

The challenge of a changing world

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OF THE many things that we might speak about here, I have chosen the challenge of change—the effect on our lives of incredibly swift change. It breaks in upon us all, whatever our profession.

Is there anything in which we need more wisdom than this, when new forces are changing our world with a rapidity that is breath-taking? “Wandering between two worlds—one dead, the other powerless to be born.” It was Matthew Arnold who said that, and he was certainly underscoring our predicament. “Living between two worlds—one going, the other trying to come.”

To be living in such a time and not possess some light to steer by, some inner principle to guide us, is to be unfitted to deal with the most insistent demand that our age makes upon us. The time has gone when we must choose which side, which war, which world will have our allegiance—the one that is going or the one that is trying to come. By and large, people can be roughly classified into three major groupings. On the one extreme we have the wild-eyed radicals who are out to destroy the old world and leap with one swift jump into something they think is new. *Revolution* is their magic word—smash it up, tear it down, destroy the old. How many movements in how many countries are taking the violent way of revolution, destroying the old that something new might come!

On the other extreme we have the stand-patters, the dyed-in-the-wool conservatives who are out to preserve the old world and everything in it. They are the privileged people mostly. They like the way things are and are determined at all costs to keep it. So they resist change, set themselves against the new, hold on as long as they can, put their money and energy into organizations to patch up and shore up the old structures that are doomed eventually to pass away.

We are in a time of terrific tension between extremists. They tear the peace and order of the world. But the hope lies, and we believe that the Christian way lies, in another attitude altogether; it lies in the solid people of all lands who have learned the meaning of change—the divine law of growth and progress.

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They are, therefore, out not to destroy the old and certainly not to preserve it—to keep things as they are—but to build on it and to transform it by constructive fulfillment. This, we believe, is the way of Christ. “Think not,” He said, “I am come to destroy, but to fulfill.”

There is a character in the New Testament—John the Baptist—who was the forerunner of the Christian movement. The Gospel says, “He came preaching in the wilderness, saying ‘Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand.’” I have a friend, a Baptist minister,* who, when he uses these words of John the Baptist, gives them his own particular slant: “Change your mind and accept the new age.” And that is precisely what they mean. “Repent” means to change your mind. “The Kingdom of God” is the new age, the new order, the reign of God which we all daily pray for when we say, “Thy Kingdom come . . .” And I know of no better motto to hang in the forefront of your mind than this: “Change your mind and accept the new age.” Be the forerunners, the advance men, the flagship of the new age that is trying, through the turmoil, to come.

I want to put down a few plain facts which, in my judgment, are indisputable. The first is that we dislike change. I do not need to tell you that. We do not like change. One of the hardest things that we mortals have to do is to change our minds and accept the new. Resistance to change, even change for the better, is inherent in our human nature. We do not like to see our old houses come down, our children grow up, or any of the ways that we’ve grown accustomed to swept away. We like the peaceful, quiet ways of the familiar. We would sooner settle down in that, clinging even to its faults, than to risk the unknown with the unsettledness it brings. This is so common that psychologists have a name for it—*neophobia*, fear of the new. We all have it to some extent, and you can trace it in our history. Even in the area of industrial advancement—machinery—most progress has been made against protest. Almost every new invention, at least back in the earlier years, had to win its way to popular acceptance against neophobia. There were people who opposed railroads when the steam engine came in, who would never as long as they lived ride in a train—one of “those new-fangled things.”

In 1904 the president of one of the oldest insurance companies in America, speaking about automobile insurance, said, “We will not insure gasoline cans on wheels—those noisy, stinking things.” So in every area—in medicine, science, education—we have had a long history of neophobia. New ideas have been feared, resisted, postponed until they were almost forced on public acceptance. Vaccination, for example; some resist it even yet.

Now it is in the area of social ideas and social thinking—religion, politics, and human relations—that we are most reluctant to change our minds and accept the new. The church—I belong to that and I love it. But I’ll tell you that we are notoriously slow to change our minds and accept the new. Politics—the political mind is the slowest of all to change. We do not have to go far for illustrations. You have been reading about the fuss in Tallahassee over attempts to get a revision of the Florida Constitution which was written back in the horse-and-buggy days. Some day it will come, but a lot of spade work will have to be done, a good deal of it by the undertakers.

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How often we are told that we cannot stop the clock. Oh yes, we can! The easiest thing in the world is to stop the clock. Lots of people do it; they hold back its hands, the mind with it, while time goes on ahead of them. The world today is full of stopped clocks—people who lag far behind their times in their social thinking—and they are trying to face today's problems with yesterday's ideas because they find it so difficult in the area of social thinking to change their minds and accept the new.

Now let us put another clear word alongside that. We dislike change, but events now are forcing us to change. We have no option anymore. Time was when you had some choice in the matter. You could stand still, stop the clock, sleep through a revolution as Rip Van Winkle did, and if you lagged behind the times it did not matter very much because time was not moving very much. But now even that option is gone. Now, like it or not, we have to change. The world is changing as we walk in it, as though some powerful Hand in history, impatient with our reluctance to accept the truth about the oneness of mankind, were pushing us, against our inclinations, into situations where we have to change and to think new thoughts.

In the last few years a powerful combination of forces have altered beyond all recognition the contour of the old world in which we have grown up, so that the world we were born in is not here anymore. Let us take a hurried look at some of the piled-up problems of our time. We have seen them come singly and separately. Now let us bunch them briefly together, the situations demanding a change of social thinking.

1. The population explosion. We now face the prospect of living in a jam-packed world. Doctors won't let us die, and the birth rate is increasing; $2\frac{3}{4}$ billion now, 5 billion by the end of the century. Take your eyes off the human race for one hour and there are 5,000 more when you look again. This fact alone—this mushrooming growth in population—is enough to jar the social thinking of generations.

2. The shrinkage of the earth. That is not new; we have been watching it come for a long time—new means of communication, distance wiped out, boundary lines erased, every man now brought closer to every other man. Geographically, mankind is now one. Carl Sandburg, in his tribute to the Wright brothers and their successors, said, "They've taken the ball of earth and made it a little thing."

3. Let us link the shrinkage of the earth with the expansion of man's reach. By the miracle of science, man is breaking now with the past and with all his old ways of dealing with the earth. He is marching swiftly to a new relation to the universe—summed up in part by that word *automation*—putting man's brain as well as his hands into machinery.

4. Man has taken the first small steps into outer space. He is dreaming of other worlds before he has learned to live in this one. This is certainly new—so new that the effect on our minds is not yet apparent. We still have to grasp the implication of those first steps into the space age.

5. Along with these expansive thoughts have come some pretty terrifying ones. The creation of new weaponry fantastic beyond imagination, where with

the pull of a nuclear switch whole nations can be obliterated. This factor is new. In 1945, for the first time in history, major war and race suicide became synonymous. It is no longer possible to win a war; it is impossible to kill wholesale without being killed wholesale. Surely, this should yank our minds into something more constructive than just preparing for war. However important that has been in the past, it is no longer the solution.

6. The rising of the whole Eastern world and the return of power from West to East. The Western nations, including ours, have lost their unchallenged mastery of the earth, their power to control and dominate international affairs. The balance is shifting from West to East, every day growing stronger there. Powerful new forces have emerged—the rise of the colored races, for one. They already outnumber us two to one. In twenty years it will be five to two. They are not going to sit in the back seats anymore. They are not going to be exploited, held down, pushed around by a white minority. A powerful race consciousness has seized the nonwhite peoples, and they are everywhere determined that they will be treated with the respect and dignity of human beings among human beings. This is something new under the sun, and at the minimum it demands of white peoples a change of thinking, a new approach, a reorientation of thought. We cannot go on with the old ideas of master race and servant race. We just can't. And you wonder sometimes at the blindness of people who think we can.

Link that with the rise of nationalism, the undermining spread of Communism, the awakening of what Toynbee calls the "depressed peasantry"—people who for thousands of years have lived without hope of change, generation after generation living as their fathers had always lived with no expectation of change, now stirred by the idea that men have some control of their destiny and some right to a place in the sun. This is a new thing. Old systems are tumbling down under the heavy march of the masses. People down under are coming up; old colonial empires are coming down. Twenty new nations have been born in the last fifteen years. Three-quarters of mankind are on the march, stirred by exciting hopes, rising expectations, standing between two worlds—one going and the other trying to come. And it is the speed of it that you have to keep your eyes on—the fantastic, bewildering pace of the change.

In the Pentagon they have a saying: "If it works, it's obsolete." Well, we know that. An airplane coming off the assembly line, ready to fly, is already made obsolete by a new model coming off the drawing board. A friend sent me a speech in which the speaker said, "The engine that first crossed the Atlantic carrying Mr. Lindbergh is not quite powerful enough to be the self-starter for a modern jet." Then he went on to list the incredible changes since 1945. A thousand years have passed since 1945.

We may not know where we're going but, you can count on it, we are going there pretty fast. And the most futile of all attitudes, the most bankrupt of all ideas, is the notion that with all this going on in our social thinking we can stand still; that if we just sit down nice and quiet and shut our eyes real tight, the world will slow down, get back to normal, and all the nasty problems—racial, national, social—will go away. We don't like this upsettleness of the world,

so we won't even think about it. We'll be like the man who loved his cigarettes. He was troubled by all the reports about the harmful effects of smoking. Every paper or magazine he picked up had some article on the bad effects of smoking. So finally, unable to stand the pressure any more, he quit—reading about it.

Change your mind and accept the new age. That is, come to terms with what is happening. How much we need some prophet to wake us up, to jerk our minds out of yesterday into today! The world is changing, and we must change with it. We have changed it. By discovery and invention, man has altered the world so much that he must now change his social thinking to survive in it. The question is no longer, "Shall we change?" or "Shall we have change?" The only questions we have left are, "What kind of change?" and "Who will do the changing?"

Surely this lesson is clear. If we don't want radicals to change the world and twist it in directions in which we don't want to see it go, then we must give leadership in it, rise up to make the wrongs right and the crooked places straight, be the forerunners of the constructive kingdom that is trying now to come.

Well, that is what I want to say to you, and I want to close with a balancing thought. We said that the changes of our time are unprecedented, and that is true. The total effect of it, however, has created the illusion in the minds of some that stability is an outworn idea, that nothing can be depended on anymore. All the old absolutes are gone; the old moral rules by which civilizations have lived have gone down the drain. Nothing is certain now; everything is relevant.

Well, don't believe that. Never believe it. It is not true. Some things are changeless. The moral order has not come loose. The Ten Commandments haven't budged an inch. The compass needle still points to the north. And down underneath all the outward confusion is the stability of the permanent, fixed, abiding realities which are eternally the same. We are prepared for change only when we remember that. There is such a thing as "the everlastingness of God"—an eternal purpose toward which all events must ultimately move.

It is said that the home of Thomas Jefferson is preserved at Monticello just as it was when the great Democrat lived in it years ago. On the porch where he loved to sit and write there were always three instruments in view—a big clock, a weather vane, and a compass. The clock changed with every minute. The weather vane changed with every shifting of the wind. But that old compass—no matter what happened around it, night or day, storm or calm, its needle pointed to the magic mystery of the north.

I hope you can always remember that. There are some fixed things, fixed in the nature of existence, fixed in the nature and character of God, fixed so that no matter what time it is, what age, no matter which way the wind blows, they can be utterly and eternally trusted. This is the steadiness we need in a time of change, something that will do for us what the compass does for the ship at sea—provide a touch of celestial certainty that you can steer by, trust in, and be sure about.