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THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF OUR LORD

BY REV. WALTER L. LINGLE, D. D.

There was recently an organized movement to put the Christmas story and the Christmas songs out of the public schools of New York City. Our whole country became interested and even excited. There is another movement which may well cause us deeper concern, though it is being carried on so quietly that we scarcely notice it. It is a movement to put the Christmas story out of the Bible itself. The whole trend of modern, radical criticism is to deny the Virgin Birth of our Lord, and practically all of the incidents which go to make up the beautiful story of his birth. One quotation will suffice to show to what lengths some of these critical scholars go. It is from Soltan's "Birth of Jesus Christ." "An evangelical Christian, that is to say a Christian holding fast in his religious convictions to the gospel of the Apostles and the Apostolic school, is no longer able to believe in the supernatural origin of Jesus. * * * Whoever makes the further demand that an evangelical Christian shall believe in the words, 'Conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary' wittingly constitutes himself sharer in a sin against the Holy Spirit of the true gospel as transmitted to us by the Apostles and their school in the Apostolic Age."

Nor is this denial of the Virgin Birth confined to the critical schools of Germany. It is creeping into the modern pulpit. The City Temple in London is one of the great pulpits of the world, and in the days of Dr. Joseph Parker the pure gospel was preached there in great power. Dr. R. J. Campbell, a minister of wonderful gifts and of wonderful personal mag-

MEN AND RELIGION

BY REV. A. L. PHILLIPS, D. D.

He must be both blind and deaf who does not recognize on every side signs of the awakening of men to God's call for Church work to-day. We may see men banded together for mutual instruction and inspiration under various forms of organization far and wide through the land. We may hear men discussing religion in earnest tones and true in a way never heard in our generation. For fifty years the movement known as the Young Men's Christian Association has steadily increased in strength, dignity, variety of work and in evangelical intent. These Associations of men were never so numerous. Their registers have never contained so many active names, and within the last five years the most remarkable developments have occurred in the erection of buildings and athletic grounds for their use. Within the last ten years this movement has been seen in almost every branch of the evangelical Church, and Rome itself has not been slow to use the power which men seem now to be willing that the Church should consecrate. In the Episcopal Church the growth of the Brotherhood of St. Andrew is one of the most remarkable signs of the times within that great communion. for thousands of men have been brought together for prayer and service. The Methodists have long been organizing their men quietly. In the Baptist Church the movement seems to have taken the form of the organization of Bible classes for men in connection with the Sunday-school through the Baraca classes. The Presbyterians throughout the country are organizing Brotherhoods, establishing the men in their new-born purpose to give a more worthy account of themselves in the Church. The Brotherhood of Andrew and Philip contains the largest membership of the inter-denominational brotherhoods and has its representatives in every section of the country. The last demonstration of this awakening of men is to be found in The Laymen's Missionary Movement, which has had a phenomenal

growth. Already, under its influence, men by the thousands have been awakened to their sense of privilege and responsibility to make Christ known in all the world; and hundreds of thousands of dollars, not before available, have been pledged to the missionary treasuries. Business men have been glad to accept the commission to travel abroad in order that they may see what God is doing. Conferences and conventions, composed of the leading men of our towns and cities, are of constant occurrence where men plan for worthier exhibitions of their interest and power.

Men's Interest in Religion.—To any thoughtful person it is evident that all regenerated persons have a common interest in certain religious ideas and work. Everybody in a family is interested in the furnishings of the home, in the garments worn and in the food prepared. So everybody is interested in the great fundamental facts of religion, like faith, repentance, good works and human destiny. All true Christians are interested in common in work for the poor, in the enactment and maintenance of proper laws, in public health, in education and the like. All of these have a religious bearing and all draw men and women in common. Further thought, however, reveals the fact that certain forms of activity rather than others appeal to men. Just what these forms of activity are is difficult to say. Some, however, are known. Men love to discuss religion. They do not perhaps like to have such discussion in a general way about personal religious matters, but they like to discuss creeds and forms of work and various matters affecting religion in general. Financial matters appeal to men in the Church as well as out of it. It remains true still that the finance of the world is in the hands of men. They are not only especially interested in it, but have special endowment from God to handle it successfully. In the Church they may become intensely interested in its money affairs. Men are interested in the expansion of trade. They like to discuss and invade new territory where they may plant their ideas and reap reward. If we translate "trade expansion" into terms of religion, we will have "missions." Christian men are interested in the expansion of the

Christian religion. Their interest may be tremendously increased by proper cultivation. It is certainly one of the things that would appeal to men. Unquestionably social work has an attraction for men. Secret societies and Brotherhoods of every description show how men love to work together for a common end. The Church's social side appeals to men. Christian men are interested in one another personally. They are interested in helping men out of work to get employment, and in advancing one another in business. The misfortunes as well as the triumphs of their fellow-men appeal to them. A man in politics loves to win men in crowds, or one by one, to his way of thinking through personal advocacy. Down at the bottom of their hearts, Christian men are interested in personal work and only need to be drawn out and developed.

The executive and administrative work of the world is in the hands of men. Everywhere they are interested in it. They give time and thought and investigation to it. Business has never been organized as it is to-day. It is not an uncommon thing to find men planning for financial conquests in Asia or Africa or in the remotest islands of the seas. Surely men are interested in the executive work of the Church. If they are invited to participate in laying plans for the administration of the work of the Church, they will respond.

To a limited extent it is true that men are interested in boys—that is, a few men are intensely interested in all boys, while all men are interested in some boys. The betterment of boys through clubs and other organizations appeals to men. Because of their own experience, men are naturally the best guides and leaders for their younger brothers. They should be invited and encouraged to undertake work for boys.

These lines of work appeal to men. It is the duty of the wise pastor to use these points of contact that he may seize his men for permanent betterment. Other forms of work that have been named by men as of special interest to them are the following: Bible Study, Church History, Evangelism, Business Ethics and Encouragement of Religion, Religion in Business, Temperance, Philanthropic Enterprises of Local Character.

Civic Studies for Local Benefit, and Institute Work, (i. e., gymnasium, reading rooms, baths, etc.)

Easy Contact.—Careful study of these movements among men will reveal that social pressure, of one kind or another, is the power at work. When Edward Everett Hale said “together is the word for the twentieth century” he uttered not only a prophecy but voiced an interpretation. Men not only prefer to work together to-day, but they find it practically impossible to work alone. The instinct for combination lies deep and can not be up-rooted from our nature. That it has invaded the realm of religion is not to be wondered at. All these organizations for men are more or less influenced by the social desire and in perhaps most cases the work undertaken is of a more or less purely social character. It is not meant that religion is not held in view, but the point of contact seems to be with men’s social natures. One would expect to find that this social desire would lead to improper manifestations in the Church, and that the social enjoyment would dominate religious purpose. This has been true in many cases. It remains true, however, that this social capacity of men is inborn and is no evidence of man’s depravity. It is a legitimate point of contact and the Church is wise in laying hands upon it.

Careful investigation conducted some time ago brought out the following suggestions as to attractive social meetings for men. They are given as they were sent, without any suggestion of approval or disapproval. Here they are: Supper; music; address by good speaker; members invited from the pulpit and by telephone; informal smoker; short speeches and bright programme; meeting showing attractiveness of innocent pleasure; annual supper with good speakers and charge for it; public lecture but social; make it a deacon’s convention; free discussion of practical work of the Brotherhood; oyster fry with humorous speeches; social hour in the home; informal entertainment at manse; picnic with speech; pretty girls and a meal well served.

Brotherhood Organization and Work.—Wide investigation reveals the fact that the brotherhood movements of our times are interested in certain great fundamental religious questions.

There are at least eight kinds of activity which are more or less prevalent amongst them, to-wit:

1. Bible Study;
2. Prayer;
3. Christian Culture;
4. Missions;
5. Local Extension;
6. Stewardship;
7. Social Work;
8. Personal Work.

It is not common to find all of these lines of work developed in any one Brotherhood. One Brotherhood will develop one or two or more lines of work, and some times a Brotherhood is characterized by one special development. A little study of these subjects will prove helpful.

It will be seen that the first three, (Bible Study, Prayer and Christian Culture), are cultural in nature. They have to do most largely with the inner life. It has been demonstrated beyond all doubt that men will study the Bible when it is presented to them in a strong and spiritual manner. Men do not like cant. They despise platitudes; but, when the Bible lesson is thoughtfully planned and directed, with the effect upon actual life clearly set forth, they will study it. The organized Men's Bible Classes are now numbered by the thousand with an enrollment of ten thousands of men.

Men will pray. They do not differ from other Christians in this. They need to have their prayer life greatly developed. Their belief in prayer needs to be strengthened and they need training to regularity in prayer. For public prayer they sadly need training.

In a general way men are interested in affairs of religion in general. Christian men read about religion, not systematically nor thoroughly but they read something of what is going on in the churches. If a Christian man's life is nurtured by Bible study, prayer and Christian knowledge, his life will be so strengthened that one would naturally look for some spiritual expressions of it.

These expressions are not hard to find. A life nurtured as above indicated is interested in the expansion of the Christian religion, which is just another term for missions. It must be confessed that up to the present, men's interest in missions has been weak and uncertain. It is perhaps true that the methods of presenting the facts and claims of missions upon them have not been attractive and not always even sensible. Something may be said in palliation of men's lack of interest in missions, but mission work of one sort or another is one of the legitimate outcomes of the genuine Christian life.

It is true that men love to extend the influence of the institution which they love. They can be interested in questions of local extension. The increase of the male membership of the churches and Brotherhoods, if presented to the men rightly, will surely meet with response.

As pointed out above, one of the essential interests of men in the Church is finance. The Bible word for a "good financier" is "faithful steward." The Church to-day handles vast sums of money for its local uses and for its extension. The raising of this vast sum of money, its proper expenditure and accounting, will naturally appeal to men.

There is no necessity of developing further here the subject of men's interest in social work. It appeals to them strongly; and, if encouraged, they will take hold and use it for religion's sake.

In certain places, under certain conditions, men have been powerfully influenced to undertake personal work. By this is meant primarily the work of one man to win another to accept Christ as his personal Saviour. In a broader sense it includes all the forms of ministry which a man may personally do for another man.

The Suggested Constitution of the Brotherhood of our Church has been formed with these questions clearly in view. It is not the Church's purpose that any cast-iron rules shall govern the men so as to produce an artificial uniformity, but the suggestions are made growing out of study and experience which may be of help to men as they face their responsibilities to God and man for their manhood. At the present writing,

fifty-nine local Brotherhoods have been chartered within our Church, including a membership of 1,668. Many Brotherhoods exist which are not chartered. Any Brotherhood is recognized whose purposes and methods are in general keeping with the above plans. The time is evidently ripe for bringing men into line with Church work. Sessions and pastors will do well to bestir themselves now.

Responsibility and Accountability.—There is no patent method for making men do their duty. This method and that may be useful in this place or that, among these men or those. The fact remains that unless men are soundly converted by the power of the Spirit of God, all appeals for spiritual work will be in vain; but, granted a genuine regeneration, we may confidently expect that certain methods will in the end develop men's activities and train them for God's service. Two things are here suggested as being the most reliable and swift to produce results. Men should be gotten together in Brotherhoods and every member should be made responsible for some definite line of work. Let him choose what it shall be. Give him some idea as to what his choice involves. Help him to form a clear conception of the work which he chooses. Then throw upon him all possible responsibility. Make it definite, continuous and insistent. Couple with this definite responsibility certain accountability. Let the Brotherhood hold its membership to an account of the work its men have agreed to do. Let each man give account of himself. Make it easy for him to do so and make the accounting inevitable. Responsibility and accountability will surely reach his conscience if it has been quickened by the Spirit of God. Much prayer, wisdom and tact are needed in dealing with them. A manly pastor, with his heart quickened with a love for his fellow-men and a desire to see them give their noble gifts to God, may set incalculable forces to work for the Church if he only makes the men under his care definitely responsible and surely accountable.