

Forward to Enerest Loosely's book, When the Church Was Young

The experience of the early church was very much like that of a young and growing child. There was newness and freshness in her. She knew exploration, experiment, discovery and wonder. "Some new thing" had come into the world and those who found it were engaged for years in trying to understand and to explain what it meant.

An institution is bound to grow and to become more complex, gathering about itself numerous accessories as the years pass. But that development must be in harmony with the original spirit and intention of the movement, and not restrain or divert or enfeeble it. The days of the first warm enthusiasm, of the first vivid inspiration, and of original contact with creative personality must ever be kept; and the ideals then imparted must fashion the whole course of outward development. The essentials are the things that are present at the beginning.

It will scarcely be denied that many unessential things have crept into the church's life, and that a disproportionate share of its energy is absorbed by these unessentials. Indeed, in the opinion of Dr. C. E. Raven, something even more serious than this has happened.

"A profound alteration has taken place in the character of the religion of Jesus. This difference is not merely one of externals nor is it inherent in the necessity of growing older. The evidence demonstrates that fundamental changes have taken place in the inner life of the church, in its relationship to Christ and to God."

It should be a salutary experience to remind ourselves that things were not always the way they are now. The church, with more or less conscious aim, has made itself what we now know it to be. But when it was very young, it carried a minimum of paraphernalia, and did its work the more effectively because it traveled light.

We may yet find that the way of wisdom for ourselves lies in the pursuit of a similar policy.

What traditions have been introduced for expediency may now be left behind, also for reasons of expediency. The Spirit is still alive, and is willing to lead the church to new ventures of faith and practice. Hear the closing paragraph of Dr. Streeter's book, *The Primitive Church*.

"It is permissible to hint that the first Christians achieved what they did because the spirit with which they were inspired was one favorable to *experiment*. Perhaps the line of advance for the church today is not to imitate the forms but to recapture the spirit of the Primitive Church."