may even suggest the idea that Pasteur was a great Catholic, proud of his Religion, the practices of which he observed faithfully. And still, the name of the film is "The Life of Louis Pasteur."

It may be said here that what was omitted in the picture was exactly that which any materialist would have set aside. And yet, this is not the way to present a great man, who was great precisely as the result of the high regard that he had as a Christian for his mission in life, which was devoted to the research of truth to prevent suffering for the benefit of his fellowmen.

To suppress one side of the picture is what the press itself does in many instances to push forward ideas and systems that although have filled with blood and tears many unfortunate countries, still they strive to invade the other nations of the world in order to wreck all that has been built in the course of centuries and to substitute it by the most tyrannical forces of destruction.

The influence of the press will be exceedingly beneficial in the field of education and in the promotion of peace when the obstacle that I have pointed out to you is removed through the action of the public, who is to be served according to its best interests. Although there is the commercial side of the press, it should never prevail against the common interests of the people which the press is supposed to serve.

The same applies to radio and to any other means of public information.

Governments and the international agencies that labor to advance the cause of peace can do very little if the spirit of every people is not bent towards peace, and this spirit could not be leaning in such a way if the school, the press and the radio do not cooperate in the work of education, in its proper sense, which endeavours to uplift the spiritual nature of men and to teach them to master their material nature.

“Atheism versus Christianity,” which is the present tendency, should be reversed and substituted by “Christianism versus Atheism,” as the only possible way to secure peace permanently over the whole world.

A few years ago, just after the World War, the prevailing opinion in all civilized countries was that several generations would come before another war was possible. This was a natural reaction in the minds of those who actually witnessed the horrors of the war; and it was shared by those who remained at home and who rendered their cooperation by making it possible to support the soldiers in the front. And yet, only a few years later the very countries that most severely suffered the calamities of that war have been several times on the verge of a new catastrophe of the same kind, showing plainly that although the World War was a tremendous lesson to mankind, it was not learned because the field had not been previously prepared by a proper education.

Let me say in conclusion that whatever we do in order to cultivate the spiritual nature of man, taking him as the most perfect work of God on our earth, and whatever we do to close the door to materialism, which strives in such a hard manner to break its way into the field of Christian education, all that will be a work for the cause of peace and for the general welfare of mankind.

Hector David Castro.

Washington, D. C.