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REV. S. G. BLAND WRITES

CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS AS OLD AS A PRIVILEGED CLASS.

Leading Churches Have Not Kept Pace With Their Denominations—New Ideas Need a Favorable and Fostering Environment—Danger Before New Church.

By Rev. Dr. S. G. Bland, in Winnipeg Tribune.

The Labour Church has at least made a good start in Winnipeg. Begun July 8, 1918, it has been in existence only a little more than a year and during that period has struggled under considerable difficulties in the way of securing a meeting place. The strike, however—and this is a unique and deeply significant fact—led to a great expansion. It consists now of the Central Church, meeting in the Columbia Theatre, and eight branches, St. James, West Kildonan, Weston, Fort Rouge, Norwood, Elmwood, Morse Place and Transcona. It is regularly organized. The membership is 1000.

Every Sunday there is an estimated attendance of between 2,000 and 2,500. When a mass meeting is called the Labour Church has no difficulty in filling the great hall of the Industrial Bureau, which is estimated to seat some 4,000. Similar churches have been organized in Brandon, Saskatoon and Calgary. No formal constitution has yet been adopted, nor any creed. All are welcomed into it who seek the establishment on the earth of an era of justice, truth and love.

It has a secretary and an organizer who are expected to give their whole time to the work.

Classes are being held for training speakers and Sunday schools are in contemplation.

Has the Labour Church a future? Some will say its distinctive class character makes this unlikely.

A great deal is being said today in condemnation of a class consciousness on the part of labor as though it were a new thing on the face of the earth.

Class Consciousness. The fact is, class consciousness is as old as a privileged class. A privileged class is always intensely and fanatically self-conscious. Formerly it was a class of nobles or landowners who lived by the labor of their slaves, serfs, or tenants. Today, in countries free from feudalism, it is the class roughly made of financiers, employers and well-to-do, with those immediately dependent on them or who cater to them. There is no class in America so keenly and passionately class-conscious, so sensitive to danger or even the possibility of danger, so

resolute and closely-knit in meeting it, so politically vigilant and untiring.

The assimilating power of this class feeling is enormous. With rare exceptions as soon as a man becomes an employer on the smallest scale he becomes imbued with the consciousness of his class. He may have sprung from the wage-earning class and associated with it more than half a life, but, as I said, with rare and noble exceptions, the new class-consciousness seems to drown the old forthwith.

The capitalist class, to use the popular term is a phalanx. Labor, in comparison, is a mere chance crowd. Many wage-earners, usually the most competent, have no interest in this class. Their ambition is fixed on emerging from it. A vast number have no class-consciousness beyond the desire for not always very active for a better wage. It is only a fraction that is really class-conscious and interested selfishly or altruistically in the rise of the wage-earners as a class. And with this fraction the class-consciousness instead of uniting often divides. There is the deep, almost unbridgeable, gulf between the thorough-going and radical Socialists (again of widely different views but contemptuous of ameliorations) and the Trades Unionist who hitherto has had place in his policy for nothing else. In addition, in Winnipeg and the West, all now see a new cleavage even in Trades Unionists between the conservative, internationalists and the more radical advocates of One Big Union.

If Working Class Become Infected. It is difficult to imagine how any employer or banker can keep his face sober when he speaks of the danger of the working-class becoming infected with a class-consciousness. Let him first compare the class-consciousness of the proletariat even of Winnipeg to-day where it may be supposed to be peculiarly acute, with that, for example, of the Canadian Manufacturers' association.

No defence is here intended of class-consciousness. It is deplorable and must pass away. But the class-consciousness of labor is certainly no more dangerous than the other; it was not the first; nor is it likely to disappear unless the other does also.

Intensely class-conscious, then, as is the upper middle-class in Canada as elsewhere, it is inevitable that the churches attended or dominated by that class will be deeply colored by it. These churches in Canada are the great Protestant churches.

This does not mean that the yeast of the social revolution is not working in these churches. It is, and ever more strongly and especially among the ministers. A little pamphlet published recently by the Methodist Board of Evangelism and Social Service on "Christian Churches and Industrial Conditions," will be a revelation to many as to the degree and extent to which radicalism is permeating all the great churches of Britain, the United States and Canada.

Whenever, indeed, leaders of these churches meet in national conventions something (can it be other than the Spirit of God?) seems to carry them further than probably most of them thought of going before they met.

however, not always kept pace with their denominations. They are not yet, nor seem immediately likely to be, centres of radical propaganda. And it is in these churches that are usually to be found the ministers who are the natural leaders of their denomination.

Now, consider the case of a minister in one of our well-to-do city churches. Unless he is a man of very wide knowledge, deep sympathies, great courage and independence, conditions are tremendously against his being a propagandist of even those social doctrines endorsed by his own denomination.

In the first place, in such a well-to-do church the minister probably does not meet the poor, perhaps not even the proletariat. The hardships of the underpaid wage-earner, or of the humbler members of the salaried class, the discontent, the anxieties and fears, the deep yearning aspirations, are not forced upon his attention. His daily routine is amongst people pretty well satisfied with the present order, pleasant people, kindly people, even when bearing possibly not the best name among their employees, very hospitable and likeable and generous as he sees them. He would have to go out of his way to become an "agitator." Even if he brought to such a church a passion for social justice, his flame might die out for lack of fuel. An occasional sermon or reference will satisfy his conscience.

But if, nevertheless, he does begin to repeat with passion and purpose Christ's great message, change your minds for the new social order is at hand, what will he find?

For anything but the most academic and general discussion an uneasy and frigid reception on the part of some of his congregation.

Now, sympathetic men are generally sensitive men. It is not pleasant to disturb and estrange people who are kind to one and whom one likes and respects, and it is not difficult to find good reasons for not going very far upon a lonely road.

Moreover, while almost any congregation today will tolerate or even approve occasional sympathetic references to social reconstruction of a vague character, and probably there are very few Canadian congregations where there is not a section that will approve even of bold and energetic radical issues, there is in many of our well-to-do churches a section, and often a very influential section, that will resent in the preacher prophetic frankness and passion in regard to the injustices and inequalities of our own day. Any persistence in such preaching will encounter, not merely resentment, but hostility. There may be also fear of division in the church, a very great calamity, especially to a conscientious and sensitive minister, or even to an ambitious one.

And a cynical devil is always at the ear in such cases and whispers, cui bono, why endanger a career, why wreck a church, why stir up anger and trouble and possibly accomplish little or nothing?

Still more serious consequence: In some of these well-to-do churches the preacher cannot but be aware that any emphasis on the social gospel may cost him his pulpit and involve the loss, not only of a livelihood, but of a great opportunity for usefulness.

Protestant churches do not always furnish a free, and what is also needed, a sympathetic acid-bed for the new social ideas which are pressing for recognition.

As I have said, these great churches are moving forward. The ministry especially is being gripped with new convictions and new ideals. In many of the local churches there is even a free course for these. But in the cities and larger towns the churches are largely controlled by men who have no enthusiasm for the social gospel, if not actually hostile to it.

Democracy And Brotherhood Ideas. Now, new ideas are like all other young things. They need a favorable and fostering environment, like babies and seedlings.

There is no doubt these ideas of democracy and brotherhood will grow and prevail. They will, it may be affirmed, grow more quickly in an organization specifically fashioned to develop and propagate them than in one fashioned for other ends.

With the fullest confidence, then, that the new social gospel is destined to capture all the great churches, and wish no expectation so quickly in an organization specifically fashioned to develop and propagate them than in one fashioned for other ends.

There need be no antagonism nor jealousy. There ought to be none. All men who desire to see the Kingdom of God on the earth should pray that the Labour church may accomplish its true function—to spiritualize the present discontent and bring to economic agitation the purifying and steady and sustaining passion of Christianity.

Dangers Before New Church. There are dangers before the new church, the greatest, perhaps, that the economic may crowd out the religious. But if it helps to lift the struggle of the working class on to the plane of a high and pure religious devotion, where, indeed, much of it already is but not all, it will, whether it have a long, or not, render a great service, and will pave the way for that simple, undogmatic, comprehensive, democratic, and, above all, brotherly and practical kind of church into which all present churches will merge, in which at last the true soul of the Christian people will find its full expression and into which it will pour its consecrated energies, with a spring-tide of passion such as the history of the church in Canada has not yet revealed.

Jesus said He had come to "send fire upon the earth." That is the last thing which our religious life suggests at present, but it will not always be so. A fire not of hatred, but of love will yet break out in Canada, and directly and indirectly the Labour church may help to kindle it.

Rev. Salem Goldworth Bland was born at Lachute, Quebec, on August 26th, 1859, a son of the late Rev. Henry F. Bland and Emma, daughter of the late Rev. William Levell. Thus he came of Methodist ministry stock on both sides. He was educated at the high schools of Dundas, Kingston and Belleville, then at Morris College and McGill University, graduating

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B.A. in 1897. In 1903 he was given the honorary degree of D.D. by Queen's University. He entered the Methodist ministry in 1880, and was ordained in 1884. He was stationed at Kingston, Perth, Quebec, Cornwall, Smith's Falls, Ottawa, Toronto and Winnipeg. He was secretary of the Montreal Conference in 1898. In 1908 he was appointed professor of New Testament Exegesis and Church History at Wesley College, Winnipeg. He has written and lectured much, among the most popular of his lectures being "The Development of the

Canadian Type of Character," "Civic and Social Problems" and "The Building of a Nation." He has not been identified with either of the political parties, but has labored strenuously for temperance, social and moral reform. He has always desired and worked for a federation of Christian churches and the Christianization of the misadvised secular activities of the world. An ardent Imperialist, he believed that Canada should share in the cost as well as the protection of the Empire. He is a Free Trader, a believer in Single Tax on land values, the largest measure of public ownership that can safely be managed, and favors the erection of a Canadian Hall of Fame.

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