

**THE OPPORTUNITY FOR  
RELIGION IN THE PRESENT  
WORLD SITUATION. [NEW  
YORK-1919]**

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The Opportunity for Religion in the Present World Situation. [New York-1919] by Harry F. Ward

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## THE OPPORTUNITY FOR RELIGION

### I

OF the much writing impelled by the Great War, that which deals directly with religion is a very small proportion. Of this, by far the greater part is concerned with the problem of personal faith and conduct, or with the effect of the war upon religion and the churches in the days to come. There is another phase of the subject that calls for consideration. What opportunity does the world crisis offer for religion to lead humanity into a better way of living? The answer to that question should point the path of duty for the religious individual, and upon the answer which the churches make to that inquiry their future will most certainly depend.

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The war has developed the demand and opportunity for the reconstruction of society. Practically all the social forces are now massed in a mighty struggle to determine in what kind of a world and in what manner humanity shall live for a long time to come. Religion is one of these forces. How is it mobilized and to what end? Is there any spiritual imperative that religion can bring to bear upon the present world situation? Is it able to translate its ideals into collective conduct, to give content to the duties it has been teaching? These are the questions that demand an answer, for the final test of all religions is in the field of social action. By what they have to contribute to the welfare of humanity, is their ultimate worth to be determined.

Of course when we speak of religion, it is organized religion that is meant, and more particularly the leaders of organized religion. The term "church" is not adequate for our purpose. It needs to be remembered that



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organized religion to-day comprehends not only the churches, but also a number of other agencies for religious instruction and propaganda. It needs still more to be remembered that in the modern world there are large religious forces, actual and potential, without the bounds of all organized religion, which can be mobilized and brought to bear upon the present situation by an adequate religious statesmanship. Such forces are particularly to be found in the world of labor.

The mind of the race is beginning to see what the heart of mankind has long felt — that there is no hope for humanity save in the working out of world-democracy, and world-democracy will never be developed unless a common religious dynamic operates among all peoples, of which humanity shall become increasingly conscious and to which it shall increasingly yield its allegiance.

A unique element in the present situation is the extent to which mankind is conscious

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that an hour of destiny has arrived. The fateful hours of the past were not known to many of those who lived in them. They were revealed afterward to the historian. But the people of to-day have eaten plentifully of the tree of knowledge. The laws of the physical universe, the history of the human race, the causes of social progress and decay — these are all an open book before this generation. The control of nature and of human society is now in the hands of the common people to an extent unimagined by even the leaders of the past. Not blindly as did men of other days do we take the road. We are not walking in darkness.

The knowledge of the possibilities that hang upon the outcome of this day is not merely the property of the wise men of the universities. All over the earth the plain people are taking the destiny of the race into their hands. This issue will not be decided by a few leaders gambling with the lives of the masses. The "silent masses" are

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everywhere becoming articulate. The voice of the weaker and more backward peoples is heard. Their interests are now to be considered. The Orient takes its place beside the Occident. Japan and China enter into the family of nations with power. The common people of India get unto themselves self-government. Never before have so many peoples been consciously joined together in the choosing of their future. It is indeed mankind deciding its destiny.

Yet it is still true that in every land large numbers of people are not conscious of the issue of the hour and many more are only partially enlightened concerning it. These are often the so-called "better class" of people. In this fact lies one opportunity and duty for religion. As it makes a man conscious of his moral choices, so must it make the nations conscious of the results that will follow their decision. Its educational and preaching processes can be used to that end. There is a penalty in store for