

# The Philosophical Research Society, Inc.

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## THE CALLING OF THE CARPENTER

DEAR FRIENDS:



THE STORY of the Protestant/Christian Communion in the United States during the nineteenth century is worth remembering. In those days a call to the ministry was equal to a vow of poverty. With the exception of a few metropolitan congregations, the clergymen had to face the rigors and hardships of life in small pioneering communities striving for survival against numerous hazards, natural and artificial. It was religion that sustained the average family through years of poverty and toil. Usually there was a small church which had been built between seasons by the local people. There were also instances in which the schoolhouse was the meeting place for the devout. In the more remote areas there was no regular preacher and a respected elder gave readings from the scriptures and preached a homely sermon in support of local piety.

When the wagon trains moved westward there was special need for spiritual consolation. Attacks by hostile Indians were frequent, and along the way there could be births, marriages, and deaths. As it was unlikely that a clergyman would be available, ministerial duties were assumed by some layman who enjoyed general respect. There was prayer at every graveside and a motley group assembled reverently for this final parting from some loved one. Religion was in the hearts and minds of these people, and for the most part the creed was a simple statement, "Thy will be done." Patience was the virtue of the pioneer and by modern standards his faith was strong and deep.

In the mining towns trappers, cowpunchers, and prospectors were not actually as disorderly as modern motion pictures would suggest. There were difficulties and justice was crude, but it was quite usual for the saloon to be closed on Sunday and if no preacher were available, the lawyer, doctor, or sheriff might officiate. After a rousing service most of the cow men wrote letters home to mother if she was alive. They always opened the letter with the statement that they had just been to church. In these barren places the mother image was next

in sanctity only to God, himself. It was into this difficult and even dangerous ministry that a young man might be called.

In those days there were many lay preachers. They had not attended seminaries, but they could read and write and their most precious possession was a Holy Bible. Those who were able to attend some theological school might graduate into a well established pattern of churches scattered about in various parts of the country. They only required two indispensable assets--they had to be "sound in the doctrine," and married. Very few communities would accept a clergyman who was not a family man. If the call was to a small town church, the pastor was given a house rent-free. It was usually in a dilapidated condition with three rooms and outside plumbing. A minister with an assured income of \$5 to \$10 per month considered himself extremely fortunate. When the collection did not produce this, members of the church gave food and cast-off clothing.

In recent years there have been many changes in the spiritual outlook of mankind. The stress of modern living has brought with it an increasing need for inner spiritual security. Many of the larger denominations of the Christian Faith have attempted to adapt their teachings to contemporary problems. The ministry of healing has been restored by a number of sects and early mystical traditions have been revived with considerable success. Tolerance is noted in even the most conservative theological systems. Some denominations, however, are finding difficulty in attracting young people to the ministry. Freedom of thought is becoming widespread in the metropolitan sections, where a more sophisticated membership objects to many of the old dogmas. Evangelical movements have a large sphere of influence among young people, who are also beginning to appreciate the importance of strengthening internal integrities.

We also have the modern equivalent of the lay preacher. He belongs to no denomination, has little or no formal ministerial training, but feels within himself a strong determination to share his religious convictions with those around him. Today, those who receive the call divide into two distinct groups--the assenters and the dissenters. The first group is composed of those who have found a faith suitable to their needs and seeks to spread the message in any way possible. The other group, the dissenters, is offended by the religions of their fathers and go forth on a crusade against what they consider misinterpretations and corrupted teachings. At this time also, Western peoples have experienced the impact of Eastern religious philosophies. Some have been drawn toward Oriental philosophies and others have armed themselves against the encroachments of heathen beliefs. Regardless of individual attitude, Buddhism especially has gained a firm foothold in the West. It is acceptable to scientifically trained minds, and has made contributions to psychology and psychiatry. Acupuncture, based upon the esoteric teachings of Taoism, has many well accredited practitioners in the United States and England. The mystical sects of Hinduism have come to be generally respected, and have brought consolation and peace of soul to numerous truth-seekers.

When we remember back to the ministries of older times which were carried on without benefit of clergy, we can better appreciate the modern trend. Those who heed the call of the carpenter today are impelled by their own souls to serve their fellowmen. They do not all preach the same beliefs, and occasionally their followers come into open conflict. They have one advantage, however, over a formally trained clergy. They know small Latin and less Greek, but they understand the

needs of their friends and neighbors. The recent tendency has been to over-emphasize the intellectual aspects of faith. When a person attempts to intellectualize his spiritual convictions, he usually ends in confusion. When those of similar insights gather quietly and attempt to strengthen the faith they have in common, immediate good often results. The Sermon on the Mount is a comparatively simple statement of Christian Mysticism. It requires very little analysis, but a great deal of kindly acceptance. After all, religion is a way of life. It is a daily rededication to truths known in the heart and sanctioned by the mind. In the isolated farming communities of Tennessee, West Virginia, and the Ozark region there are many wonderful people. They have quiet virtues, no longer noticeable among modern sophisticates. They are still honest according to their own lights, they work hard, and have few luxuries. About all they seem to need is an occasional itinerant preacher to bring their convictions into focus. The fundamental faith of these people would be of great service to most of us today. Upon such a foundation the higher aspects of culture could evolve and develop naturally. Those who are grateful for small things would appreciate larger advantages and greater opportunities. Progress cannot float on the surface, and the survival of civilization depends almost entirely upon a faith in the Universal Plan and the Divine Power at the source of existence. Once we accept the leadership of the best part of ourselves, we can be entrusted with greater knowledge and broader opportunity. We can outgrow almost any creed with which we are associated, but we cannot outgrow kindness, charity, and gentle faith.

Those who feel that today they are being called to spread the truths of life will do well to build a solid foundation under their mission. They must emphasize first the simple virtues. They must convince the sceptical that only those who live the good life can ever truly understand the doctrine. Each of us in a way must convert himself. We may hear about religion and estimate the quality of its teachings, but we must begin by putting our own lives in order. There will be confusion everywhere until we unconfuse ourselves. Most of the lay preachers who labored a century or more ago were very simple people, perhaps unduly orthodox, but they felt themselves called because in their own hearts and minds they wanted to help their neighbors. There was no economic advantage; they did not build churches; rather they wandered about like the the prophets of old, admonishing others like themselves to prepare the way of the Lord and face the future with love and courage.

Most sincerely yours,

*Mary P. Hall*



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<u>TITLE</u>	<u>AUTHOR</u>	<u>PRICE</u>
How to Develop Your Thinking Ability	K. S. Keyes, Jr.	(p) \$ 2.25
Highest State of Consciousness, The	John White (Ed.)	(p) 3.50
Healing	Francis McNutt	(p) 3.50
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#### BOOKS BY MANLY P. HALL

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