

THIS MAN-MADE RELIGION

By Rev. W. E. Smith.

The religion of a majority of Church members today is a man-made affair. The supernatural is eliminated, and the Word of God has little place in the heart and life of the individual.

The authority of the Bible is being discredited by many of the preachers, who place the supreme authority of religion in the divine life that dwells in the individual. This means that every one can receive or reject as much of the Bible as he chooses and still be a Christian. He brings the Word of God to the touch stone of his superior judgment.

Those who wish to get away from a supernatural religion that brings a glorious consciousness of God to the human heart, must first invalidate the Scriptures. When they make themselves believe that these were written by men who were influenced by all the ignorance, prejudice and narrow vision of their day, they can finally regard with indifference their standard of doctrine and christian experience.

These men with the new vision will tell us they ardently believe in Christ, the Christ of the synoptic gospels; but they repudiate the Christ of Paul, and give that great apostle no place in their theology. Why is this? Because they want to emphasize a christianity of Doing and not a christianity of Being. They are forever telling us, do, do, do! "Jesus went about doing good," and they think any unregenerate that flings himself into social service or the work of moral reform is following in the footsteps of the man of Galilee. But Paul's teaching and that of Jesus was, we must be before we can render acceptable service to God. The practice of all the moralities and the enthusiastic advancement of all moral reforms and humanitarian enterprises count for little with God unless they have back of them a motive that has been created and purified by the regenerating and sanctifying power of grace. Many who clothe themselves in the sheepskin of so-called religious service are the ravening wolves who antagonize and endeavour to destroy everything that makes christianity a supernatural religion and differentiates it from a heathen philosophy.

There has ever been a tendency of spiritual movements to degenerate into materialistic activities. There may be some relation between soap, soap and salvation, but it is a sad thing when salvation has to take a subordinate position, and the soap is the only hot thing found in the place, and there is more said about soap and sanitation than there is said about the blood that cleanseth from sin.

The cry today is for the church to come down from the mountain of spiritual vision and minister to men. Sad to say in many places she has come down, but is failing to fulfill her divinely appointed task of making God real to the world.

Such attempts have always failed. A great denomination over the sea, thought to reach the multitudes by building great central halls that would minister to the social as well as the religious life of the people. These great plants have called for the ministry of the ablest men of the denomination. Amusements, intellectual and

physical pursuits go hand and hand with the church enterprise. In fact are part of it. It looks splendid on paper. It looks attractive as a concrete example of Christian statesmanship and enterprise. And yet the last years have witnessed a most appalling decline in the membership of that denomination and a corresponding depletion of its Sunday School ranks.

It seems as though the world will take all the amusement and entertainment the church will give and still refuse to be caught that way. Worldlings do not flock so readily into the churches that pull down all the bars and are willing to let anybody join who is respectable enough to keep out of jail. The Universalists and Unitarian churches have made amazingly slow progress notwithstanding they have for years been practising the methods the so-called orthodox churches are adopting today. I see by articles in the organs of these liberal churches, they glory in the fact that all the churches are following the path they have blazed. "They deify humanity and humanize deity." Theirs is altogether a salvation by works and by character. Epochal experiences are delusive, and revivals are but the spent force of superstition and emotionalism that belong to the ignorance of a by-gone day. The late war has done much to strengthen such teaching. The soldiers for the most part were not taught "Ye must be born again." They had received a new vision and a new life in responding to their country's call. To die in such a holy war meant glory. Chaplains were commissioned all the way from Christian Scientist up to Roman Catholic, and one was as good as another. These chaplains are coming back to tell the churches they must make a programme that will attract the brave boys. On the battle field they got a new revelation of God. They are longing for reality. I don't know what that reality is but I feel sure the theatre, cards, cigarettes and all forms of physical exhilaration are prominent. It seems that it was more an act of devotion for a chaplain to put a cigarette into the mouth of a wounded soldier than it was to offer a prayer for the salvation of his soul.

One great D. D. tells us we must not preach our doubts to the boys. Well, we confess merely preaching doubts is a poor kind of preaching. But we must make plain the fact that even though a young man served his country overseas that does not make him a child of God.

It will be a great wonder if the men who served as chaplains have escaped the moral deterioration that must arise by being carried along by a great machine and compelled to keep silent on many things that must have called for protest. At any rate if they wish to make the church move along the same line that religion moved in the army all denominational differences will be abolished. Jew, Mohammedan and Christian will see eye to eye. It will all be a religion of service, on the ground that we are all good children of God, and we can interpret the Bible as we like. We may leave out the new Testament altogether, or we may accept the Koran as our guide and be assured we are on the way to the happy hunting ground the Indians longed for. Oh, how terrible is the blindness that follows the failure to know and magnify a Holy

Ghost salvation. It puts religion wholly in the realm of creaturely activities that can be performed without a particle of grace. And the more such works are performed the prouder and more self-sufficient the devotees become. It is man saving himself by his own good work, instead of receiving the salvation that alone can come through the merits of a crucified Jesus. Let such a movement go on steadily for many years and this country will become as rationalistic as Germany and no League of Nations can save it from the wrath of God.

Our only hope is that God will in answer to the prayers of those who have not been caught in this subtle delusion, break through in tremendous manifestations of his divine power; causing men to see the awfulness of sin and the reality of an all sufficient Saviour.

No man-made religion can fully satisfy the heart. The soul cries out for God. Only by the operation of the Holy Ghost can Jesus become real to the heart. Souls that get satisfied with Jesus see that God has called the church to be more than a play house or a lecture bureau. It is to be a great life-saving station to rescue men and women from sin.

A great denomination in this country has a program what calls for the raising of \$90,000,000 in five years. They will do it; an amazing tribute to the liberality of its people. One of the new schemes suggested is to abolish the little country church with its poorly paid pastor and build great central buildings that will serve for both social and religious purposes, and be under the control of a splendidly equipped leader. The thing looks fine on paper. But if the experiences of other such enterprises are any criterion we shall see the social and the amusement features kill out all the Spiritual. We must confess that the rural church is for the most part dead today. But the sad feature is that the great leaders hope by these institutional methods to build up the Kingdom of God. They will have a kingdom of meat and drink, but the true righteousness and power of the Holy Ghost will be left out. But we are told this advanced age calls for these new methods. Well, the great church that was called by God to preach holiness may pull down its flag to the methods of Unitarians but God will have a church in city and in country that still believes in the old time fire. Preaching good roads will never take the place of pointing the straight path to heaven; the hilarity of carnal amusements can never become a true substitute for the joy of the Holy Ghost; instruction in physical exercises seldom makes one a spiritual athlete ready for the life of self-denial. Money can put up buildings and men can pile up creaturely activities but without the power of the Divine Spirit no true church can exist. "Oh, Lord revive thy work."

"Cut out Pentecost, Paul, Peter and from history, and civilization would not have enough left for a rummage sale."

"The failure of the Church is due to its not having a definite aim to win a definite man to a definite Saviour at a definite time, which is now."

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