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**The Devil and the Church Part II**

by E.M. Bounds

Sometime in the country I have stood and watched the village blacksmith at work, and for a long time could not make out the use of the little trip hammer. The big hammer I could understand, but why should the smith strike in turns the anvil and the iron puzzled me. One day I ventured to ask an explanation, and found that the little hammer regulates the stroke of the big one. The smith holds the glowing metal, turning it lest the stroke fall too often upon the same spot, directing the blows that they may descend at the right moment; turning, tempering, regulating till the metal is fashioned to the desired shape. So God holds the soul and regulates the stroke. Sometimes He makes the Devil His hammer-man . . . Satan strikes to smash. God regulates the stroke, and turns His malice to our perfecting, and the Devil sweats at the task of fashioning saints into the likeness of Christ. —Samuel Chadwick.

THERE are two ways of directing the Church, God's way and the devil's way. God's way and man's way of running the Church are entirely at poles. Man's wise plans, happy expedients and easy solutions, are Satan's devices. The cross is retired, the world comes in, self-denial is eliminated, all seems bright, cheerful and prosperous, but Satan's hand is on the ark, men's schemes prevail, the Church fails under these taking, pet devices of men, and the bankruptcy is so complete that the court of heaven will not even appoint a receiver for the collapsed and beggarly corporation.

All God's plans have the mark of the cross on them, and all His plans have death to self in them. All God's plans have crucifixion to the world in them. But men's plans ignore the offense of the cross or despise it. Men's plans have no profound, stern or self-immolating denial in them. Their gain is of the world. How much of these destructive elements, esteemed by men, does the devil bring into the Church, until all the high, unworldly and holy aims, and heavenly objects of the church are retired and forgotten?

One of these taking, man-savouring, Satanic devices is to pervert the aims of the Church after this manner of statement and effort, that the main object of the Church today is not so much to save individuals out of society, as to save society, not to save souls so much as to save the bodies of men, not to save men out of a community so much as to save men and manhood in the community. The world, not the individual, is the subject of redemption.

This popular, seductive and deadly fallacy entirely subverts the very foundation of Christ's Church. Its materializing trend is so strong that it will sweep away every vestige of the spiritual and eternal if we do not watch, work and speak with sleepless vigilance, tireless energy, and fearless boldness. The attitude and open declaration of much of the religious teaching we now hear is in the same strain and spirit which characterized Unitarian, Jewish, or rationalistic utterances half a century ago.

To save society is a kind of religious fad to which much enterprising, lauded church work is committed. Advanced thinkers and discoverers have elaborated the same idea. They seem not to realize their true condition, which is one of going back, and not going forward. This backward step entombs religion in the grave where Judaism has been buried all these centuries. It may well accord with the idle dreams of the worldly rabbis to think of regenerating the world and ignoring the individual.

The phrase 'to save the world,' has a pompous sounding; and right taking to flesh and blood is it for the Church to apply itself to bettering the temporal surroundings of the individual, and improve his sanitary conditions; to lessen the bad smells that greet his nose, to diminish the bacteria in his water, and to put granite in the pavement for him to walk on instead of wood or brick. All this sounds finely, and agrees well with a material age, and becomes practical in operation, and evident and imposing in results. But does this agree with the sublime dignity and essential aim of the Church? Do we need any Church to secure these ends? Councilmen of common talent, an efficient street commissioner, and tile ordinary vigilance of the average policeman, will secure these results in their best way. It needs no Church, no Bible, no Christ, no personal holiness, to secure these ends, and this is the point to which all this vaunted advance tends. If the ends of the Church are directed to those results which can be as well or better secured by other agencies, the Church will soon be regarded as a nuisance, a thing to be abated by the most summary process.

The purposes of the Church of God rise in sublime grandeur above these childish dreams and effete philosophies. Its purpose is to regenerate and sanctify the individual, to make him holy and prepare him by a course of purifying and training for the high pursuits of an eternal life. The Church is like the seine cast into the sea. The purpose is not to change the sea so much as to catch the fishes out of the sea. Let the sea roll on in its essential nature, but the net catches its fishes. No bigger fools would ever be found than fishermen who were spending all their force trying by some chemical process to change the essential elements of the sea, vainly hoping thereby to improve the stock of the fish that they had not and never could catch. By this method, personal holiness, the great desideratum for church operation and ends, would be impossible, and heaven would be stricken from creed and life and hope.

To save the world and ignore the individual, is not only utopian, but every way damaging. It is the process, fair and laudable in name, to save the world, but in results it is to lose the Church, or, which amounts to the same, making the Church worldly, and thereby unfitting her for her holy and sublime mission. Christ said that gaining the world and saving the man are antagonistic ends. Christ teaches Peter that his Satanic device would gain the world to and for the Church, but would lose the soul. Everything would seem thrifty to the cause when in reality all was death.

The Church is distinctly, preeminently and absolutely a spiritual institution, that is, an institution created, vitalized, possessed and directed by the Spirit of God. Her machinery, rites, forms, services and officers have no comeliness, no pertinency, no power, save as they are depositions and channels of the Holy Spirit. It is His indwelling and inspiration which make its divine being and secure its divine end. If the devil can by any methods shut the Holy Spirit out from the Church, he has effectually barred the church from being God's Church on earth. He accomplishes this by retiring from the Church the agencies or agents which the Holy Spirit uses, and displaces them by the natural, which are rarely if ever the media of His energy. Christ announced the universal and invariable law when He said, 'That which is born of the flesh, is flesh; that which is born of the Spirit, is spirit.' The Church may have a holy preacher, a man of great prayerfulness, of great grace, filled with the Spirit. But if Satan can by any method retire him, and put a man of no prayerfulness, plausible, eloquent and popular, the Church may seem to have gained, but it has gained by the substitution of natural for spiritual forces, a gain which has all unconsciously revolutionized the Church. Officer a church with holy men, not highly cultured, but well-versed in the deep things of God, and strong in devotion to Christ and His cause, not wealthy, nor of high social position. Now change these officers and put in men who are every way decent in morality, but not given or noted for prayer and piety, men of high social position and fine financiers, and the Church scarcely marks the change save marked improvement in finances. But an invisible and mighty change has taken place in the Church, which is radical. It has changed from a spiritual Church to a worldly one. The change from noonday to midnight is not more extreme than that. At this point Satan is doing his deadliest and most damning work, the more deadly and damning because unnoticed, unseen, producing no shock and exciting no alarm.

It is not by positive, conspicuous evil that Satan perverts the Church, but by quiet displacement and by unnoticed substitution. The higher is being retired, the spiritual gives place to the social, and the divine is eliminated, because it is made secondary.

The perversion and subversion of the Church is secured by Satan when the spiritual forces are retired or made subordinate to the natural, and social entertainment, and not edification becomes the end. This process involves not only the aims and ends of entertainment, but it is intended to soften and modify the distinctly spiritual aim, and to widen from what is deemed the rigid exclusiveness of spiritual narrowness. But in the end it eliminates all that is distinctly spiritual, and that which is in any sense deeply religious will not survive the death of the spiritual. Edification as the end of God's Church is wholly lost sight of, and entertainment, that which is pleasing and pleasant, comes to the front. The social forces not only retire the spiritual forces, but effectually destroy them.

A modern church with its kitchen and parlour, with its club and lyceum, and with its ministries to the flesh and to the world, is both suggestive and alarming. How suggestive in the contrast it presents between the agencies which the primitive Church originated and fostered, as the conserver of its principles and the expression of its life, and those which the modern and progressive Church presents as its allies or substitutes. The original institutions were wholly spiritual, calculated to strengthen and cultivate all the elements which combine to make a deep and clear experience of God. They were training schools for the spiritual life, subservient to its culture as the chief end. They never lingered in the regions of the moral, the aesthetic and the mental. They fostered no taste nor inclination which was not spiritual, and did not minister to the soul's advance in divine things.

They took it for granted that all who came to them, really desired to flee from the wrath to come, and were sincerely groaning after full redemption, and that their obligation to furnish to these the best aids were of the most sacred and exacting

kind. It never occurred to them that the lyceum or sociable were channels through which God's grace would flow and could be laid under tribute for spiritual uses. These social and fleshly forces are regarded in many quarters as the perfection of spiritual things. These agencies are arrayed as the mature fruit of spiritual piety, flavoured and perfected by its culture and progress, and ordained henceforth as the handmaids of the prayer and testimony meeting. We object most seriously to the union. What have they in common? 'How indeed can two walk together unless they be agreed?'

What elements of piety are conserved by the lyceum or sociable? What phases of spiritual life do they promote? By what feature of the lyceum is faith invigorated? Where do you find in it any elements which are distinctly pious, or are aids to piety? How does the sociable produce a more prayerful, a holier life? What secret springs has it to bring the soul nearer to God? Wherein does it form or strengthen the ties of a Christly fellow-ship? Is it not frivolous and worldly? Is it not sensuous and fleshly? Does it not cater to and suit the tastes of the carnal, the light and worldly? What unity of purpose and spirit is there between the lyceum and witnessing for Christ? The one is intensely spiritual. The other has in it no jot or tittle of spiritual uses.

We might as well add to the list of heavenly helpers, the skating rink, calisthenics and the gymnasium. If the young people desire to join a lyceum, enjoy a sociable or establish a bank, let them do so, but do not deceive them and degrade piety by calling these things holy institutions and feeders of spiritual life.

Disguise it as we may; reason about it as we will; apologize for it as we do; vainly philosophize of growth and change and culture, the truth is, we have lost that intense type of personal experience, that deep conviction of eternal things which are such evident features of all great spiritual movements. Many preachers and people have fallen so low in their experience that they do not relish these distinct and strongly spiritual agencies; and are devising schemes and institutions to gratify their non-spiritual tastes with schemes which are midway between Christ and the world; which, while not essentially wrong, do not possess one grain of spiritual power, and can never be the channels of heavenly communications.

It is said we cannot get the people to attend the distinctly spiritual means of grace. What is the trouble? Are the institutions worn out and no longer of value to the humble, pious soul? Who will dare affirm this? The tastes of the people are low and perverted. Shall we then change the agencies to suit the unsanctified appetites? No; let us tune up the appetite for spiritual things, and correct and elevate the tastes of our people. Let the revolution begin with the preacher. Let him wrestle with God until his ordination vow becomes vitalized, so that all can feel the pressure of his aim, the ardour of his zeal, his singleness of purpose, and the holiness and elevation of his life, and until the people catch the fire and purpose of his heart, and all press on to the regions of perfect love, panting for all the fulness of God. Under this united, mighty, divine impulse the social and the lyceum will be forgotten and become stale, and all saintly assemblies will be attractive and delight some.

The Church cannot confederate with non-spiritual agencies. By this she breaks the tension of her faith and discards the Holy Ghost. She cannot be the purveyor to unsanctified desires. Neither is it her province to fall down to the beggarly task of entertaining the people. This is her saddest mistake, when her solemn assemblies are surrendered to the concert and lecture, her praise turned into worldly music, her classrooms into parlours, her sociables more popular than her prayer-meetings, the house of God made a house of feasting, and social cheer is sought after rather than a house of prayer. The unity of the Spirit and the holy brotherhood are displaced and destroyed to make room for social affinities and worldly attractions. Her high and royal duty, that by which she maintains her spotless fidelity to her Lord, is to stress holiness and afford all means for its advancement and perfection. This done, spiritual character and affinities will order all the rest.