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## THE ALIENATION OF CHURCH AND PEOPLE.

WE are living in the ebb-time of the Christian Church. The Church is ruled by dogmaticians, ecclesiastics and traditionalists. But their day is almost over. There is that profound dissatisfaction with the present state of things, that intense longing for better things, that anxious quest for something higher, that readiness to follow anyone who seems to have something new, which herald the approach of a new era.

(1) The Church has lost the confidence of the people in its ability to teach them the truth. The Church ought to be in the van of knowledge—for it is endowed with the Holy Spirit, the guide into all the truth. Theology in olden times was rightly regarded as the queen of the sciences. But theology no longer reigns, she has not kept pace with the progress of knowledge. She has pursued her own independent way. She has waged war with science and philosophy and has been defeated in so many battles that science and philosophy have gone on before her and left her in the rear. The Roman Catholic theology is too mediæval. The Protestant theology is too much that of the seventeenth century. Even the more advanced types of Protestantism have become stereotyped in the doctrines and methods of the eighteenth century. The theology of the denominations is therefore apart from the learning of our times, confined for the most part to the office-bearers of these denominations, and of no value or importance to the people. There is a Christian theology which has appropriated in a measure the results of modern thought. But this theology is taught by a few individual teachers, and its adherents are found among a liberal minority in the denominations, who have to contend against imputations of heresy and heterodoxy. The denominations still adhere, in the main, to the traditional theology which the majority insist upon as the true orthodoxy, and they resist stoutly all changes and improvements.

These have been the inevitable results of such traditionalism and lack of faith in the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The official teaching of the denominations is apart from the thought of the age.

Therefore those who have been trained in the thought of the age, the whole class of learned men, are out of sympathy with the theology of the denominations. How can a man of science have any patience with the doctrine of creation and the theories of miracles and prophecy which are commonly taught in theological schools and from the Christian pulpits? How can a man who has been trained in modern psychology, metaphysics and ethics fail to be repelled by the crude philosophy that underlies the dogmas of the systems of theology which are regarded as the standards of orthodoxy? How can such a man look with complacency upon the battle over the doctrine of original sin between creationism and traducianism, or the discussion of the freedom of the will? How can he engage to dishonor the reason, to divest himself of his conscience, or to assent to the unethical dogma of immediate sanctification, whether in this life or in any other life? How can the man who has been trained in modern historical investigation accept the traditional denominational history, with so many spurious claims that will not bear the strain of historical criticism? How can the man who has been trained in modern philology and in the classic literatures do otherwise than refuse his confidence to those denominations which are loud in their hostility to the literary criticism of Holy Scripture? Denominational systems of dogma which shrink from the fellowship of science, philosophy, history and literature, forfeit thereby the respect and confidence of all those who pursue the paths of scholarly investigation. It is not strange that so large a proportion of scholarly men are out of sympathy with the Church. It is a marvel that the denominations retain so large a proportion of scholars in their communion.

The situation is relieved to a considerable extent by the modern theory that only the office-bearers are responsible for the tenets of the denomination. The tenets of the denominations are seldom in these days brought to the attention of the Christian people. Denominational dogmas are to a great extent esoteric to the ministry. The people know little about them and care little for them. But this situation is unstable. Dogmas which are outside the faith and life of the people will not long retain their hold upon the clergy. Gradually the ministry and the people assimilate. It is quite evident that a considerable body of the ministry in the several denominations have lost faith in the traditional dogmas and have banished them from their experience. But this can be only temporary. There are those

who are zealous for the old paths and the traditional modes of statement—these will ere long bring on the crisis; and the inevitable result will be either the transformation of the denominations or the gradual withdrawal from them of ministers and people.

Some of these find the relief they need in other denominations. But there are great multitudes, especially in the large cities, who no longer attend upon the ministrations of the Christian Church—not because they are not Christians or religious, but because they cannot in good conscience subscribe to the tenets of the denominations which they have abandoned, and because they have not yet found a church home in which they can feel altogether at peace. Some of them become what is known in our cities as “religious tramps,” wandering about from church to church or attending evangelistic and special services; others abstain from church attendance altogether. Ministers of this type usually withdraw from the ministry and engage in literary work or in some form of benevolence, or else enter upon a professional or business career. There are many more such ministers than is usually supposed.

The situation is still further relieved by the large number of liberal men in the Christian ministry who have constructed for themselves, in whole or in part, a system of theology which is in a measure in harmony with modern thought. These are aware of the difficulties of the situation. They know that they have a holy war to wage. They have a duty to perform in the modern world and they intend to live and think in the midst of modern thought. These ministers gather about them multitudes who without them would be lost to the Christian Church. The liberals in the great Protestant denominations for the most part see eye to eye, and stand shoulder to shoulder. They are prepared to stand in the ranks where their Master has placed them and do their reforming work inside the denominations. They are prepared to join their brethren in other denominations, or they are prepared to construct new denominations if the necessity should arise. But at all events they will go on with their reforming work. It is a characteristic of liberals that they “believe in the Holy Ghost.” They have confidence that the Holy Spirit is guiding the Church of our day as truly as He guided the Church of the apostles. They are determined to follow His guidance.

The liberals of the present day are not destructive; they have the spirit of modern criticism. But they have so used it as to eliminate

truth from error. They have in a measure, by Biblical criticism, removed the rubbish of traditional theories and gained the real Bible. They have, by historical criticism, fought their way through traditional prejudices and misrepresentations and won a real Christian history. They have traced the dogmas of the systems to their roots and have determined what was derived from Holy Scripture, what from Greek philosophy and Roman jurisprudence, what from the creeds, what from the speculations of the theologians, what from the provincial schools of theology. The hay, straw and stubble are no longer to them confounded with the gold, silver and precious jewels. They believe in the Holy Spirit and therefore do not cast aside as worthless the doctrinal development of nineteen centuries. They rather, by criticism, strip from the dogmas the filthy rags of traditionalism in order to clothe them in the shining raiment of history.

Nothing substantial of all the achievements of Christian history will be lost in this reconstruction of theology which has been undertaken by liberal theologians. Ere long they will accomplish their task, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. But until that time the alienation between the Church and modern thought will continue. It will probably increase in the United States of America, rather than diminish, through the present generation. But early in the next century we may hope that a new theology will advance to the front of human learning and will become once more the mother and queen of all truth.

(2) The Church has lost the confidence of the people in its authority as a divine institution. The Church is a divine institution in the midst of the world, with a ministry commissioned by Christ and sacraments appointed by Christ. The Church is the kingdom of Christ to which all who seek His salvation and recognize Him as Lord and Saviour should belong. The Church and Christianity ought to be co-extensive. But the Church impaired its authority when the Greek, Roman and Oriental churches divided into hostile camps. It shattered its authority when in Western Europe it broke into a number of national churches. Its authority was well-nigh ruined when the national churches of Great Britain were confronted with large numbers of non-conforming sects. In the United States of America nearly all the forms of Christianity exist side by side and lead independent lives. Where in all these heterogeneous forms of Christianity shall we find the divine institution of the Church and the authority with which the Church was endowed by Christ? The ex-

clusive claims of the Roman church amount to little in the face of the historic and aggressive Protestantism. The exclusive claims of any one of the national churches receive little attention in the face of those of other national churches of equal antiquity and of similar historic and legal rights. Shall we recognize a divine authority in all the varied forms of historic Christianity, or shall we deny it to them all?

It is not strange that a large mass of people deny that there is any divine authority in any of these forms of Christianity. Ecclesiastical authority has been so often abused in the history of the Protestant churches no less than of the Roman church, in the interests of tyranny, injustice and wrong, that men are tempted to deny that there can be any divine authority in such ecclesiastical organizations. They say, "What evidence do these churches give that they acted under the influence of God's Holy Spirit and under the superintendence of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of men? Judge them by their fruits! The ecclesiastics have exhibited little if any of the Christ-like spirit and character. They have not acted like men under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Their claims to divine authority must be spurious claims. They do not sustain the test given us by Christ and His apostles. There is no divine authority in any of these churches." This is the thinking of large masses of people at the present time. Therefore they either absent themselves from the churches, or attend their services occasionally, without compromising themselves with them by membership or communion.

In the seventeenth century all the denominations claimed divine right for their forms of government. But the Protestant denominations have in the main abandoned the theory that their types of church government are chartered in the New Testament, and therefore they seek historic right. Those who, like the Roman Catholics and Anglo-Catholics, find a divine right in the Church itself, still hold to the divine right of the Episcopal and Papal forms of church government. But those who limit the divine right to the prescriptions of Holy Scripture are obliged to abandon the divine right of their respective forms of government. With the weakening of the sense of the divine right of church government, the divine right of church discipline and of the ministry and of the sacraments also gradually disappears. As a sign of the times, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian church in the United States of America in this year 1893 declared it to be heterodox to say that "the Church is a great fountain of divine authority" and virtually assumed the position

that the Presbyterian church is nothing more than a voluntary society, a religious club, in which the supreme obligation is in the contract assumed by the vow of subscription at ordination. Those who hold to such a theory of the Church have themselves abandoned the doctrine that the Church has authority as a divine institution; and they cannot very long hold this position without undermining and destroying confidence in the validity of the Presbyterian ministry and of Presbyterian sacraments.

The Salvation Army is one of the most aggressive forms, if not the most aggressive form, of modern Christianity. It has discarded the Church form of Christianity altogether and adopted the Army form as that best suited for the propagation of Christianity. It is possible that still other such forms may be assumed by devout men and women who have lost confidence in the Church as a divine institution and who think that by divesting Christianity of the forms of the Church, they may make it more fruitful. It is quite evident to anyone who knows the Salvation Army, that the officers hold up the Christlike life and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as the chief attainments of Christian men and women. It may be that the Army form may result in another variety of the Church form of Christianity, or it may be that this form, like that assumed by the Friends in the seventeenth century, will be a temporary refuge for a more devout and aggressive type of Christianity; or like the monastic orders, it may become an auxiliary to the Church.

Confidence in the divine authority of the Church as a divine institution is a vanishing quantity in most Protestant communities; but it is all the more powerful in the Episcopal churches through the potent influence of the Anglo-Catholic movement; and also in the Roman Catholic church. Those denominations which hold to their faith in the Church as a divine institution are certain to gain in the number of their adherents, while those denominations which have lost their faith in the Church as a divine institution will certainly lose the confidence of those who now adhere to them; for no Church can have any permanent life which does not recognize the activity of the divine Spirit working in its institutions, and of the headship of Jesus Christ over all its agencies.

The denominations of Christians are in fact losing the confidence of Christian people. The people change from one denomination to another with the utmost ease, usually on the simple ground of preference for the pastor, and they trouble themselves but little what the



denomination may be. In the same family, brothers and sisters will be members of several different denominations. If the minister suits them they attend his church; if there is no minister in their neighborhood who suits them, they absent themselves from church. They no longer feel under any obligation to sustain any particular denomination or any special congregation. And yet these people are easily reached. A Christian minister has no difficulty in enlisting them in some form of Christian work and in winning their allegiance to any aggressive Christlike enterprise.

There is a profound dissatisfaction among the masses of the people with regard to the government and discipline of the churches. This dissatisfaction will continue and increase until something better is evolved out of the present condition of things. It matters little what the form of government may be. In Episcopal churches it is the bishop who has to bear the blame; in Presbyterian churches it is the Presbytery or the General Assembly; in Congregational churches the deacons are said to be at fault. The ecclesiastical denominations in the United States are too much involved in traditional usages of former centuries; they do not win the confidence of the people in the propriety of their government and discipline, or in their justice and right. Out of this complexity, liberal men in all denominations are earnestly seeking something to which all may agree, or are trying, in the words of Richard Baxter, to "select out of all the best part and leave the worst," with the hope that they will thereby attain at once "the most desirable [and ancient] form of government."

The Christian Church has made no substantial mistake in the evolution of its institutions. The mistakes have been made in those things which are formal and circumstantial. If these mistakes can be detected and removed and the lines of development, defined in the past, be still further advanced, the denominations may be compacted into a form of church government and discipline that will satisfy the yearnings of all Christlike men and women; and a united, aggressive Church will once more win confidence as a divine institution endowed with divine authority.

(3) The Church has lost the confidence of the people in its sanctity. One of the most essential attributes of the Church is its sanctity. It is the holy catholic Church. If the Church is the bride of Christ, she ought to be without spot or blemish or any such thing. Mirrored in her institutions, the life and character of Jesus ought always to be clearly seen. If the Church is the body of Christ, every movement

of the Church ought to be a Christlike movement, every activity a Christlike activity. His mission should be her mission; His life her life; His character her character. How far below this ideal is the Church of history! How inferior the Church of the present day is, when compared with the Church in its heroic periods! Is self-sacrifice or self-aggrandizement the law of the Church? Are ecclesiastics the servants of all, or do they strive to lord it over all? Do dogmatists seek the truth of God or the propagation of their systems? Is the gospel preached to the poor or to the rich? Where do we find the Church at work—among the suffering and dying, or among the prosperous and the comfortable? Where do we find the great preachers, the great church-buildings, the great expenditure of Christian men and money—among the toiling masses of the people, or among the comfortable and well-to-do? Such questions as these, honestly answered, determine how far the Church of our day is Christlike and to what extent she follows the Christ in self-denial and self-sacrifice. Doubtless there are as noble examples of self-sacrificing ministry now as there ever were before in Christian history. There are many philanthropists who have consecrated their wealth to Christ and His kingdom. There are many men and women who spend themselves in the Redeemer's service. But how is it with the churches as denominations? What is the opinion formed of the Church by the masses? There can be little doubt that to a great extent these have lost confidence in the Church as a holy Christlike institution. There are several reasons for this state of affairs.

(a) The Protestant churches have insisted upon justification by faith as necessary to salvation, and the Methodists and evangelicals have urged the experience of regeneration. They have not made the mistake of some radical Lutherans, that good works were hurtful to salvation, but they have depreciated good works, sanctification and personal holiness in the chain of salvation. They have recognized their importance, but they have not taught them as essential to a full salvation. They have looked for sanctification at the hour of death as a magical transformation. They have not earnestly and eagerly sought it in this life. The Roman Catholics have held forth the counsels of Christian perfection for the attainment of a chosen few who are called to be saints, and so far have maintained a higher ethical standard than Protestantism; but the Roman church as a body has been content with a ceremonial sanctity. The churches

have not made Christlikeness their shining mark. The mind of Christ has not been their mind; His ways their ways. Therefore the Church has not in any great measure presented itself to the people as holy in Christlike words and deeds. She has sought more her own advancement in numbers, in wealth and in influence, than the salvation of poor, weak and outcast men and women. Her ministers and her adherents have not won men and women from sin to holiness by their example. Church membership, subscription to creeds, conformity to doctrines, liturgies and ceremonies, the observance of religious customs and sacred days, have been made of more importance than repentance, good deeds, and Christlike lives.

This is a practical age. The Church is judged by its fruits, and if it does not make men holier and happier it is not greatly valued by practical men. So long as churchmen are little if any better than men who are not churchmen, these can hardly be severely blamed if they do not see any very great advantages in church membership.

(b) The churches have been slow to engage in Christian work. Almost all the great Christian enterprises of modern times have been undertaken by consecrated men and women outside the Church and often in spite of the opposition of ministers and other ecclesiastical authorities. The Young Men's Christian Association, the Society of Christian Endeavor, and many other organizations of a similar character, are potent energies of Christianity outside the Church, although conducted by Christian people. If so much of the work of Christ may be carried on outside the Church, why not more? May not the Church after all be an effete institution, very useful indeed in the olden time but of no practical importance in our time? Possibly it is the design of Providence that the church form of Christianity should be thrown aside, and Christianity in new and more modern forms may increase its usefulness and become more Christlike. Other forms and institutions may do its work more economically and more efficiently. Such is the opinion of not a few earnest Christian people in our times whose hearts are inflamed with zeal for Christian work, but who are chilled by the cool inertia of reactionary ministers and grieved to the soul by the self-satisfied conservatism of the churches.

Christian women are seeking wider fields of Christian usefulness. They have been admitted to many departments of business-life, to the professions of teaching, law and medicine. They crave a place

in the Christian ministry. Modestly they desire some sphere in which they may actively serve their Master. There has been an earnest effort to revive the order of deaconesses. And yet the Presbyterian church of the United States of America and several other denominations refuse to have them and insist upon the silence of women in their churches. Other denominations in a cautious way are preparing for the ministrations of deaconesses. Few are they who see what a mighty transformation will take place when woman enters with all her energies of Christian love into the field of aggressive Christlike service. Multitudes of Christian women are doing Christian work outside the churches such as they are not allowed at the present time to do within the churches. Many Christian women are thronging into the Salvation Army and into the numerous modern sects and religious and benevolent societies which give them full scope for their activities.

This, then, is the strange situation in modern Protestantism. The churches are engaged chiefly in the conservative work of caring for the regular worship of the congregations at the stated times, in providing for the various needs of the social and religious societies which have volunteered to worship together under pastors of their own choice. But the aggressive work of Christianity is done very largely outside the churches and apart from the churches. This does not tend to reconcile the people and the Church, for the churches are not churches of the people: they are churches of select religious societies from which the people as such are excluded, save so far as they may comply with the social and religious, doctrinal and ecclesiastical, ceremonial and liturgical terms of communion.

(c) The Church has limited its conception of salvation too much to the future life. It has not comprehended the length and breadth of the salvation taught by Jesus Christ. The poor, the sick, the suffering and the dying need a salvation that relieves their physical maladies. Christians have undoubtedly in all ages, in a measure, established hospitals, infirmaries, institutions for the relief of the poor. But this has been sporadic and occasional, rather than as an integral part of the salvation preached and practised by the Church. The toiling masses in our age are no worse off than were those of other ages. But they think that they are more miserable. And they are more miserable for they have learned that they are capable of better things, and they are yearning for better things. They are anxiously looking for a Saviour who will redeem them from their

misery. Jesus Christ is that Saviour. His Church should bear them the glad tidings of that salvation. The Church may not work miracles as He did, but the Church may and ought to do greater things than the miracles of Christ and His apostles by applying all the resources of modern science and modern methods for the relief of the poverty and the sufferings of men.

In this respect the advocates of Faith Cure and Christian Science have, if we understand them aright, grasped an important principle, and on this account are engaged in an active, zealous propaganda in which many devout men and women share. There can be no doubt that the salvation of Jesus Christ is a salvation from all sin and all misery, and that as Jesus removed bodily maladies, so His Church should aim to do the same. Prayers for the recovery of the sick and the dying should be offered in faith and holy love. The religious and the moral should always accompany the material and the physical remedies. Science and faith should be the sisterly handmaids at every bed of suffering. Science without faith may heal a wound that a diseased soul may cause to break forth with increased peril. Faith without science may lift the soul heavenward only to see it dragged down to earth by a diseased body. Faith is a heavenly help to science in times of difficulty and doubt, where recovery depends upon the state of the soul fully as much as upon the recuperative energies of the body.

The Church is called upon to consider and to solve the great social, industrial and sanitary problems of our times. The Church has lost the confidence of the toiling and suffering masses by neglecting these problems. Too often the Church has thoughtlessly espoused the side of the privileged classes over against the masses of the people. The toiling masses find in their social clubs and fraternal unions that which the Church neglects or declines to give them. If the churches have become social and religious clubs for the privileged classes, why should not the masses have their clubs in which the exercise of brotherly love and mutual helpfulness may give expression to their religious instincts? Many earnest Christian workers have apprehended the seriousness of the situation and have seen in a measure the methods of reform. College and University settlements have been established outside the Church. Undenominational missions have been organized in which agencies unknown to church establishments are employed. Churches for the people have been founded which have become hives of religious activity. These are, however,

occasional and sporadic efforts, at present. They open up immense reaches of Christian activity in the future. The churches as denominations have not yet taken any great interest in them. The future will show whether the denominations will undertake this work in a broad, comprehensive and thorough-going manner; or whether this also must be given over to new agencies outside the churches. It remains to be seen in the immediate future whether a new denomination of Christians will spring into existence to be the church of the people, or whether the alienation of Church and people is still further to increase, while the people solve their religious and social difficulties without the aid of the churches.

Some of the reasons have been presented for the alienation existing between Church and people in Christian lands at the present time. Doubtless others and better ones might be given by those who are engaged in the newer enterprises designed to overcome the difficulties adduced. One thing is evident to all who consider attentively the present distressing situation. Denominationalism is the great sin and curse of the modern Church. Denominationalism is responsible for the elaborate systems of belief which are paraded as the banners of orthodoxy and which by their contentions impair the teaching function of the Church and destroy the confidence of the people in its possession of the truth of God. Denominationalism is responsible for all those variations of church government and discipline, for all those historical tyrannies and wrongs, which have undermined the faith of the people in the divine authority of such imperious, self-complacent and mutually exclusive ecclesiastical institutions. Denominationalism is responsible for all that waste of men and means, all those unholy jealousies and frictions, all that absorption in external, formal and circumstantial things, which disturb the moral development of the individual and the ethical advancement of the community, and especially retard the great evangelistic and reformatory enterprises at home and abroad.

Liberal men in all the denominations, holy men and women in all religious agencies, have set their minds and hearts upon the removal of these hindrances to the progress of the kingdom of God. The denominations have accomplished their historic task. There is no longer any sufficient reason for their continued existence. They should yield their life and their experience to a more comprehensive and more efficient church plan, one that will embrace all that is best

in each, combining the executive bishop with the legislative presbytery and the electing people in one comprehensive organization, in which every form of tyranny, injustice and wrong will be stayed by wholesome checks and balances, in which the official doctrine will be reduced to the simple sentences of the universal catholic faith, and in which conformity to Jesus Christ in character and service will be regarded as of vastly more importance than conformity to doctrine, discipline, or ceremonial. Then we may hope that the Church will have regained the confidence of the people in her divine authority, sanctity and catholicity.

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