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Peace on Earth and Good Will towards Men

Emma Goldman

IN response to the request of the Newspaper Enterprise Association for an article on how the American people can best help to restore “peace on earth and good will toward men,” I sent the following:

To ask how we Americans can best help to restore “Peace on earth and good will towards men,” is to assume that such a thing ever existed save in the ideal of Jesus and of those who were his immediate followers. As a matter of fact it never has existed in any other way, nor was there an attempt even on the part of Christianity to make the ideal of its teacher a living force. Truth is, the teacher himself was not quite clear as to the meaning of “Peace on earth and good will toward men,” if we are to believe the data contained in the biblical records.

Jesus said, “Give unto the Lord what is the Lord’s and to Caesar what is Caesar’s.” We are also informed that he said “The poor shall never cease out of the land,” which is but a logical sequence of man’s duty to the Lord and to Caesar.

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Few sincere Christians, and they are very few, indeed, realize that if man must forever render unto the Lord and unto Caesar out of the products of his labor, "peace on earth and good will towards men" can never exist. It does not matter whether the Lord be the relentless Jewish God or his more kindly son who came to redeem mankind: so long as the Lord may exact a toll from man, the two will be at war with each other. Hence neither peace nor good will can prevail.

Equally so it matters not whether Caesar be the ruler of Rome, the Czar upon the bloody throne of Russia, the German Kaiser obsessed by militarism, or the money interests of America—so long as they exact taxes from the sweat and blood of the people, neither peace nor good will is possible.

What then must we Americans do to be saved and help save others? We must transvalue our values; we must be brave enough to throw overboard the ballast of false gods; we must realize that neither the Lord nor Caesar have any claim on what they have not themselves produced. We must get off our complacent, self-satisfied position of the "better than thou," and face the truth that but for circumstances the best placed man and the most secured woman might be in the criminal dock or red light district.

Yes, circumstances represent the most cruel chariot wheel which gives special privileges to those who never work and yet monopolize the earth, while they deny common humanity to those who always work and are excluded from the table of life. Circumstances which decree that the masses shall live in squalor and drabness, while the few gorge themselves upon the blood of children, the youth of women, the integrity of men. With such a Moloch ever present, insatiable in its voracity, there can be neither peace nor good will. We Americans who more than any other nation are in the thralls of that monster, are perhaps among the least of them who can bring about peace on earth and good will toward men.

And yet—and yet we of all nations ought to be in the lead. We who with Jefferson proclaimed that the best government is the

one which governs least; who emphasized with Thoreau that the best government is the one which does not govern at all. We who pointed out with Emerson that character, as represented through men and women, and not through a listless, immobile majority driven hither and thither by unscrupulous politicians, is the basis of democracy. We, in short, who are not handicapped by the decadent, crumbling military dynasties, we ought to be in the lead.

The first step, then, to bring about peace on earth and good will toward men is to concede the superiority of the individual, as the unit of social life, to the organized force known as the State. Secondly, to emancipate the masses from economic and social slavery. In other words to teach man the value of himself and his right to take the things which he has produced. That alone will establish peace on earth and good will toward men.