Minister Defends The 'Pink' People Called Methodists

Looks At Methodists And At Critics and Votes For Methodists

A prominent minister, Rev. W. W. Finlator, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Elizabeth City, had an interesting article in the Biblical Recorder telling how he looked at the Methodists, then looked at Methodism's critics, and then gave a resounding vote of confidence in favor of the Methodists. The article, reprinted in the N. C. Christian Advocate, reads:

The Methodists took rough sledding in the February Reader's Digest. Ttanley High, one of the Digest. Stanley High, one of the ed an article in this issue entitled "Methodism's Pink Fringe" in which he arraigns the Methodist Federation for Social Action for its apparent un-Americanism. This organization of some 5,800 Methodist leaders would seem the tail wagging America's largest Protestant sect into an unmistakable ism, and Mr. High is right in there to expose it. Of course he does not make his accusation in so many words, but by the familiar methods of sly innuendo and guilt-by-association and lifting quotations out of their contexts he holds up the suspicion such leaders of American Methodism as Bishop Robert N. Brooks, Rev. Jack McMichael, Dr. Walter G. Muelder and Dr. Jerome Davis. The article is buttressed with the gratuitous information that Mr. High is the son of a Methodist minister.

For those who wish further to ferret out the dangerous parsons regarded as poor loyalty risks the best is yet to be. John T. Flynn provides this opportunity in his book, "The Road Ahead," which is given ample condensation in the same Digest issue. Many reader will agree with Reinhold Niebuhr that Mr. Flynn's previous claims to fame consist primarily in books on the Roosevelt era in which his judgements and conclusions are colored by his venom for the wartime President. Forsaking its traditional makeup in which a back seat is reserved for book condensations, the Reader's Digest launches its February issue with "The Road Ahead," introducing it with blurbs by friendly critics (or quotations from critics made to seem friendly) and giving at the end prices for reprints up to 1,000. Neat job of salesmanship. In this highly touted book Mr. Flynn has a chapter which, graciously, does not appear in the condensation, under the heading "The Kingdom of God," and which turns out to be an out-and-out attack on the Federal Council of Churches. In his fervor and zeal Mr. Flynn seems not to scruple over the reliability and source of the information he serves up, for we find him attributing a statement to the social creed of the Federal Council which in fact is non-existent; and he borrows from the book "The Rise of the Tyrant" by Carl McIntyre, an unfrocked Presbyterian minister with feelings toward the Federal Council that may be described as pathological. Mr. McIntyre is the leader of a small rival council known as The American Council of Christian Churches. After asserting that many of the most powerful men in the Federal Council were using its machinery and directing its affairs in the interest of the creeping socialistic revolution in America, Mr. Flynn undertakes the grim business of singling out the ring leaders.

Methodist are by now used to having their famous Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam attacked since he is generally regarded as the spokesman for American Protestantism, but to behold in print the suggestion of the Bishop a Communist or a Communist fellow traveler is hard to stomach. Mr. Flynn is careless enough to name Bishop Oxnam chairman of the policy committe of the Federal Council which is, of course, wrong since the Bishop not only does not hold this office but there is no such office in the Federal Council. But no matter; Mr. Flynn is careless, period.

The spiritual children of Dr. E. Stanley Jones will be shocked to learn that the Federal Council has been sending out their 20th century prophet to preach the glories of "Red Christianity," but they must take it on the authority of the indefatigable Flynn. Incidentally the title of the chapter, 'The Kingdom of God,' is a phrase given fresh breath of life and meaning by Dr. Jones for whom it means, according to Mr. Flynn, just pure socialism. In this chapter Dr. Jerome Davis come in for his share of the dressing down, [illegible] Protestant clergymen such as Dr. John Bennett and Dr. J. Henry Carpenter, but it is enough to say that the poor Methodists are hit the hardists. It is interesting to observe, however, that Mr. Flynn is strangely silent on the courageous social statements by the Roman Catholic Church in America and indicts not a one of her social-minded hierarchy. This is prehaps understandable since he himself comes of a Roman Catholic background, as is also the case of the publishing firm which put out the book.

One is tempted to dwell a moment upon the Reader's Digest itself which in fact is no longer the digest of current literature it once was but a journal about as doctrinaire and slanted as Time or Fortune, with a definite editorial policy and a staff of contributing editors of its own. It must be painful indeed for these editors of a journal of rugged individualism to remember that their chief last year sent an emissary to Congress to protest that if Uncle Sam's Post Office really charged the Digest what it cost to deliver the magazine, the publication would lose a million dollars a year and soon fold up. The Digest was paving her "road ahead" with a neat government subsidy.

But to the main purpose. I am a minister in the Southern Baptist Convention and certainly Methodists don't need Baptists to defend them. Yet it so happened that I was studying the life of John Wesley and the history of early Methodism about the time this February issue came out. Not having the political or economic axe of the Digest to grind nor yet having subscribed to the Methodist Articles of Faith, I may be permitted a word (which I will not say is completely without bias). And I contend that the very men arraigned and held up to suspicion by Messrs. High and Flynn are in the true apostolic succession of Methodism and pari passu, in the best tradition of Americanism.

John Wesley did not recruit his followers from the ranks of the British aristocracy and privileged classes. He went to the mines, mills and the slumbs where his simple, direct preaching strangely warmed many, many hearts. It was the common people who heard him gladly. From these forgotten masses Wesley chose and developed his lay preachers when the Established Church would furnish him with none. And from these lay preachers came, later on, leadership for the British Labor Party, providing this party with a moral substratum unfortunately not always in evidence in the American labor movement. Let Mr. Flynn and Mr. High ponder this. And let Methodists in this country who have prospered like the green bay tree look to the rock from whence they were hewn. Perhaps this is a good place to quote from The Discipline of the Methodist Church:

"The eighteenth century," wrote Woodrow Wilson, "cried out for deliverance, and God prepared John Wesley to show the world the might and blessing of his salvation." And this deliverance meant change, not the change that might be expected from any mere adjustment of political machinery, but the change that comes of moral earnestness. Such moral earnestness we find today in the hearts of our Stanley Joneses and Bishop Oxnams. If Mr. Flynn is really interested in revolutions, creeping or otherwise, let him remember that because England underwent her Wesleyan moral revolution which was reflected in every area of her being, social, political, economic, she was spared the violence of political revolutions which ravager the nations of the continent who had no Wesley might be doing the same thing for America in our day when vast areas of the world are plunged in violent revolution seems never to have occurred to the Flynns and Highs.

To them anyone who does not regard the status quo as divinely ordained has a "pink fringe." They make no distinction between a commitment to a form of socialism as an economic way of life and, on the other hand, a social concern for the welfare of others which every true Christian must have.

We know their game. We won't be taken in. They are out to discredit the prophets in the eyes of the rank and file church members. They are out to silence every voice and smash every pen that is not exercised in praise and adoration of the existing order of things. To them have been committed the oracles the orthodoxy and with the oracles the authority and commission of heresy hunting. And wherever they look they see pink.

According to the North Carolina Christian Advocate, however, there is a fringe that should concern us. "This fringe is not pink, but gray. It is made up of people who fail to sense the urgency of these times, who cannot feel the quickening heartbeat of an awakening humanity, who close their eyes and ears to the hunger and tragedy of millions of their brothers in other lands, who refuse justice and mercy in their relations with their fellow man. Methodism does not need yet to be alarmed about its pink fringe.

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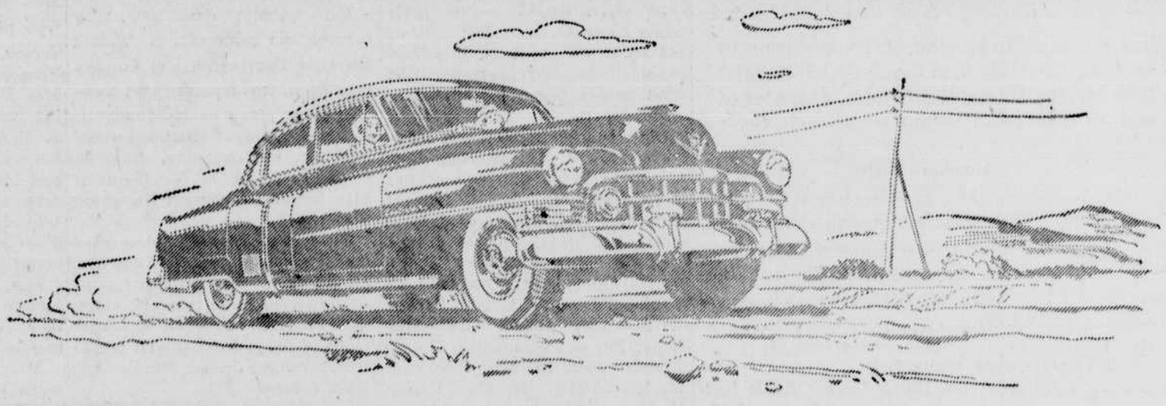

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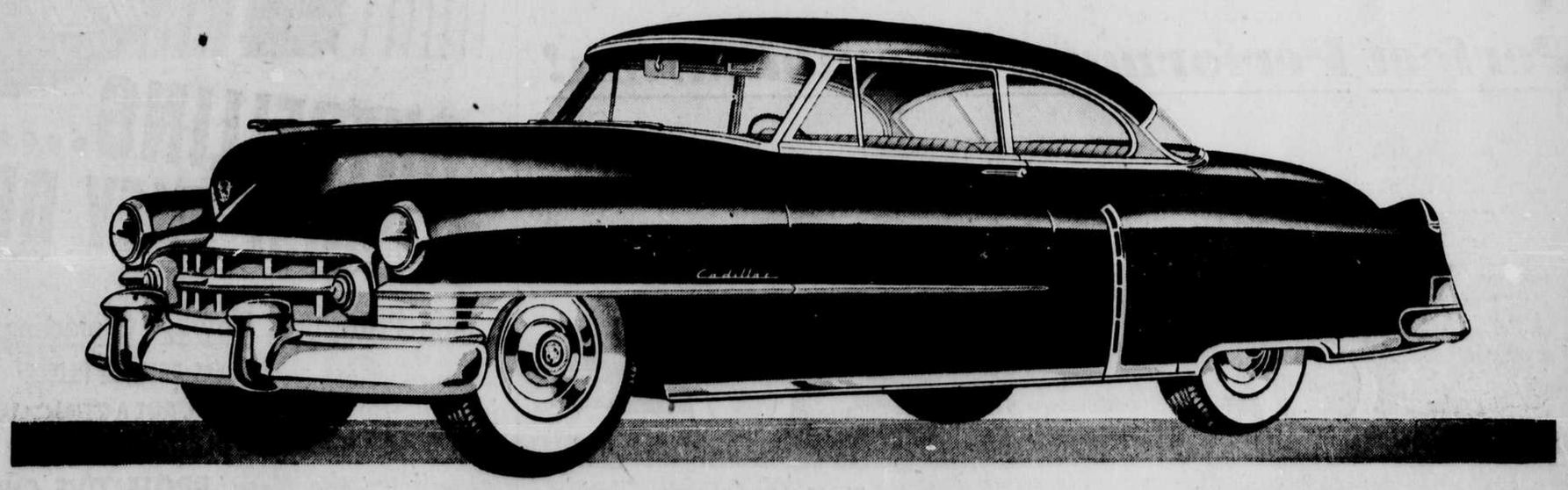

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