



DROP-IN 505 Rideau Street, PHONE: 613-241-2407 EMAIL: capitalcitymission@sympatico.ca
Mail: 390 Rideau Street Box 20183 Ottawa, On K1N 9P4

CCM NEWSLETTER JANUARY 2001

Will The Last Church Be Like The First Church?

Here we are, in January 2001, days after the dawn of the new millennium. (That's because the purists say the *true* new millennium began this year.) This time around, there wasn't nearly the fanfare or anxiety of last year. But if anything good has come out of all the millennial hype, it's this: at least it got people talking about where we might be heading: culturally, socially, and spiritually. Within the Church, many Christians wondered whether the present Church will be the last. I'd like to take that a step further. Will the last Church be like the *first* Church? More to the point, do we here in Canada really *want* it that way?

Let's start by taking a quick look at what the first Church was actually like. In the first six chapters of the Book of Acts, you witness the birth and infancy of the Church. In the first chapter God promises to use His power to fuel the Church. In chapter two we see that promise fulfilled, on the day of Pentecost, the Church's birthday, when the Holy Spirit descends on God's people. What follows is pure pandemonium. God's power is poured out like a river. There are miracles, physical healing, and thousands of people saved and made citizens of heaven. So far, so good. If the last Church is going to be like the first Church, count me in, right?

Then we hit chapter four, when persecution starts. The powerful religious elite of the day begin to crack down on this renegade sect that has turned Jerusalem upside down. (Do we still want the last church to be like the first?) But in spite of the persecution something else wonderful happens. The Church begins to show God's compassion for the poor. A form of profit-sharing emerges, with the believers sharing their possessions with those in need. The Bible tells us the believers were of one heart and mind because even in the midst of tough times, they felt that helping the less fortunate among them was the right thing to do. There was a sense of fellowship and compassion that crossed economic and social lines.

Then in chapter five, something insidious sneaks into the Church. Selfishness and deceit. Two Christians in particular, Ananias and Sapphira lie to the Church and to God by keeping some of their own goods for themselves, while publicly saying they had given everything they had to help the poor. It's selfishness fuelled by greed and pride and it's wrong. So God responds by purging the Church of those who put themselves before others. But the damage is done. The actions of one couple bring the Church to its first major crisis.

We find that crisis in Acts chapter six. A complaint arises. The complaint was raised by the Greek-speaking or Hellenistic Jews of the Church. The Grecian Jews were those who had been scattered over the Roman Empire. Unlike the Hebraic Jews of Jerusalem and Judea, they had not maintained their distinct language, and some elements of their culture. These Grecian Jews complained that their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. The needy among the Hebraic Jews were being cared for first. The first crisis of the Church was this, and that crisis continues today: The Church began to forget about those who were considered the "outsiders." We're not just talking about the financially poor here. We are talking about the poor in spirit. The people who don't have the right pedigree, who aren't part of the "in crowd." In a modern context, they are the people right off the street, not the second-, third- or fourth-

generation Pentecostals who run in the right circles. At the root of the Church's first crisis was a cultural, societal, and philosophical mindset against those who were outsiders.

Some might accuse the Grecian Jews of being divisive. But I believe this is one of the few godly complaints you will find in the New Testament. If we are going to have the heart and compassion of God, we need to complain about the things God really wants us to complain about. God allowed this complaint to force the Church to re-examine its priorities. Despite all the great signs, miracles, and numerical growth, the Church began to forget about the poor, those outside our walls and social circles. Will the last Church be like the first Church? It saddens me to say it, but on this point, to a great degree, the Canadian Church already is.

How did the Apostles respond? Did they say: "Choose some people who aren't very gifted or bright, who can't handle the high profile jobs like teaching, leading worship, or preaching, and let these people go wait on tables." No, the Bible teaches us that for the "menial" ministry of reaching out to the economically poor and the poor in spirit, the Church chose people who were "full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom" and of good reputations. We've traditionally viewed this passage as the launch of church government so our congregations can run smoothly. Instead, it's God choosing the very best to minister to the outsiders among us.

As the director of a mission my heart breaks when I see what people donate to the poor. They give their cast-offs. Stuff no longer useful to them, and quite frankly not much use even to people on the street. But that attitude goes beyond our stuff. People have said to me: "Pastor, these people would be great to work at the mission. He's got an addiction, she's got some mental problems and is a bit of an outcast. It would really be good for them to be down there." Why do you think the so-called outsiders in our churches are only good enough to work at missions and wait on tables, to serve their own kind. God's

Solution was that the poor would get the best. Just like the solution for man's sin called for the very best to be given. The example of Stephen's life is plain. I dare say if Stephen (one of those chosen by the Apostles to wait on tables) was alive today, we'd pull him out of the mission or drop-in centre and try to make him one of our star performers? We wouldn't want to waste his time in a mission, or serving the downtrodden in our churches and neighbourhoods. We would make Stephen into something God didn't design him to be. But it was God's intention that Stephen, a man full of grace and of a good reputation, should reach out to the outsider and the poor of spirit. The poor, the outcast

deserve our very best. How successful was this strategy? The Bible says that Stephen did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people, and the Church grew. In Stephen, the poor saw the love and compassion of God, and that's what attracted them to the gospel. It was the formula for the first Church. It's still the formula today.

Do you really want the last Church to be like the first Church? Ask yourself these questions: What are you complaining about? What are you passionate about? Are your complaints and passions God's? The last Church will indeed be like the first Church. "What will YOU be like?"

Rev. Timothy Meisenheimer

CAPITAL CITY MISSION A PLACE TO FIND FRIENDSHIP AND HELP

This month watch sea to sea on vision jan.21 to see more about ccm. Please pray for: souls servants support
If you would like to support ccm please make your check payable to CAPITAL CITY MISSION 390
Rideau st. box 20183 Ottawa Ont. K1N 9P4