

We Discuss:
Bible Truth
Religious Work
World Events

Editorial Department

We Seek:
Better Lives
Greater Results
Wider Fields

The Machine Age in the Church

Before you read this editorial take particular notice of the smallest word in the heading.

We are not writing about the machine age *and* the church but the machine age *in* the church.

The former is a very familiar subject of discussion, to show how the invention of machines, each doing the work of from ten to a hundred men, have aggravated the problem of the unemployed and what, if anything, the church should do about the problem.

But we are not writing about industrial machinery. We are writing about church machinery and the extent to which it has contributed to unemployment—or better say inactivity—among church members.

Dr. William T. Ellis, the well-known writer on religious subjects and church activities, in an article in the *Presbyterian Tribune*, expresses the opinion that churches have become so top-heavy with promotional plans and committee activities that, "broadly and loosely speaking, church work has in general deteriorated into a desperate struggle to raise sufficient money to keep the machinery moving." He continues:

"Because the situation is so grave—so immense and ominous—I am taking the liberty of merely indicating a few of the drastic measures that I think might restore Christianity in America to a solid basis of reality. The aim is to throw responsibility for the expression of religion back upon the individual Christian, in his local sphere. Instead of having activity artificially pumped into the congregations, by highly organized professionals, we should see just how much New Testament Christianity there really exists, operative in individual disciples."

Among other things Dr. Ellis "would release the staffs of most church boards and make the surviving agencies—after many consolidations—merely disbursing offices for the expenditure of funds voluntarily contributed. Mission boards would simply transmit to their fields the money received. All promotional activities would cease. Each Christian's own conscience would be his guide as to where and what he would make his benevolent contributions. It might mean a sensational increase of gifts if the giving were to become a matter of personal responsibility, with no money-raising agency to depend upon for the sustenance of the work."

These quotations will give you an idea of the article, which contains some suggestions even more radical, with the proposal that all this machinery in the church be dispensed with for a period of five years, as an experiment.

Suppose we assume that Dr. Ellis doesn't expect the churches to take his suggestions seriously enough to adopt them, but that he presents the subject in this way in order to provoke thought, just as a certain minister several months ago, in order to emphasize what he considers the defects in Sunday school work, proposed that the Sunday school be abolished and whatever good work it is doing now be done by the church without a Sunday school.

Even so, Dr. Ellis calls attention to a danger which is very real, and a danger which many churches are not avoid-

ing. It is the danger of individual church members forming the habit of depending on mass action to such an extent as to lose their sense of individual responsibility. And the more machinery a church has, the stronger the tendency to form that habit.

A church may be so thoroughly and systematically organized and furnished with officers, committees, sub-committees, plans and programs as to give to the individual member a feeling of absolute certainty as to its success. And the more certain the individual member is of the success of the church, the less likely he is to exert himself to do his best. He doesn't feel the need of doing so. That is the principle involved and the psychology of the situation.

If this be correct, then it logically follows that the absence of church machinery would arouse a proportionately greater sense of individual responsibility among the members. Realizing that it is harder for a church to succeed without machinery than with it, the individual members would work harder and give more in order to attain success. What do you suppose would happen if a local church or a denomination should lay aside all money-raising machinery and say to the people, "We shall need just as much money as ever to carry on our work, but this matter will be left as an individual responsibility, without any solicitation." "It would mean the utter collapse of the work," says one. Dr. Ellis thinks "it might mean a sensational increase of gifts if the giving were to become a matter of personal responsibility, with no money-raising agency to depend upon for the support of the work." In saying this he seems to have primitive Christianity in mind. It is true that in that day the church had no such machinery as we have now. It is also true that they raised more money, in proportion to their numbers and resources, than we are raising now. Even so, this doesn't prove that we should go back to their methods, or rather lack of methods. Progress points the other way. Progress has brought us away from the primitive methods of doing things, both in the world and in the church. The work which the church was established to do is divine, and ever the same. The methods of doing it are largely human, and must be changed to meet the changes of the passing years. There is no more possibility of the churches going back to the days that were without committees, programs and promotional agencies than there is of industry junking all of its machinery and going back to hand labor. But there is no harm in imagining such a thing for the moment in order to get the point of danger with which we started out—the danger of the individual church member depending too much on the multiplied machinery with which the church has become so highly organized and too little on himself. "Plan your work and work your plan" is a good slogan, but the danger with the individual church member is that of working *his plan* instead of working *himself*.

The church is a divine institution. The work it was established to do is a divine work. It can succeed only when inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit. These three facts are the same today as in the beginning, though methods of church work differ. The success of the apostolic

church was not due to the absence of plans and programs but to the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit can give success to churches with meager methods, as in the apostolic days, and He can give success to churches with elaborate methods, as in our day. The vital thing is to introduce only such methods into the work of the church as the Holy Spirit can consistently use.

What, then, is the most important lesson of all? It is this: that church machinery is a great blessing when used by the Spirit, but it is a tragic substitute for the Spirit.

Good News From Bogra, India

We call your special attention to an article in the Missionary department of this issue by Brother Cover, reporting the dedication of the new bethel at Bogra and the organization of a church with one hundred members.

This is certainly good news, that should inspire and stimulate the entire brotherhood to thanksgiving for what has been accomplished and to increased efforts in behalf of our foreign work. For it goes without saying, that while we are encouraged by the invisible results which we can see only with the eye of faith, we are also eager for what we have always called the "visible results" of our efforts. The event reported from Bogra is, therefore, an epochal one in the history of our foreign missionary activities.

We would say much more, except for the fact that only three months ago we discussed this matter at some length in the same issue (October 16th) in which Brother Cover reported the laying of the cornerstone of the bethel. This, then, is to ask you to read the report of the dedication and the organization of the church carefully and to rejoice in what God has accomplished through His servants.

The Courage of Convictions

The courage of convictions was strikingly emphasized in recent days by two of the most prominent men in the country—President Roosevelt and his former ally, Hon. Alfred E. Smith. The President gave this principle emphasis when he vetoed the soldiers bonus bill in face of the overwhelming vote of the Congress and Smith emphasized the same principle in his speech against the New Deal before the Liberty League.

Please note that we are not saying anything either for or against the bonus nor for or against the New Deal. We are simply calling attention to the much-needed emphasis given to the courage of convictions. Roosevelt showed that he had the courage of his convictions, in spite of a national election in the offing. And Smith, in spite of old-time friendships and political affiliation, showed that he is still the "Happy Warrior," though his present thrusts are adding nothing to the happiness of the one who coined that phrase.

And in the Reform department of this issue you will hear from another prominent man who has the courage of his convictions, Hon. Morris Sheppard of Texas, co-author of the Eighteenth Amendment. Notwithstanding the changed attitude of the country, he persistently adheres to his custom of delivering an address once a year in the United States Senate against the liquor traffic, just as he did when we had national prohibition. We venture the guess that you didn't see anything about this in the wet secular press. The speech didn't fit in with the remunerative liquor advertisements.

An Interesting Death Notice

According to the daily press the Council for Moderation has passed away.

This Council, you will recall, was organized and its campaign launched with lavish display in the Waldorf-Astoria, New York City, last May. It had as its sponsors John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Alfred E. Smith, Nicholas Murray Butler and others of their class. Its purpose was to teach the people in general and the young people in particular, by a ten years' campaign of education, that moderation in drinking is the "sensible" solution of the liquor problem.

Now, in less than nine months of the first year, Everett Colby, the President, announces that the Council for Moderation has suspended operations, due to a lack of financial support. He adds the concise explanation that "The Wets thought we were too dry and the Drys thought we were too wet."

Thus dies a movement which should never have been born. Please omit flowers.

Evening Talks With Our Readers

After getting away from my office and the editorial chair into the quiet of the evening hours at home, I often imagine myself in the homes of our readers, engaged in conversation on topics of mutual interest.

Perhaps you would like to talk a little while about the Townsend plan.

Well, what do you consider the "big-idea" of the plan? "Old-age pensions," you promptly reply.

No, you're wrong. The Townsend plan proposes to give a pension of \$200 a month to all persons over sixty years of age (of whom it is estimated there are from 8,000,000 to 10,000,000), on condition that they retire from gainful employment and spend the entire \$200 within the month.

Here we have three ideas: first, the monthly pension of \$200; second, the condition of retirement by old folks who are still employed, which it is estimated would make places for approximately 4,000,000 of the unemployed; third, the condition that the \$200 must be spent each month, within the month. And the third idea is the big one.

The plan of old-age pensions is receiving general approval, and has already been provided for. Some of the states have had old-age pension laws for years and the Federal Government made general provision of this kind when the last session of the Congress enacted the Social Security Bill. It is not the *receiving*, but the *spending*, of pension money that is the main idea of the Townsend propaganda. Dr. Townsend, the originator of the plan, delivered an address in Philadelphia recently, and during the question period following the address some one in the audience asked, according to the newspaper report, "if the \$200 a month would be paid to a man who had made a good salary up to the age of 60 but who had squandered it all." To which Dr. Townsend replied: "Why, God bless you, that's what we want people to do. That's the basis of the plan, the spending of money, of keeping it in circulation. Money and credit are the life blood of business. There must be circulation."

Here we have, from the originator, the philosophy of this plan. It is to increase spending by the billions, this tremendously increased demand will stimulate production to the starting of every idle wheel, and, presto! we have prosperity back again. This is the big idea, and it accounts for the two outstanding peculiarities of the plan; namely, the