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A STATEMENT:

the Future of This Church

By

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A STATEMENT:

On the Future of This Church

On Sunday, November 24 last, as most of you know. I was invited by unanimous vote of the people of All Souls Church, Chicago, "to take up the work laid down by (their) beloved pastor," the late Dr. Jenkin Lloyd Jones. On Thursday, November 28, I received this call through the personal visitation of two members of the Chicago church, and agreed to give it most earnest consideration. On Sunday, December 1, through my associate, Mr. Brown, I announced this call to the congregation of the Church of the Messiah, explaining that it involved the ministry of All Souls Church, the directorship of Abraham Lincoln Centre, and the editorship of the weekly liberal religious journal, called "Unity." I stated in my announcement that I had asked and been granted ample time for the consideration of this call, but that I intended to answer it as speedily as possible. On Thursday last, just five weeks to a day after receiving the invitation to Chicago, I sent my reply for transmission to the people of All Souls Church this morning. I choose this same time to announce to you my decision.

At the beginning of my consideration of the problem, I found questions of personal inclination and comfort inevitably to the fore. For twelve years minus one month, I have lived and labored in New York City. Every particle of moral energy which I possess, I have invested here. Nearly all of my friends are associated with this community. Especially am I bound by ties of deepest reverence and affection to this church. Here are memories of joy and sorrow and great trial which are more truly a part of me than the voice with which I speak, or the hand with which I turn these pages. It [3] needed but this single summons to teach me what I had not known—how deeply my roots are struck into the soil of this place, and how great the pain and hazard of their exposure, removal and replanting.

It very soon became clear to me, however, that personal considerations could rightly have but little part in the settlement of this problem. In no spirit of bravado, but in simplest recognition of the truth, I say to you that I believe I would have been betraying the profession which I have sworn to serve had I permitted conditions of personal affection, however lovely and precious, to determine my decision in this case. I take seriously the fact of my ordination—that as a minister of religion I have been "set apart," as the traditional phrase has it, to the high purpose of propagating an idea, championing a cause, seeking the best and the highest that I know in terms of God and of his holy will. I am here, in other words, not to make or to keep friends, not to enjoy pleasant associations of hand and heart, not even to serve a particular church, but to serve, perhaps at the cost of these other and more personal things, the great idea of which I speak. To allow my individual sentiments to fix the place and fashion of my professional service, would be to me as dastardly a thing as to allow considerations of profit or prestige to make decision. Not even my wife or my children could interfere in this case. My problem was to determine where I could best advance the ideals to which I have given my life—where I could find the weapons or tools best fitted to my hand for the doing of my work—and there to stand. To remain in this church and city might be infinitely desirable to me as a man; but I must decide not as a man but as a minister, and therefore if I remained, it must be because I could do no other!

But there was another consideration which held me to this impersonal relation to the problem. I refer to the fact that the Great War had brought to a focus in my own soul the inward and largely unconscious spiritual development of a decade. I had discovered, through [4] much tribulation of mind and heart, the ideal which I sought to serve, and disclosed to myself at least the picture of the realization of this ideal in institutional form. This same Great War, however, had distracted my parish, absorbed the energies and attention of my people, and in spite of wellnigh unexampled forbearance, had introduced elements of misunderstanding and even alienation. The conflict, in other words, had no more left our church unchanged than the world itself. We had been shaken and distressed and tortured and driven, so that we were no longer the persons we once were. You knew me, and I knew you, as we were yesterday; but we did not know one another as we were going to be, or should want to be, tomorrow. It was necessary that we should meet not on the plane of the past, nor even of the present, but on the plane of the future, and thus find ourselves again, and discover what now, in this new world, we wanted, and would be able, to do together. Months before the War was ended, it had clearly entered into my mind to summon you to conference on our future relations as minister and people. This invitation from Chicago but precipitated suddenly what was in itself inevitable sooner or later. It introduced into a problem already existing between you and me, a third element—namely, the people of Abraham Lincoln Centre. The problem, however, in its nature, remained the same. I have work to do. I have set my hand to the plow, and I must find the field where I can best drive this plow through the furrow of my sowing.

In order to make plain the situation, as it has presented itself to my mind during the last five weeks, I must turn to the past for a moment, and bring to you therefrom some fragments of autobiography. Those of you who were present at the meeting on last Monday night, have already heard what I am about to say. I beg your undivided attention, none the less, that you may note the bearing of this recital not on a problem presented, as then, but on a decision made, as now.

I entered the Unitarian ministry in the year 1904, [5] under the influence of motives not unfamiliar. In the first place, I saw the pulpit. I went into the ministry for the same primary reason which has held me there through all these years gone by—a desire to preach. I think I can say, in no spirit of boasting, that from my earliest days I have had an intense interest in the problem of truth, and a passion to interpret and defend by the spoken word, the truth as I saw it, to other men. It is just this passion, I suppose, which makes the preacher, as distinguished from the poet or the scientist. So Phillip Brooks would seem to suggest in his famous dictum, that preaching is "Truth (conveyed) through Personality." Furthermore, the truth which I desired to expound was theological in its nature. My whole approach to the problem was along the lines of speculation in the field of religious, as distinguished from political or social, thought. God, the soul, immortality, the origin and destiny of man, sin and salvation—these were the questions that held me, even as a boy, partly, I suppose, because of native inclination, partly because of careful training in a Unitarian home and church, mostly I am convinced because I early came under the spell of that prince of liberal preachers, Dr. Minot J. Savage. To do what Dr. Savage was doing each Sunday, preaching to eager throngs the great truths of the Unitarian gospel—this became the consuming ambition of my life. I wanted to stand in a pulpit and preach. I decided to do so; and if judgment in such a question can be based on experiences of inward joy, I am ready to testify that my decision was not unwise.

I entered the church, therefore, primarily because it had a pulpit. But other reasons, not so decisive, and yet impressive, persuaded me to this same end. Thus I saw in the church not only a pulpit but an altar. Indeed, the pulpit distinguished itself in my mind from a platform or a teacher's desk, by the fact that it was always associated with the presence, visible and invisible, of an altar for divine worship. It was easy for me to picture myself as saying all I wanted to say in [6] college halls, in theater meetings, in public forums, but I craved for my work on behalf of truth the atmosphere and environment of spiritual devotion. It was my desire, in other words, to be not merely a teacher or speaker, but a preacher; not merely a prophet, but also a priest. This does not mean that I am a churchman, as such; or that I find any permanent significance in rituals or other forms of worship. But there is in me that which seeks the stimulus of praise and prayer, the uplift of conscious communion with the Eternal, the consolation of appeal to, and trust in, God. Not only from habit, but from temperament, I find myself at home amid religious rites. Nothing so moved me on my one trip to Europe, as the hours I spent under the shadows of the great cathedrals. As a quiet place of worship, as well as a high place of testimony, the church called me in those youthful years, and I gave answer.

A third motive for my choice of the ministry must not be forgotten. I refer to the appeal of the church as a place for action, a service station on behalf of public causes. My vision of what we mean by public causes was strangely limited. It scarcely went beyond the Unitarian denomination, and the works of charity and kindly reform with which it has always been identified. I was a passionate Unitarian in those days. I had read, and been deeply stirred by, the story of the achievements which Unitarianism had wrought on behalf of freedom, fellowship and character in religion. I reverenced its saints and prophets, and longed to follow in their train. Hence the eagerness with which I sought preparation for the Unitarian ministry—that I might serve the church—advance its glory and magnify its work.

It was with such ideas as these in my heart that I was ordained in February, 1904. Within two years there came an event which shook my life to its foundations, revolutionized my thought, and changed the whole character of my interest and work. I refer to what we have [7] learned to describe in our time as the social question. This question, of course, is nothing new. It has burned at the heart of life from the beginning, and at intervals has flamed forth like the eruption of a volcano, to the terror and glory of the world. Its latest phase, as we know it today in the religious field, made its appearance at about the time I entered the ministry. I recall that the book, which first revealed the fires so soon to burst upon us—Prof. Peabody's "Jesus Christ and the Social Question "—was published in 1903, the year before my ordination. I was not unprepared for what was coming. My deep-rooted reverence for Theodore Parker, the supreme prophet of applied Christianity in our time, and my enthusiastic study of his life, had revealed to me the meaning of socialized religion. But I had caught only the pure essence of its spirit; I had not thought to apply it to the social problems of today. Indeed, I was not aware of the existence of such problems. My whole approach to the question of truth and experience up to that time, had been along the lines of speculation in the field of theological, as contrasted with political or social, thought. In the second year of my ministry, however, I read Henry George's "Progress and Poverty"; then followed the writings of Henry D. Lloyd and Prof. Walter Rauschenbusch; then came the deep and prolonged plunge into the waters of socialism. For several years after I came to this church, I was in a

state of intellectual and emotional upheaval impossible for me to describe. At last came a conviction which was a complete reversal of all my former ideas. I was as a man converted; I was as one who had seen a great light. Henceforth I was a social radical; and religion, pre-eminently not a testimony to theological truth but a crusade for social change. Of course, my interest in theology has persisted; but its place in my life has tended to become ever more subordinate to other and more directly practical interests. You know how the character of my preaching has changed since I first entered the Messiah pulpit. You know with what [8] waxing intensity of expression I have moved to the left of our various divisions on the social question. You do not know, hence I must tell you, how this intensity of radical conviction is destined to continue in the years that are now before us. For the war has accelerated the social crisis beyond all forecasting. In two years has transpired what fifty years could not have consummated under more normal conditions. Three great empires—Russia, Germany, Austria—and several newborn countries, like that of the Czecho-Slovaks, have been captured by the Socialists; and the British Empire seems promised to the British Labor Party in not more than another decade or two. The social revolution long prophesied, long hoped for, long feared, is here; and this means in countries like our own, still untouched by change, such a "sturm and drang periode," as makes even the Great War pale into insignificance. Now in these years which are before us, I propose to speak and serve for the speediest and most thoroughgoing social reconstruction. I am committed both by conviction and temperament to the program of the British Labor Party and its policy of indirect or political action for the advancement of that program. This is my predominant interest at this moment, and through what is destined I suppose to be the whole period of my life. This is as much the cause of our day as abolition was the cause of the days before the Civil War. To this I have given all I have—from this I intend to withdraw nothing that I have given. Not in any sense of bitterness or violence in method, but in every sense of utter change as the end desired, I am committed to the ideal of the complete democratization of society.

When the significance of this transformation first broke upon me, I felt an impulse to leave the church, and attach myself directly to the labor movement. I recall how my soul leapt in answer to the great scene at the close of Kennedy's "The Servant in the House," when the Vicar strips off his clerical garb, seizes the dirty hand of his brother, the Drain-Man, and cries out, [9] "This is no priest's work—it calls for a man!" I was deterred, however, not, I hope, by cowardice but by wisdom. On the surface I felt that I should miss the services of the church—the prayers and worship with my people. Deeper down, and nearer the heart of things, was an unshaken trust in the church as a social institution. I loved her traditions, reverenced her saints and prophets, believed in her destiny—was unconvinced that she must necessarily serve the interests of reaction. At-bottom, was a perfectly clear understanding that my approach to the social question was a spiritual approach, and my acceptance of it the acceptance of a religious task. I saw my new position as nothing more nor less than the logic of Christianity. Men must be free from all oppression, because they are children of God, and therefore living souls. They must be equal in opportunity and privilege, because they are members of the holy family of God, and therefore brothers. They must be lifted up out of poverty, disease, war, because their heritage is the life of God, and they must have it abundantly. The material aspects of the social question, I would be among the last, I trust, to ignore. These are central—but central only as the fetters are central to the problem of slavery. Furthermore, the means which I recognized to the great end, were also spiritual. I could find no place in my thought for the use of violence. The plea of class-conscious rebellion never won my acceptance. Only patience, persuasion, and much love for humankind, seemed to me legitimate weapons of reform. In other words, I was again a victim of the logic of Christianity. And where did this logic hold me, if not to the church? Where could I make plain my spiritual position, or bring to bear my spiritual influence, apart from the church? If this institution must hold me altogether aloof from the social question, then of course my duty was manifest. But its pulpit was wide open to social preaching; its altar a chosen place for social consecration; and its machinery of service all at hand to be shifted from the gear of [10] charity to the gear of justice. Why not stay, therefore, in the church, as Theodore Parker stayed, and fight capitalism, as he fought slavery, in the garb of a minister of Christ?

Decision on this point came fairly early, and it was favorable to the church. Strangely enough, however, it brought me little peace and surety in my church relations. Outside, in the denomination at large, I found myself in almost constant conflict with my fellows. There were few meetings or conferences in which I did not speak in protest and vote with minorities. Here in the Messiah parish there was no trouble, thanks to your forbearance, friendship, and scrupulous loyalty to freedom; but almost from the beginning there was uncertainty, wonderment, at times unrest, on the part of those longest associated with this society; and the records show a melancholy tale of withdrawals of those, not unable to endure differences of opinion, but impelled to turn away when the institution, long precious in their sight, no longer presented the recognizable attributes of a Unitarian church. That my own shortcomings as a man and a minister were responsible for much of this disturbance inside and outside the parish, I have no doubt. But as I look back over the years, I also have no doubt that there was something much more fundamental here, at the heart of the trouble. That I was a heretic on the

social question was insignificant, for Unitarians have long since learned not only to tolerate but to respect their heretics. What was infinitely more important, as I now see, was the fact that unconsciously through these years, I was coming to question not the church itself, as I have explained, but the whole order and purpose of the church as it now exists. Every ecclesiastical institution today is denominational in character. It belongs primarily to some particular sectarian body, and is pledged to the service of this body. Sometimes the central body is narrow, as in the case of the more orthodox Protestant denominations; sometimes it is liberal, as in the case of the Unitarians and Universalists. [11] But always there is a distinctive form of organization, or type of ritual, or doctrine of belief, or spirit of association, which binds these separate churches into a single group; and always this distinctive feature is something which had its origin, and still finds its vitality, in the thought and experience of an earlier age. Every one of our denominations, and every one of the churches in our denominations, is representative of past controversies, not of present interests and duties. No one sect can be distinguished from any other, except by a reference to the text books of Christian history.

Now with the intrusion of the social question into religion, a new concept of church organization came immediately to the fore. The unit of fellowship was now no longer the denomination, but the community. The centre of life and allegiance was no longer the challenge of ancient controversy, but the cry of present day human need. The more I became interested in questions of social change, the less I was concerned with questions of denominational welfare. The more I became absorbed in the people of New York City, the closer became my fellowship with other ministers similarly absorbed, and the remoter my fellowship with those who were bound to me only by the accident of the Unitarian tradition. More and more my hand and heart went out directly to men who saw and labored for the better day of which I dreamed; and only indirectly to those with whom I was appointed to serve, but who could not or would not catch the vision of my dreams. An irreconcilable conflict was here being joined—the old, old conflict between a dead and a living fellowship. It was my intuitive, although unconscious knowledge of this fact, which made me a rebel in every Unitarian gathering of the last ten years. It was a similarly unconscious instinct of self-preservation which taught my Unitarian brethren, to whom the old association was still central, to resent the things I sought. We had been born together, and we lived together; our past and our present were joint possessions. But when we faced the future, we divided; my [12] colleagues, many of them, were content with old, familiar ways, while I sought new associations.

What was dimly felt in those days, was suddenly transformed into something clearly seen by the impact of the Great War. If this stupendous conflict has revealed anything in religion, it is that the sectarian divisions of Christendom are no longer to be tolerated. In the fusing fires of battle, Presbyterian, Methodist, Episcopalian, Unitarian, even Catholic, Protestant and Jew, have been melted, and now flow in a single flaming stream into the mould which shall fashion them into a single casting. Man after man has returned from the front, to tell us that the denominational church is dead. A new ordering of Christendom is at hand. The unit of organization will be not the one belief, nor even the one spirit, but the one field of service. Not the sect, but the community, will be the nucleus of integration. We will have groupings not of Methodist churches, and Baptist churches, and Unitarian churches, to remind the world of ancient differences, but of New York churches, and Boston churches, and San Francisco churches, to teach the world of present needs and future hopes. Our churches will be related as the wards in a city are related, or the cities in a state, or the states in the nation. We shall be all Christians together, as we are all Americans together. We shall have different religious ideas as we have different political ideas. But we shall be organized religiously, as well as politically, in a single community. Our churches, like our schools, will be the possession, and the resort, of all!

This vision of the church as a community, or civic centre, is the logical application of socialized religion. It is no accident that together these two things have captured my life. For a moment, just as the idea of the social question set me thinking of leaving the church altogether, so this idea of the community church set me thinking of leaving this church and organizing in this city an independent religious movement. Indeed, this latter thought has been something more than a [13] momentary temptation. To have a church has been with me from the beginning a necessity. To have a church of the new community order has become a great desire. Last spring I seriously considered presenting to you my resignation, that I might enter upon the fulfillment of this hope. Last summer I pretty definitely made up my mind to lay this problem and prospect before you, as soon as peace should come, and the distractions of war be gone. Then, at the very moment when peace came, as though to anticipate and thus forestall my decision, there came the call from Chicago.

Most of you know what Abraham Lincoln Centre is, and many of you by what pioneer devotion this church of the future was fashioned out of a traditional church of the past. It is not perfect; in some ways it is already itself became traditional again. But it stands today as a more complete embodiment of what I feel a modern church should be than any other institution of which I know in America. The invitation from the people seemed to me an instant bestowal of all for which I seek. I do not think I

could have resisted this call to service, had it not been for your rightful claims of loyalty and affection, and my own reluctance to abandon the project of accomplishing my desires in New York. These considerations made me hesitate—and while I hesitated, I thought. Why should I turn elsewhere for the fulfillment of hopes which may be as surely if not as swiftly realized here? Why should I undertake to build an independent church in this city, or accept the leadership of a church however remarkably developed in Chicago, when the Church of the Messiah, pledged to freedom, and long committed to the idea of progress, lies ready to my hand? Why should I seek the easy inheritance of another man's completed work, and thus avoid the hard labor of building an institution of my own, which, for that reason alone, would be moulded nearer to my heart's desire? Above all, why should I assume that my people who have loved and sustained me these dozen years, are unwilling to move on with me in comradeship [14] to the new pathways of the new world which we have entered, or by what right make decision involving my future ministry here or elsewhere, without taking them fully into my confidence and searching the utmost temper of their minds? These were the questions which came to me promptly on the receipt of the Chicago call. Should I undertake to organize an independent church in New York, should I go to Chicago as minister of All Souls' Church and Director of Abraham Lincoln Centre, should I stay here as minister of this Church of the Messiah—this was my problem. I could not solve it, with fairness to myself or to you, until you had spoken. Hence, the meeting of last Monday night, called by the helpful co-operation of the Board of Trustees, and attended largely by our people.

In addressing this meeting, I stated in some detail the future conditions of church work which I proposed to establish or to find. I had intended originally not to make these public, at least all at once; but rumor has been busy, and exact information, for purposes of correction, if nothing more, has now become essential.

First of all, therefore, may I say that I made announcement to this meeting, as I would now make announcement to you, that I have left, or am planning to leave, the Unitarian denomination, and propose not much longer to be known specifically as a Unitarian minister. The reasons for this change in my life, I shall make plain at another time; this morning I content myself with stating the fact. Almost a year ago I resigned the office of vice-president of the Middle States Conference of Unitarian churches, which have held ever since I came to New York. Two months ago, I resigned from the Council of the Unitarian General Conference. Two weeks ago, I resigned my life-membership in the American Unitarian Association. Next May, when the new list is made up, I expect to withdraw my name from the official roll of Unitarian clergymen, and thus sever the last strand which holds me to the Unitarian body. Of course, I shall join no other denomination, and in [15] this sense shall be independent. But to me this action means not isolation, but entrance into that larger fellowship which I so long to share. No barrier will then separate me from those Episcopalians and Baptists and Methodists and other men, who are my real spiritual brethren. I shall be at one with all men everywhere—at home with the family of mankind. I shall not so much cease to be a Unitarian, as to become a Christian. This matter is of course personal; and it thus affected only incidentally the problem which was before our meeting last Monday night. It is easy to find precedent for the occupancy of a Unitarian pulpit by a minister not a Unitarian. At the time of the famous Year-Book controversy, Mr. Potter of New Bedford, Mass., and several of his colleagues, withdrew from the Unitarian body, but continued to hold their Unitarian pulpits. The latest instance of which I chance to know was called to my attention by the death last week of Prof. George A. Foster, of Chicago University. Dr. Foster was born, bred and ordained a Baptist; and yet last year was called to fill the pulpit of the First Unitarian Church church in Madison, Wisconsin; and died in the service of this church, a Baptist.

Even in orthodox churches, the denominational tag is losing its significance. Thus, when the City Temple London, the most famous Congregational church in the world, sought a successor to Dr. Campbell, it chose Dr. Joseph Fort Newton, of Iowa, a Universalist. We are getting sensible enough these days to recognize that the essential thing even about a minister is not his name but his manhood. Nevertheless, my contemplated change in denominational status might well be regarded as a part of the whole problem before us, and I therefore made careful mention of it last Monday night. Secondly, and more important, I stated my desire that the church which I should serve tomorrow, might itself be undenominational, at last to the degree implied by my conception of what I have called the community church. By this I meant that the church should proclaim [16] as its primary interest and aim identification with, and service of, the people of its community, to the subordination, and, if necessary, the ending of its connection with persons of various and scattered communities who have no other bond of union than that of a single denominational inheritance. Was I wrong when I ventured the assertion at the meeting of our Society, that in this church we have already moved far in this direction? Unconsciously, in the last dozen years, it seems to me, we have been moving out of the denomination, into the community. Nearly every interest in this parish is a community and not a denominational interest. Our natural affiliations as a church in this city have not been so much with churches of our own denomination, as with churches of various denominations distinguished like ourselves as predominantly civic, or community, institutions. This congregation is an independent congregation. If

the Unitarian name adheres to it at all, it is to the embarrassment of those whose Unitarianism is their pride, and to the confusion of those who, not Unitarians either by birth or conviction, desire to join us in spirit and active work. For years, like "the chambered nautilus," we have been outgrowing our denominational shell, and seeking "more stately mansions." Is it not time, now, that we left this "outgrown shell," and became at last the full and free community institution of which I speak? Should we not at least clear ourselves of ancient entanglements to such degree that we may invite people openly and honestly to come into our portals not because they want to profess themselves Unitarians, but because they want to confess themselves lovers and servants of mankind?

Again, I stated at last Monday's meeting my desire that the church which I shall serve tomorrow, may have a name which means something in the language and thought of our time. The application of this principle to our church is obvious. The name, Church of the Messiah, is precious to many of us, because it awakens memories and revives tender associations. But a name [17] is important not from the standpoint of those who know what it means, or ought to mean, but of those who do not know. The name of a church, like that of a business, is an advertisement. It is a symbol, a slogan, a banner. It should tell at once to everybody what is behind it, what it stands for; and this is exactly what our name does not do, except to the initiate. Dr. Savage tried to save the situation by associating with the name, Lowell's familiar line, "some great cause, God's new Messiah." I have tried to breathe the breath of life into the corpse, by attaching it deliberately to our various activities—as the Messiah Forum, the Messiah Social Service League, etc. But all in vain! Our name suggests a hope of ancient Judaism, a period of Unitarian history, a habit of Episcopalian nomenclature—and that is all! It should be changed, to give some adequate expression of our ideals. The City Church, the People's Church, the Community Church, the Church of the People, the Church of the New Democracy, the Fellowship, the Free Fellowship, the Fellowship of Social Idealism, the Fellowship of the Kingdom, the Fellowship of Spiritual Democracy, the Liberal Centre, the Community Centre,—think of what we might call ourselves, if we but had the courage. And after all, what courage would it take, save that long since displayed by our fathers in this church? How many of you know that for fourteen years, this church was known simply as the Second Congregational Unitarian Society of New York. Then in 1839, because the name Unitarian was open to serious misconstruction, this name, except in its strictly legal uses, was dropped, and the highly orthodox name we now bear, was substituted. I stated at our meeting that if I should remain as your minister, I should hope that this church might similarly baptize itself afresh in the language of our own time, and in the spirit of our own life!

Again, at this meeting on Monday last, I stated that a modern church should have free pews. This statement needs no definition or argument. The system of pew [18] rentals is an abomination, already abolished in countless churches more orthodox than our own, and a scandal in any church claiming to be liberal or democratic.

Lastly, I stated my desire that my church should have a non-covenanted membership. On the side of organization, this means of course that we make our church and society a single body, and thus abolish the present system of two unrelated groups, the one business and the other spiritual in character. On the side of religion, it means that we abandon the idea of an inner group of members, who have reached some spiritual eminence not attained by others. Of course, in our body, this sanctification aspect of church membership has disappeared from our apprehension. But if this is the case, why should we retain the form? What is essential is organization and fellowship on the basis of simple brotherhood. Here we are, comrades together, worshipping and working to the great end of a better world. We must be bound together in some way, for we must be an enlisted body, not a mob of unrelated individuals. But let it be a Roll-Call to Service—a joining of the church as of the Red Cross for the love of mankind. In spirit, our membership is already this; but its form is not so much an embodiment of the new democracy of the saviors as an echo of the old aristocracy of the saved.

It was with these five points that I confronted the members of this Society last Monday evening. I stated them much as I have stated them this morning, and then asked not that action be taken, but that sentiment be expressed. Since that time, I have been assiduously collecting information of what took place. Official report of action taken, of votes passed, has been laid upon my desk. Friends have written or spoken to me their impressions of the gathering. I have myself canvassed the members of the Board of Trustees, and have received replies to my questions which show such high endeavor to convey accurate information and sound advice, quite apart from personal opinion on most points, as does [19] abounding honor to the persons concerned. From what has thus come to me, I deduce three facts about this meeting. First, that the members of this church were willing to face without revolt or rebuke, questions which more often than not in the past have been the occasion of unseemly quarrel and unholy schism. Secondly, that the consideration of these questions was carried on for two hours without bitterness of spirit as between the members of the church, or as between these members and the absent minister. Lastly, that there is a large working majority in this church who desire the things that I desire. Taking these facts into my own soul, which must be the last court of decision, after all, I have

become convinced that I am confronted here by a situation which I can neither ignore nor evade. My challenge to you has been answered by a challenge to myself. To refuse this challenge, is impossible. To leave this fruitage of my twelve years of plowing and planting unharvested, and thus to wither and be scattered, would be a crime. I have therefore declined the call to Chicago, and will remain here as your minister!

To this announcement of my decision in this case, may I make, in closing, some two or three supplementary remarks?

In the first place, for the benefit of such rasher or more enthusiastic spirits as may be present in this place, I would state that I have no intention of abusing the confidence thus reposed in me, or the power thus granted me, by demanding immediate and final action on all the points of my program. We are members here not of a political caucus, but of a church; and it behooves us, therefore, to observe even the uttermost refinements of good-will and mutual consideration. We must respect with scrupulous fidelity the rights of each, and seek nothing that falls short of the happiness of all. Determination must now yield place to patience, and courage to sympathy. Conversion and not conquest is our method. I had rather wait years to gain my point with the consent of every heart, than carry off the victory [20] tomorrow with some hearts broken and thrown away. I have a perfect faith in the power of persuasion —an unshaken confidence in the ultimate supremacy of love; and am quite willing to leave to these mystic forces the determination of the time, the method and the ultimate form of our accomplishment.

On the other hand, lest there be those who think that deeds are not to follow upon words, may I state that I take up my ministry in this church afresh today with the conviction that I am committed to a program, and you committed to its decent and friendly consideration. Nay more, I am persuaded that we are ready for unanimous action on some points. At the regular annual meeting of this Society, on Monday, January 13, I hope, and have every reason to expect that a resolution will be introduced, providing for the abolition of the pew rental system of financial support, and the establishment of the principle of free pews. I shall recommend that certain methods be employed for the affecting of this great change: (1) that all present pew-holders be invited to surrender their sittings and to pay to the treasurer in the form of subscription what they now pay in form of rent; (2) that those who may be for any reason unwilling to make this change, be protected in their rights and be guaranteed their sittings, so long as they may desire this arrangement; (3) that all new-comers be invited to support the church by subscription payments only, and no pews or sittings be rented anew under any consideration after a certain date. By some such procedure as this we shall gain our end, protect our present income, and impose compulsion upon no single individual.

Secondly, it is my hope, and expectation, that at this annual meeting next week, the problem of our name as a church will be taken up. I shall recommend that a committee be appointed to consider a new name for the Church of the Messiah, and to report back to a special meeting of the Society perhaps in the early spring, their recommendation on this point.

As regards the problem of non-covenanted membership [21] I propose to recommend that this matter be promptly referred to the Advisory Board for study; that this body, in turn, report its findings to the Board of Trustees for similar study; and that this Board, at such time, and in such way, as it and the ministers may deem proper, bring the matter before the Society for action. This question is complicated, and poorly understood. We shall want to examine the experience and precedent of other denominational bodies, and of such independent religious organizations as the Ethical Culture Society and the Free Synagogue. We must find, or create, a system of membership which shall accurately and fully represent the spiritual idealism of this church, as well as practical utility, at its best; and this is a task calling at this moment not for action but for meditation.

There is left the most important of all questions which I have raised—the continued connection of this church with the Unitarian denomination. It is to me an occasion for surprise that some of you should have imagined that I was desiring, or expecting, action on this matter last Monday night. I have been still more astonished to hear, during the week, that some of you suspect or infer that a decision on my part to remain will involve an immediate intention to proceed to the capture of the church for purposes not disclosed. On Monday night I gave expression to a conviction and a hope, and asked you to register opinion thereupon. Beyond that I would not go, and could not if I would. Those of you who have been Unitarians for years, are Unitarians today, and desire to remain Unitarians, must be protected in your rights. The indebtedness of this church to the many in generations gone who have served it for the sake and in the name of Unitarianism, must not be repudiated. Moral obligation as well as legal necessity may make it impossible for this church to sever connection with the body of its origin. Above all, I am insistent that there shall be no quarrel or schism on this issue. There may be place here for change by evolution, but never by violence. No faction must presume to dictate what may [22] come beneficently by consent alone. What I did on Monday last was to plant in your minds the seed which found lodgement years ago in mine. What I shall now do is to wait the germination of that seed through a

period of years which may be less, and may well be more, than I endured. And I do this with the more content and confidence, that I have little doubt as to what the result will be. I have not lived with you all these years gone by, without learning the openness of your minds, the instinctive passion of your souls for right, the quickness of your sensibilities to all sweet influences of progress and good-will. If there be truth in my conviction for change, it will in time be your conviction, as it is mine. If this be

"The freer step, the fuller breath,
The wide horizons grander view,"

then it will inevitably work enchantment in your hearts as it has in mine. And if not, then shall I trust those sweeping tides of change which are now engulfing all the world and destined so soon, to obliterate the barriers of denomination, so that this issue between us must vanish for good and all. And in any case, we may ever have the task of making our Unitarianism in this place of so new and wonderful a character that this body to which we are bound, may itself become transfigured by the service we perform for God and man. I am quite content, therefore, to postpone this question for an indefinite period. By the inward consent of converted minds, or the outward logic of inexorable events, this problem will be settled in due time, and with perfect amity and concord.

Lastly, may I congratulate you, as I am congratulating myself, on the high adventure of the spirit which we undertake this day; and appeal, without apology, in frankness unashamed, for your support in this endeavor? I call to my people in this church, to join their hands and hearts in this great enterprise of faith. Not to divide, but to unite you, am I speaking: for it is the challenge of high aim and struggle which alone can hold [23] us to accord. I call as well to people outside this church—strangers and friends alike, who have turned from the churches of the past, but, still devout in expectancy and love, have waited long for the new church of the morrow. Our vision may be dim, our purpose weak; but we are trying for something higher and better than man has ever known—and we need the help that you can give. We need your money—bills cannot be paid without it. We need your names—a body cannot exist and labor without members. We need your love—our hearts must falter if we have it not. To all who hear these words I speak, to all who read them when they are printed, to all whom rumor may inform and question, I cry out, Come! To go on alone, were not so hard. I can do it, if it be necessary. The blazed trail, as well as the broad avenue, knows the footsteps of the Lord. The wilderness and the solitary place, as well as the crowded city, is the abode of God. But better than loneliness is comradeship. The explorer may see from afar the Promised Land, the pioneer may spy it out, but it is the marching host that enters to conquer and possess. To you all, therefore, I lift my cry

"We have chosen our path—
Path to a clear-purposed goal,
Path of advance!—but it leads
A long steep journey, through sunk
Gorges, o'er mountains of snow. . . .
Fill up the gaps in our files, Strengthen our wavering line,
Stablish, continue our march,
On to the bound of the waste,
On, to the city of God."

[24]

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