

Does This Description Fit Your Church's Case?

In the Canadian Courier, recently Rev. Salem D. Bland, one of Canada's most noted ministers, gave a vitally interesting article on "The Church Keeps Out of Danger." Dr. Bland is pastor of the Broadway Methodist Church, Toronto. The Church today, he says, is "patronized by the rich, despised by the poor, and loved by neither." His article deals with the condition of church life in both the United States and Canada, and is well worth reading. It is as follows:

Never was the Christian Church in appearance so strong as today. Never was it relatively to its possibilities in reality so weak. So weak is it, that many who seem to think themselves advanced by the automobile, they point to the lessening congregations, as automobiles increase and roads improve, from the opening of spring to the last autumn Sunday becomes increasingly a day for motor trips. Church services suffer correspondingly. When the weather becomes hot or cold in the fall, church-going does not always take its old place. It was largely a habit, and habits once broken are not easily resumed. Automobiles in all probability will become much cheaper. They may become an appendage of practically almost every home. When then will become of the church? It would be an extraordinary thing if the religion which the whole might of the Roman Empire vainly tried to suppress, the religion which tortures and flames the millions of sympathizers only served to nourish and extend, should at last die at the hands of a machine.

Three things—guidance, inspiration, fellowship. In regard to every one of these points the Christian Church has fallen down. Not wholly but generally. The century from 1850 to 1950, will, it is probable, bear the distinction of being identified with the most profound and extensive transformation of human life so far undergone in the same space of time. Ever men needed guidance. It has been during the period, to all who love the church and believe in her divine mission, a matter of deep shame and deep grief to give. In the great transformation there have been three main phases. There was, first, the birth of modern science, especially of the idea of evolution, the most fruitful idea probably ever flung into the field of thought, and the revolution which evolutionary science has wrought in our conceptions of the origin and history of our race. Blind, desperate hostility was the almost universal attitude of the Church to the new conceptions. All science and thought was hard fought and won. Meanwhile our colleges had been strewn for a generation with the wreckage of those who the Church had falsely compelled to choose between religious faith and intellectual integrity, and who had, and not honorably, chosen to retain the latter.

The second phase was the recognition of the traditional Biblical and theological ideas which the scientific method compelled. Here again the Church, officially at least, made the transition as difficult and dangerous as she could. The proved way, via crucis—the way of the cross is the way of the light. In the struggle for a scientific theology the open minded ones found the way of light to be the way of the cross.

And now storms of most dangerous and difficult of all, the phase is upon us. It is the economic and social revolution. What guidance has the Church given, what preparedness of spirit to meet this tremendous testing? Until within the last five years very little. Individuals here and there have led up the good. The Church officials and in overwhelming majorities has counted them faddists or notoriety hunters. She has not made members in the organized churches too uncomfortable for them to keep, she has put upon them the stigma of unsafe and kept them out of leading pulpits and official positions. She has left it to outsiders, socialists and single taxers, who were often, indeed, outsiders, not of choice, but of necessity, to force upon the lay or thoughtless public the ideas which are destined to dominate the new age.

Referring more especially to the situation in Canada during the last quarter of a century, we have to acknowledge the serious fortunes of that great protest. The Church made no such quick period. What condemnation has she passed on the men who have stolen millions from the poor by watered stock or by practical frauds? What opposition did the Church offer to the gigantic gambles, hell into which Canada was turned during the first twelve years of this century? In what word, what sense has she quickened in her members that a transaction ethical, unjustifiable is no more legitimate to a Church member than a deal that might land him in the penitentiary?

But after all a high degree of technical knowledge is not always necessary for the most vital questions. The bigger the question and the more vitally it affects human well-being the more ethical it is. The more knowledge, of course, the better, but a keen sense of justice and a high and unbending courage count for much more. Moreover, the minister of not an expert, can have an opinion of experts. Our judges and jurists are not experts in all the questions that they have to adjudicate. But, this may be said, the Christian Church has no future except as her ministers and assemblies grapple fearlessly and in the highest Christian spirit with the social of which would seem to be the special task, divinely committed to it, of the next quarter of a century. Of inspiration and fellowship no hard task. She has ministered and economic problems, the solution space permits me to say only this, that the Church has failed to inspire, because she has set her people infinite consolation to the sad and the sick. She has sustained nobly the spirit of the people during the long strain of the war. Such a ministry has not been dangerous. She has not antagonized vested interests nor made men unrighteously rich, un-

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