

What's Wrong With The Church

By C. O. SMALL

In my article of last week, I emphasized the point that the pulpit has become too often a bulletin board on which the reform agencies can tack any kind of placard. Blunder number two might be: "The pulpit has allowed itself unconsciously to be a place for the dissemination of too much propaganda." For outside organizations get out pamphlets and books and put these in the hands of the ministry and almost compel them to instruct the people from the church what should be done. An appeal is made to the pulpit to take part in politics, by declaring for this or that thing; it may be the making of certain kinds of laws, or an appeal for certain candidates who will make some particular legislation. None of this is the gospel and can never save a soul. Imagine Christ going before a law-making body to influence some legislation, or going into a synagogue to hang a crowd on the evils of divorce! You might as well imagine the great preacher, Dr. Talmage, dressed in tights doing a trapeze performance in Barnum and Bailey's circus. Twice recently, I have read of a newly appointed judge going into the pulpit on the Sabbath, each time delivering a lecture on the liquor traffic or prohibition. I presume the choir sang, "Come, All Ye Who Thirst."

Here is blunder Number Three: "The church has almost forgotten how to uplift humanity by teaching men to love righteousness and have strength to leave off unrighteousness." Very distinctly, do we recall that not so long ago the church had certain organizations to teach people the moral wrong of intemperance. They made fine headway, too. Then came along some men who sneered at the idea of making people better except by legislation. They jeered the church for what it was doing. Now the same people come back to the church and say that they are unable to do a thing without the aid of the church. The law in men's hearts is worth more than all published statutes. Law has never been half as effectual as we believe it has been. Both good men and bad men care but little about laws. This constant haggling about teaching the people to obey the laws has never fallen kindly on listening ears. You who know the history of Judea know there was a time when law completely collapsed among the Jews; you know there was a certain great man among them, a prophet, who proclaimed God's law as the only remedy, and that law written upon their hearts would alone bring a reform. Just how long the pulpit will tolerate these things, we know not, but it becomes the cat's paw for repeated propaganda, it will surely awake sometime to find that while the good man slept, thieves stole his goods.

These three major blunders can be expunged at any time the church puts the gospel head and shoulders above outside activities. If I am not mistaken, our Episcopal friends have kept themselves pretty free from these enumerated outside affairs; they have kept the house of God with a sacredness that can help impress even less devout people. And so I will pass to some other things too overt to be ignored entirely.

This controversy between the Fundamentalists and Modernists has driven a wedge into our Protestant churches, and the cleavage will continue to widen. The Catholic church since it accepts as infallible the precepts of the papacy, may gain those who are among the dissatisfied elements of this controversy. But just why organic evolution or any other scientific discovery should be a disturbing element in the hearts of men, is more than I can see. To accept or reject the theory can not possibly make a scintilla of difference with the principles of Christianity. How long man has been in the world, or how he got here is no concern of ours. Huxley, a contemporary of Darwin, said that the theory would certainly upset some things in religion. The inquiring mind will sooner or later come to the truth. God has never receded because men have investigated, or science advanced. Christ invited investigation. Superstition has wrought havoc thru the ages, and the church and the world have suffered too much and too long because of it. Science has saved millions from the grave; it has fed the hungry and clothed the naked; and it has made the few days we live here a little more comfortable for us. Long ago did I determine to drive superstition from my mind as long as it was possible for me to do so.

Some charge that the ministry is not strong. Perhaps this is true, but the average congregation may be far weaker. Not every church audience has much desire to do any real serious thinking for itself. Once I heard Sam Jones say that no one would use a cannon to shoot snowbirds with. A real scholarly sermon might not have altogether an awakening effect. However, salvation depends not alone upon intelligence, and some of our best men do not belong to the literati. A man must feel what he preaches, for no man can preach the gospel who does not feel the gospel. No man can teach history who does not feel history.

Too many congregations are, perhaps, looking for "good mixers" and "go-getters," and those who can put across an interesting Sunday night program to get the young folk out. Now, when you hear such, isn't it a plain admission that the minister is not intellectually able to make any impress upon that part of the people who do think, and upon these who appreciate intellectual guidance. A man may be ever so good, yet have little wisdom with it. Goodness is one thing and wisdom another thing. Goodness and intelligence are not

always handmaidens. The word a "good mixer" is flubdubbery, pure and simple. Wouldn't it be funny, indeed, to hear Paul spoken of as a "go-getter?" Some charge that we do not see beautiful and dignified services in many of our churches. There is an element of truth here. The music may be a little jazzy. That is too often true. Often have I heard many fine quotations from literature and poetry to illustrate some fine ideal. Is this passing away too? They may not be the gospel, but they do stand for an ideal. And isn't Christianity an ideal? Not long ago, I heard a minister attempt, with utter failure, to produce some things from literature. Another I heard deflect long enough to berate some candidates for the presidency. This is rather repellent to people who know.

Perhaps, another dose of poison which the church swallowed unconsciously, was the acceptance of large gifts and donations from men of predatory wealth. No man can atone for his robbery of this by hiding it under the dome of God's temple. Well, can we recall how the good Dr. Gadsden refused to accept the gifts of Rockefeller, and how he warned the church by saying that such money would sometime prove a cataclysm of ruin to the church. Now, nothing is refused, no matter where it comes from. Some tobacco magnate, who has reaped his millions from the honest sweat of those who labored in penury, may donate his millions to churches, hospitals, or schools, but the very structures themselves will cry aloud for judgment. The mills of the gods grind slow but they grind sure and fine.

Again, this mad rush for finer churches is a mad race indeed. This thing of outdoing the other person is a hectic strife. The peoples' minds are turned from righteousness to the competitive side, while spirituality takes care of itself as best it can. Let the stranger go into a town or community, and the people point out to him with equal pride their churches, saying come and see, what beautiful churches we have; but, do they ever say, "Come, and see how good we are." There may be just about as much resemblance between many a church and the manager of Bethlehem as there is between a French peasant's cottage and Notre Dame Cathedral. Generally speaking, when men are rich, God's kingdom is poor; when men are poor, God's kingdom is rich. The man of Galilee made his parsonage right up among the poor and distressed; he talked with them; he ate with them. The poor man will be mighty slow to walk down carpeted aisles on Sunday morning, when all the week he walks on bare boards and sits on a stool. How nice it would be to build the parsonage up among the workers in the factories or the mines! While Daniel Webster was Secretary of state, he was encouraged to attend the church of the elite in Washington, but refused by saying, "Let me go out yonder to that little church where I can

hear about Daniel Webster, the sinner, instead of Daniel Webster, the statesman."

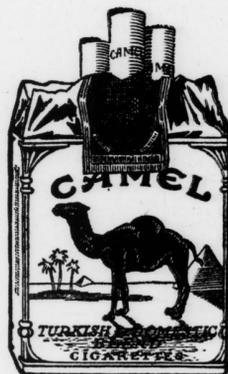
The world today stands aghast! It is a glorious time to live for men who think, and never was anything in more demand. The first Age of Expression has passed away. The Second Age of Expression has come; not, however to expression of all,

for the masses sweep on just as the crowd goes on. There once lived in Holland a man who wrote a little book called Imitation of Christ; it was translated into all languages; it reformed the clergy and the church, but the reform did not last. The first age of expression had come. The crowd heedlessly swept on. In a little while all Europe was array-

ed against itself. Something had gone wrong, and thereby hangs a tale.

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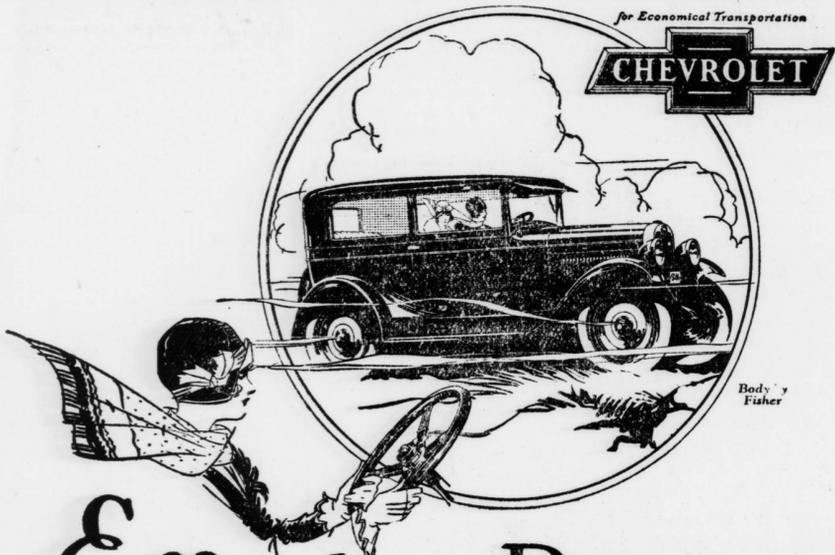


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