

SHOULD PRINEVILLE CHURCHES BE UNITED?

REV. VAN NUYS PUTS ISSUE SQUARELY TO PEOPLE

COUNTRY DISTRICTS NEGLECTED

Says Differences Between Doctrines Is All a Myth—Is Not Christian Spirit

Will the churches of Prineville take the medicine of cooperative effort and brotherly love which they have been mixing for others since the issue is put squarely to them by one of their own ministers?

Rev. W. L. Van Nuy's of the Presbyterian congregation forced the issue in his sermon Sunday morning as follows:

As we are met here in this little company for the worship of God, there are six other similar services going on in our little town. There will be three additional services at an identical hour this evening. There are eight ordained ministers of the Gospel conducting these meetings. Two of them are special and distinguished visitors with messages of importance for the entire community. But because of the insistence of the claims of individual organizations these messages can be heard by only a portion of the people.

While we are holding ten services here in town today, the country about Prineville is untouched except by small afternoon meetings near town or weak Bible schools maintained by a few faithful souls whose love for the Word of God cannot be destroyed by the selfishness of the churches or the indifference of the world about them. There are about sixteen hundred people in Prineville and we shall reach today in our ten services perhaps less than half of them. In Crook County, outside of Prineville, there are over two thousand people with almost no religious care. Last Sunday we held a memorial service for one of our

boys whose life was given as a sacrifice in our great war. We did well to seek to lift the community here to the levels of patriotism and devotion to which such sacrifices point us. And it prepared our hearts in a measure for other sacrifices that will be made and for sorrows that will come much closer to many of the homes of Prineville. We would have been glad if the entire family and circle of intimate friends of Elmer Houston could have been with us in that service. But they were forty miles away, many of them, and the roads were almost impassable. Did we make any effort to hold a memorial service there among his friends and neighbors? They need the consolations of religion more than we needed them. They needed just as much as we the visions that teach us that such sacrifices are worth while, the visions that reconcile the heart to its sorrow.

The shame of our selfishness is deepened when we consider the fact that we are working as religious organizations along lines that are so nearly parallel. If you were a stranger to the voices of the men who are preaching in Prineville this morning and you were led blindfolded into almost any one of these services, I venture a guess that however familiar you may be with the teachings and spirit of your own church, you could not tell from the sermon, prayers or songs what church you were in. We are holding up the same Saviour as the hope of the world, and in almost identical terms—absolutely identical in the majority of cases. We teach the same principles of Christian living in almost every detail. Point to the same source of strength for the weak and tempted man, the same Comforter in sorrow. You cannot tell from a man's life as a Christian, whether he is governed by a Bishop, Priest, his Congregation, or is his own boss. The effect of his baptism does not remain on him in any way that will enable you to distinguish the next day whether he was immersed three times, or once, in running water or in a comfortable pool, whether water has been poured on him or merely sprinkled. And the great majority of the other distinctions that divide the church of today are as futile when tested by their effects in life. And the Master's word is: "By their fruits ye shall know them."

A further question that rises like a mountain before us is this: When the world is afire as it is today, and all the strength and wisdom of every

individual is called out to stay the destruction, when we are asked to produce as much food as we can and to use it as sparingly as possible, to invest our earnings in funds for the aid of our government and for the relief of suffering, when every man is confronted as never before with the question as to where his life will count for most in the great causes of the hour, are we expending our religious resources of money and men wisely? The money that is spent in Prineville to maintain these separate religious institutions would support two churches in the town, provide the necessary assistance to enable the country around us to have the entire services of a competent minister, and support a representative of Crook County among the soldiers in the name of the splendid boys we have sent to the front.

Friends, I have come to the point when I can no longer maintain my self respect as a man, my clear conscience as a patriotic citizen, or as a Christian and be a silent participant in such waste. We all love our church, I hope. If we don't we ought to get out of it. To me the Presbyterian church represents in its various teachings and practices the truth of the Bible as I understand it. But the things that are peculiar to the Presbyterian church are not worth separate maintenance in such hours as these. We all believe that great good would be accomplished if greater unity could be brought about. But the trouble is we are selfish in the type of unity we approve. We love to think of the day when the "lion and the lamb shall lie down together," but when our thought is unfolded it is that the lamb shall be inside the lion. We say "church union is all right when it means a union of all the rest with my church." That is inexcusable arrogance and sinful selfishness. No man can claim a patent on the whole truth of God. There is truth that has been wonderfully blessed in God's providence to the good of thousands of lives in the peculiar views and understanding of every church division. The great Church Universal is the richer for the emphasis put on these several phases of truth by the separate divisions. But in such communities as this and especially in such hours as this, we must work for the larger good. A continued selfish and narrow life means the doom of the church. God will set it aside for some other form of organization that will meet the larger need. The world is drawing near a crisis not unlike that which confronted the Jews when Jesus came. They refused to receive Him. Their sectarian selfishness and pride in ecclesiastical institutions blinded their eyes to the Lord of Glory. In new and more glorious form the Lord will work among men tomorrow. Just what that form may be we cannot know till the morrow comes. But it is surely not a time for us to confine our interest and center all our effort on that little section of his church which we call our own. We cannot be justified in limiting the sending forth of the message of His saving grace and love to every corner where it is needed today. And we are limiting that work when we insist on keeping such a state of things going on as we find here in Prineville and in hundreds of other similar communities in this land today.

In the past we have thought perhaps of these things and have gone no farther, saying, as some men said about the liquor traffic, it is an evil, but necessary. We cannot cure it. Men indulged in their own selfish church preference a little as some sold liquor saying, "men will do it anyhow, I might as well have the money as the other fellow." But the time has come for action. I do not want to dictate your course or influence you to a sacrifice to which your heart and mind cannot gladly consent. Think it over. Perhaps this will open the way. Let the Presbyterian congregation in Prineville appoint a committee and adopt a resolution saying that "this committee is empowered to enter into negotiations with a similar committee from any other religious organization for the purpose of more effectively ministering to the religious needs of Crook county and conserving our religious funds and forces." I have deeply enjoyed the cooperation and Christian fellowship of the church here. The friendship and good will of very many outside the church is thoroughly appreciated. The work in the country has been perhaps the greatest joy of all. But no man, unless he is an exceptional giant in strength, is able to carry on the work in both city and country as it should be done. Experience will soon teach anyone that lesson. And I am ready, whenever my resignation would open the way for any union of the Christian forces of this city, and a better care for the scattered country communities, to place my resignation from this pastorate in your hands. I shall do all in my power to bring about such a

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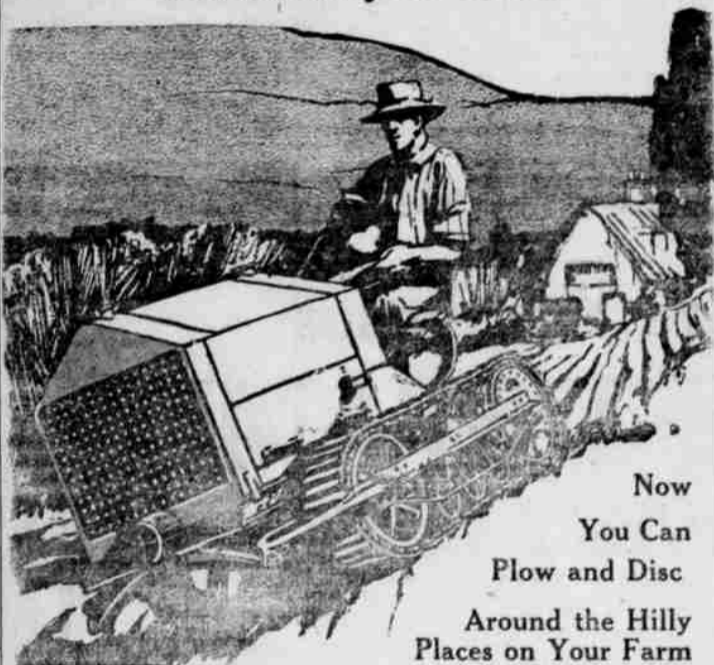
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