

The King's Highway

AN ADVOCATE OF SCRIPTURAL HOLINESS

VOL. XXXVIII

MONCTON, N. B., APRIL 1ST, 1959

No. 459

God's Call for Leaders

(Abridged)

By Dr. Paul Rees

Most of us, I suspect, overlook the fact that the prophets of ancient Israel were more like laymen than they were like the ordained clergy of our day. The priests of Old Testament times would come closer to resembling today's pastors, although of course there are sharp differences.

Most of the prophets with whose names we are familiar had no formal training. They were not necessarily "consecrated" or "ordained" by men. They were men from the ranks on whom God laid His hand and raised them up for a ministry to their day and their community.

Look at Amos. "I was no prophet," he tells us, "neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman and a gatherer of sycamore fruit; and the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel" (Amos 7:14, 15).

Look too at our young man Jeremiah who, though from a priestly family, was no priest. He came not from the big city of Jerusalem, but from the straggling village of Anathoth. No mature, confident man was he, but an inexperienced youth. No background of prestige or nobility was his, but one of undistinguished plainness. No man of massive mold like Elijah was he, nor of commanding eloquence like Isaiah, nor of mystical vision like Ezekiel, but rather a shy, hesitant young man, keenly aware of his limitations, longing for a love he was never to know and a sympathy he was never to experience.

It was such a man indeed who turned out to be one of Judah's noblest leaders, despite the loneliness of his career and the unpopularity of his cause.

Consider, therefore, in the light of Jeremiah's case, the possibilities of leadership that belong to any and all of us among the children of God.

Do we not need, for example, a fresh and stimulating leadership in the realm of prayer? Jeremiah gave it in his day. To him we owe one of the finest, most bracing passages ever penned on prayer: "Thus saith the Lord, the maker thereof, the Lord that formed it to establish it; the Lord is his name. Call unto me and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things which thou knowest not" (Jeremiah 33: 2, 3).

One of the most powerful spiritual awakenings ever to occur in our country's history began about 1857. It started with a gathering of business men for prayer in Fulton Street, New York City. Do you know who called that prayer meeting and gave it its first direction? — Jeremiah Lanphier, a layman! Sometime afterward another layman had occasion to make a journey from Omaha to New York. He reported that in every city of any considerable size that he visited he found a businessmen's prayer meeting.

Come down to our own times. Who started the prayer-service that is held three noon-days a week on Track Thirteen in Grand Central Station, New York?—a layman,

and he a Negro Red Cap in the employ of the New York Central Railroad!

Who gives the lead to the Breakfast Prayer Groups in Washington, as well as other cities of the Nation?—laymen! Men like Congressman Brooks Hayes of Arkansas, Congressman Walter Judd of Minnesota, and Judge Luther Youngdahl!

All this is excellent. It points the way. But it doesn't go far enough. There are masses of laymen in our churches who, because their own life of prayer is so feeble, can give no firm and fruitful lead among their own comrades. Others, who do have a grip on prayer that makes it meaningful to them should be concerned about their colleagues in the laity. They should be lending or giving books and pamphlets on prayer. They should be conferring with their lay friends about forming a prayer-cell, in which together they might learn the deeper secrets of personal and corporate prayer. They might be surprised at the lives that would be revolutionized if they would do it.

Or take a very different area of life, and one that in our day has assumed immense proportions: labor. However we may account for it, the ranks of labor today are almost completely "lost territory" so far as the Church is concerned. It is a tragedy of the first magnitude, and God only knows how far the churches themselves may be to blame for it.

It is perhaps an index of how big is the gap between Labor and Church that in some cities the central meeting place of the unions is called the "temple" and the union meetings are actually held at eleven o'clock Sunday mornings.

My point at the moment is not one of denunciation of this unhappy secularizing of the Lord's Day. My point is rather that if anything is to be done to correct this condition and to give to the labor movement in America new regard for Jesus Christ and a new appreciation of the place of the Church in the total community, the lead must come principally from Christian laymen within labor's own fold. Parsons and priests can't do it. Professional church men can't do it. But laymen, men of labor's own ranks, thoroughly committed to Jesus Christ, men of dedication, imagination, and determination, CAN do it.

Or, there is this long-neglected matter of personal witnessing for Christ on the part of laymen who have trusted Him as their Saviour. Jeremiah became a witness to the careless men of Judah in a day when false religion, sexual vice, and the corruption of citizen by citizen were rampant. "The word of the Lord came unto me," the young prophet reports, "saying, Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem."

A half dozen centuries later the Christian movement burst upon the world. Not to His apostles only but to

(Continued on Page 3)