

The Mission of Laymen

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THE New Testament likes laymen. It knows nothing of that unique dignity and supernatural authority of the clergymen which have been the curse of the Christian world. The Church on the day of Pentecost was a democracy. From the days of Moses onward the deepest wish of Israel had been, "Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his spirit upon them." Prophecy at its highest had dared to say that such a time was coming. Peter in his opening sermon declared that the dreams and prophecies of the ages were at last fulfilled. God had indeed poured out his spirit upon all flesh—upon women as well as men, upon the young as well as upon the old. All were prophets. All spoke for God. Upon each head there sat a tongue of fire. They were all filled with the Holy Ghost. The greatest word in the Book of Acts is "all." All were baptized; all spoke; all prayed; all spread abroad the good tidings; all participated in public worship; all exercised authority in Church government; all were thrilled by the rapture of a great love, ennobled by the weight of a great responsibility, and zealous in the performance of a great task. The Apostolic Church was mighty because it was a brotherhood, and all believers had all things common.

But into this new Garden of Eden a serpent crawled—ecclesiastical ambition. By slow advance the clergy encroached upon the rights of the laity, crowding laymen from the position given them by the Lord. The Church of God ceased to be a brotherhood. It became a monarchy, with rulers and subjects. All authority passed little by little into the hands of the clergy. With the growth of the hierarchy the power and the glory of the Church of the Apostles vanished. The dark ages in which the hierarchy was supreme.

The Reformation in the sixteenth century was a triumph of laymen. Martin Luther could have done nothing had it not been for the laity of Germany. In England the head of the Reformation was a layman. It was largely by the energy of laymen that the English Church was reconstructed; and it was by the laymen of Cromwell's army that the Stuart despotism was crushed, and the history of political liberty was opened. The great event of the sixteenth century was the rise of the laity in the Christian Church. Modern history began when the laity resumed their rightful place in public worship. For a thousand years they had simply assisted at rites wrought for them by priestly hands. A new day dawned when "the people were called into the chancel," and public worship became a common prayer of the whole body of worshippers. The Book of Common Prayer is the monument of an immortal triumph. As soon as the Mass, which is a sacrifice wrought through priestly intervention, was superseded by the "communion service," laymen once more enjoyed the privilege which belonged to them in apostolic days, and tasted anew the blessedness of Christian fellowship. The stream of centuries was turned out of its channel by allowing laymen their New Testament rights as worshippers.

But the world awaits a new reformation. The Church to-day is not yet apostolic. It limps and halts. In the midst of vast opportunities it stands impotent and bewildered. Hundreds of ministers are sick at heart. Many of them have grown pessimistic. Occasionally one of them drifts into infidelity. The majority of them are discouraged. It would be a revelation to the world should clergymen speak out plainly what they know and suffer.

We shall never get out of the ditch until laymen realize that they also are successors of the apostles. They stand in the line of a great succession. They are called to be kings and priests unto God. The trouble now is that laymen in large numbers are not in the Church. Their names are in the Church book, but they themselves are not in the Church. Some of them are in their business, and others in their lodge, but too few of them are in the Church. No man is in the Church whose heart and mind are not in it. The Church is hungering for the thought and affection of her men. There is enough brain-power in every Church to solve all its problems if this brain-power were utilized. The problems will never be settled so

long as men think that paying their pew rent satisfies all the legitimate claims which organized Christianity makes upon them. The great need of the Church is not money, but life. With new volumes of mental and spiritual energy, money would flow in like a mighty stream. Laymen have won their rights as worshippers, they have not yet accepted their privileges as workers. This is the next step in the world's redemption.

According to the New Testament every Christian is a herald, a pastor, a missionary. Every follower of Christ is ordered into the vineyard. Unless he takes up his cross daily, he does not belong to Christ. But this is a page of the New Testament little heeded. "The fields are white unto the harvest, but the laborers are few." The minister goes into the field, and the majority of his people go somewhere else. This, in a sentence, is the running sore of Christendom. Why are churches half empty? Laymen do not work to fill them. Why are deficits so universal? Laymen do not plan to abolish them. Why does the Church make so few converts? Laymen do not talk on the subject of religion. Why does Church life flow in such feeble streams? Laymen do not pour their life into it.

The baptism for which the Church is waiting is the baptism of larger knowledge. We do not seem to know the things which belong unto peace. They are hid from our eyes. We do not comprehend what this means: "One is your Master, and all ye are brethren."

We stumble over this: "As my Father have sent me, even



ORILLIA METHODIST CHURCH

Decorations for the Toronto Conference Epworth League Convention, Oct. 16 and 17. The gentleman on the left is Rev. J. J. Ferguson, Pastor of the Church; the one on the right is Rev. S. T. Bartlett, Associate General Secretary of Epworth Leagues and Sunday Schools.

so send I you." We forget to whom this is spoken: "Go and make disciples of all nations."

We cannot say with Paul: "I rejoice in my sufferings, and fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ," because we do not realize that we, laymen as well as clergymen, are called to be "laborers together with God." And yet, it is a faithful saying: "For if we be dead with Him, we shall also live with Him. If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him."—From "Talks with Earnest People."