

Daniel De Leon

**Editorial: An Open Letter to the
Right Rev. Hugh Miller Thompson,
D.D., LL.D., Bishop of Mississippi**

Right Reverend Sir: The press announces that you will preach to-day—the eve of Labor Day—a sermon in Trinity Church, in this city, “for the advancement of the interests of labor”. As a Mississippian, it may happen that you are not fully informed upon things in New York, especially not upon the character of the religious corporation under whose auspices you are to speak. A few facts upon this subject may aid you in illustrating and giving point to your words.

True enough, there is no lay capitalist concern, in this city, or elsewhere, that can make any pretence to morality, let alone sanctity. Nevertheless, they cannot, black with sin though they be, be held up to public view as a sample or a symbol of the downright immorality of capitalism. They are avowedly intended “to lay up treasures on earth”; consequently, they can be best utilized to illustrate, in matter of fact ways, the economics of capital, and are, accordingly, used to exemplify the scientific fact that the capitalist is a useless, superfluous being; an idler and a sponge upon the body politic, a parasite that lives upon the toil of others; that his profits—rents, interests, dividends, premiums, etc., etc.—are wages he withholds from the workers; that he keeps himself in possession of his stolen goods by means of the brute force which his lackeys, the Republican and Democratic parties, put forth in his behalf; and that his reign means the exaltation of the idling few and the degradation of {the} toiling many. But capitalism has also a moral, besides an economic aspect, and it

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produces institutions that illustrate with particular clearness the standard and complexion of its morality. The Trinity Church Corporation is pre-eminently one of these.

The corporation under whose auspices you are to preach for the advancement of labor stands out in this city as the embodiment of sin. Its example is the most corrupting in existence to the morals of the commonwealth.

Started during colonial days for the purpose of promoting purity and religious sentiments, with the public duties then attached to such bodies, such as relieving distress among the poor, it speedily cut loose from its moorings and entered upon a career that is the blackest in the annals of this city.

First, during the days of the American Revolution, it was a nest of traitors; its prayers went up, not for George Washington but for George III.; its funds were misappropriated to give aid and comfort to the enemies of the country; it was the base of operation for the spies and cowards who hovered on the flanks and rear of the Revolutionary army, impairing every victory won by the patriots, and aggravating every defeat they suffered.

With the evacuation of New York by the red-coats, the Trinity Church Corporation took a new start. It made its peace with the Government of New York; freed, under the republican laws, from its colonial duties to the poor of the parish, it threw overboard its "religion" also, except as a cloak for its crimes; and it started on a course, the most successful, as it is also the most dastardly, of private aggrandizement for private purposes.

The history of its first 30 or 40 years after the independence of the colonies, is one of unprecedented plunder. Right and left it stole property. "Cursed be he who removes his neighbor's landmarks" was a Biblical warning that it recked little. Widows, orphans, the aged, it mattered not who, they were dispossessed by the scores, by pure brute force, backed by the dilatoriness of civil procedure, and the lack of funds on the part of those whom it spoiled to prosecute their cases in the courts.

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But moving upon these lines, it threatened to break its own back. By the laws of the State the amount of property and revenue it was entitled to enjoy was limited. It exceeded that limit. One of two courses then lay before it. Either to put the brakes on its mad scramble for more acres, and stop its plundering tactics; or to go right on, and by bribery and corruption keep the authorities from declaring its charter forfeited, and seizing for the people of the State the vast property it had acquired and the vaster property it meant to grab. It took the latter course. Since that day to this the Trinity Church Corporation has become the owner and manipulator of the largest corruption fund wielded in this State. Without the connivance of scores of officials, on the bench and elsewhere, it could not survive one single session of the Legislature. The immense revenues it draws in violation of law are used to befoul the law still more by corrupting the officers of the State into an attitude of silence. By such means it has gained immunity from punishment, and secured fruition of its stolen property.

Nor is this all. Apart from the fact of the moral pestilence it spreads by the example of successful robbery, and corruption to protect robbery, a large portion of its revenues comes from, and in that way serves to protect, immoral sources. There are more houses of prostitution; more low, dangerous rum-holes; more gambling dens; the Sunday law is more flagrantly violated upon the estate of the Trinity Church Corporation than upon that of any other landlord in this city. And furthermore the Trinity Church Corporation tenement houses, inhabited by thousands of working people, are of the filthiest, ricketiest and most disgraceful in existence.

This, in short, is the history and character of the Corporation under whose roof you are to preach on behalf of labor. Every stone of the edifice in which you will stand is saturated with a crime against conscience. It should need no great effort on your part to hear, through its fretted vaults, the moans of thousands of human beings, the poor, laboring people, whose property and

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hard-earned pennies were squeezed out of them to satisfy that vampire Corporation in its lust for wealth, with which to support a crowd of worthless Philistines, and to hush up the voice of the Law.

Yours is a rare opportunity, Right Reverend Sir. The Master whose cross, one should think from your profession, you bear, scourged the money lenders and speculators out of the temple of His Father. Will you not prove His disciple and do as much for Him?

You cannot promote morality and, by that much, the cause of Labor in a better way than to boldly tear the mask from that Pharisaic institution, and on its own premises expose it to the world. The cause of Labor cannot be advanced by pretty, hollow phrases; it can be advanced only by bold, plain language, and straightforward manly deeds.

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