

The REFLECTOR

"NOW, IT IS DIFFERENT"

Lowell Blasingame, Pine Bluff, Arkansas

"It is most likely that in the Apostolic age when there was but 'one Lord, one faith, and one baptism,' and no differing denominations existed, the baptism of a convert by the very act constituted him a member of the church, and at once endowed him with all the rights and privileges of full membership. In that sense, 'baptism was the door into the church.' Now, it is different, and while the churches are desirous of receiving members, they are wary and cautious that they do not receive unworthy persons. . ." (*Standard Manual for Baptist Churches*, Edward T. Hiscox, p. 22.)

One does not study the New Testament without being impressed with the fact that no differing denominations existed in that age. Christ is not the author of denominationalism for He prayed for the unity of those who believe on Him (John 17:20, 21). He built only His church (Matt. 16:18) and had it been composed of a variety of denominations, one could have read of their existence then. The apostles of Christ did not build denominations. Their plea, too, was for unity and they condemned the emergence of parties that followed men (I Cor. 1:10-13).

It is equally true that the baptism of a convert made him a member of the church in New Testament times and in that sense "baptism was the door into the church." Paul identified the church as the body of Christ and said that we are baptized into it (Eph. 1:22, 23; I Cor. 12:13). Inquirers on Pentecost were told to repent and be baptized and those who gladly received the word did that and were added to the church by the Lord (Acts 2:37-47). They joined nothing and were voted on by no one.

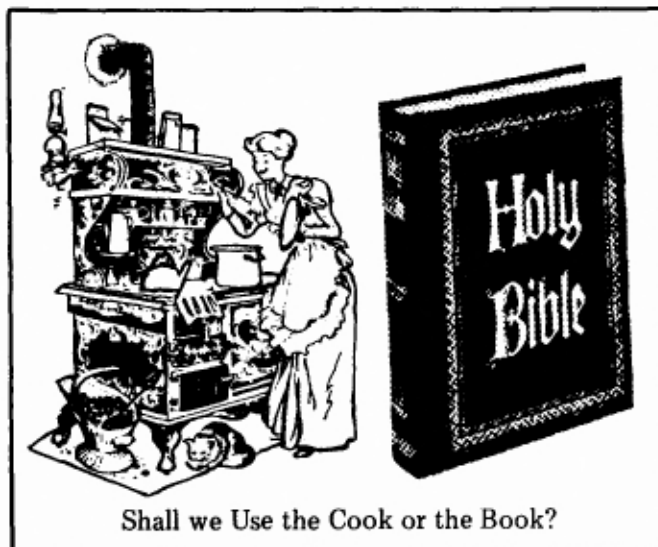
"Now, it is different" — and how very different it is! During the apostolic age there was but one Lord, one faith and one baptism. No differing denominations existed for there was but one church (Eph. 1:22, 23; 4:4). Now there are more than 300 denominations in existence in our country and these are divided into some 1500 different faiths. How different this is from that of the apostolic age when there was but one church and one faith.

And, may I ask, who made it different and why? Is it the Lord who has made it different because He has become dissatisfied with His original way as revealed in the New Testament? If so, where and how do I learn that it is He who has made the changes? Is it man, acting from his dissatisfaction with the Lord's way, who has made it different? If so, by what reason or right does he presume to do this? These questions merit serious consideration from all who would serve the Lord in sincerity and truth.

"Those who follow the crowd are quickly lost in it."

COOKSTOVE APOSTASY

Billy Moore, Butler, Missouri



"The early church prayed in the upper room, the twentieth century church cooks in the supper room. Today, the supper room has taken the place of the upper room, play has taken the place of prayer, and feasting the place of fasting. There are more full stomachs than there are bended knees and broken hearts. There is more fire in the range in the kitchen than there is in the pulpit. Ice cream chills the fever of spiritual life.

"The early Christians were not cooking in the supper room the day the Holy Spirit came, they were praying in the upper room; they were not waiting on tables, they were waiting on God; they were not waiting for the fire from the stove, but for the fire from above. They were detained by the command of God and not entertained by the cunning of men. They were filled with the Holy Ghost, not stuffed with stew and roast.

"Oh, I would like the cooking squad put out and the praying band let in; less ham and sham, and more heaven; less pie and more piety; less use for the cook book, and more use for the Old Book. Put out the fire in the kitchen and build up the fire in the pulpit."

—*Gospel Advocate*, May 30, 1935

Many brethren did not take heed to the warnings given by preachers forty years ago; they wanted to be like those about them and bring into the church recreation, banqueting, entertainment, and they succeeded in far too many places. Example: in one little bulletin from a church in Illinois, which a friend gave me a few weeks ago, I read of these things:

"Remember the pantry barrel . . ."



Since the Reagan landslide last November, hundreds of "conservative" politicians are coming out of hiding and pretending to have been such all the time. That's what is called "getting on the band wagon."

We are witnessing the same thing in the church. In an effort to answer us, the liberals have been contending for several years that there "is no pattern," and "we do many things for which we have no authority."

Now they are discovering that they have produced a new crop of preachers and members who have gone far beyond what they planned or envisioned. The "Crossroads philosophy," the grace-fellowship movement, the charismatics, the fellowship all religions plea, etc. is not exactly what our older liberals had in mind. Now they are shouting "Fire, fire," and they have forgotten who set the blaze. Many preachers whom I consider to be very liberal on many things are now scared about liberalism.

True conservatives not only oppose these "far out" movements, but we still oppose all church-related societies, sponsoring churches, the social gospel, and everything else for which we cannot produce scriptural authority. When you leave "the pattern" in one area, departure in any and all other areas is only a matter of time and opportunity.

On his newscast recently, Paul Harvey was commenting on the large number of neoconservatives in political activities, and he quoted some fellow who said that "a neoconservative was a liberal who had been mugged by reality." Maybe the same is true in the church.

MORE ABORTIONS THAN BABIES!

The NBC Evening News on June 3rd reported that more women had abortions than had babies in Russia last year. We can somewhat imagine that in Russia, for they are under the teaching and influence of atheism. So far as I know, it would be no more wrong to an atheist to kill a baby than to kill a bug.

But in this "Christian nation" we are killing millions of babies each year. How do WE account for such conduct? A recent ABC poll revealed that 75% of Americans are for abortion. But the same poll showed that more than 50% believe in premarital sexual relations. So that indicates the kind of people we have — at least the kind questioned in such polls.

Eugene Britnell

COOKSTOVE APOSTASY continued . . .

"Thanks to _____ for the hot chocolate."

"Pizza for the teenagers."

"Executing the fun packed game . . . cooking the pizzas."

"Work up your Halloween costume for Saturday, October 29th. Whooooooooo will you be?"

"Awards go to _____ Champion Balloon Stomper and to _____ Champion Marshmallow Eater."

"... the teenagers had a bushel and a peck of fun."

"The Come and Go Breakfast."

Sound like a church of Christ? Well, not like any I have read of in the New Testament, or like any I knew when I was growing up. In fact, not like any I am associated with today. But, unfortunately, it does describe many many churches of Christ today. Warnings were not heeded and the "Cookstove Apostasy" has taken over.

These manifestations of the social gospel of which brother Moore writes are not confined to Illinois; they are all over the country, including our area. From a recent bulletin of a church in N. Little Rock, I find the following under "Coming Events": Fish Fry, Pancake Breakfast, Zoo Trip, and Area-wide Skating. There isn't a word in the bulletin about the gospel of Christ!

Sad-Sack Syndrome

Dr. Paul Southern, Abilene, Texas

Have you listened to any "pop" songs lately? We have in mind those "Top Twenty Tunes" that hit the charts and fill the airwaves of America with jungle beats and maniacal melodies. Turn your radio on and you will get a good picture of what the world is like in these latter days.

Some time ago we listened for two hours one afternoon in an effort to profile the mind of our culture. Was it ever bad! Out of twenty-seven songs that the disc jockey put on the air, only two had any semblance of a healthy, positive thrust. All of the others belonged to what is called the "Sad-Sack Syndrome."

Among the numbers aired by that powerful station during a two-hour period were the following: "Mixed Up World," "I'm in a Dark Place," "My Heart is Breaking Inside," "All Shook Up," "I Think I'll Lose My Mind," and "I'm Going to Jump into the River and Drown." The subliminal impact of such psychobabbling projected upon the youth of America is frightening to consider.

These pessimistic tunes were aired on Monday, considered by many to be the worst day of the week. As the disc jockey signed off to make way for the next announcer, he said, "What a terrible day Monday is. But it's better to begin every week with a Monday than to have no week at all."

If anything characterizes the cultural life of the eighties in America, it must be our popular music. Naturally, such "music" would not be produced were it not for the confusion in our culture. Composers are simply profiling the neurotic condition of our time.

Human behavior is all "shook-up," and many behavioral scientists anticipate no reversal in the foreseeable future. Our therapeutic age has culminated in one profuse, steady stream of self-revelation, with millions of disturbed persons trying to bring the whole world into harmony with their confusion.

There was a time when persons with the blues went to the farms and factories and worked off their hang-overs. Now they hit the jug and pop pills until they come up with some kind of "jigilating jive" that tells the whole world what a terrible "fix" they are in. Free-floating in some linguistic atmosphere describing the snakepit of haunting fears has become the repetitive pasttime of many composers and publishers.

Unfortunately, the negative, pessimistic attitude toward life in this present world is making a traumatic impact upon many members of the Lord's church. Most of the songs used in some assemblies present a gloomy outlook toward life. They leave the impression that it is sinful to "feel at home in this world any more." We hear some members saying, "I never expect to have a happy day in this life."

Some church members "feel bad when they feel good for fear they will feel worse when they feel better." There is something wrong with a man's thinking who says, "When I go to worship, I want the preacher to hurt me so I will feel bad when I leave the service." Such a masochistic viewpoint concerning the purpose of Christian worship is foreign to the gospel of Christ. Prophets of gloom and doom who sing in somber tones, "Lord, come quickly" are no better prepared for the judgment than a Texas grasshopper is for Christmas. How could anyone enjoy the bliss of heaven when he cultivates nothing but melancholic misery as a Christian on earth?

The recurring note of the New Testament is one of triumphant joy. It begins with the singing of the angels: "I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people . . . Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men in whom he is well pleased" (Luke 2:10, 14). It continues with a glorious crescendo: "Make full my joy . . . Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord . . . Rejoice in the Lord always: again I say, Rejoice." (Phil. 2:2; 3:1; 4:4.) The good news of the kingdom finds redeemed saints rejoicing around the throne of God.

— The Christian Journal, May, 1981

FROM DUSK TO DARKNESS

The daily coming of darkness is a gradual thing, especially in those northern regions (for those who have never experienced such, dusk changes to darkness much more quickly near the equator). And in our lives as well as regarding the fidelity of the church, darkness doesn't usually come suddenly. Rather, it comes over us and among us by very short steps, one-by-one.

For four decades we have watched institutionalism grow among the people of God. From the small beginning of church support of Orphan Homes (relatively small homes, at that), until now some churches support kindergartens, colleges, hospitals, youth camps, day-care centers, homes for the elderly, etc.

DID YOU KNOW?

Did you know that, of all people living today, perhaps half have never seen a Bible, have never heard of Jesus Christ and therefore can't possibly be saved even if they realize they are sinners and even if they want salvation (read Rom. 10:13-15).

Did you know that there are still vast areas in the U.S. where almost no one ever heard the way of salvation preached, who never even heard anyone quote (or read) Acts 2:38 and who never heard of the Lord's church?

Did you know that the Lord's people living today have more ability (in manpower, in money and in transportation and communication facilities) than any generation ever had — ability to take the saving gospel to a lost world.

Did you know that YOU can do something about this? And, *did you know* that the church where you worship can also participate in supporting the preaching of the gospel everywhere?

— Leslie Diestelkamp

During the same time period we have watched the gradual development of various power structures among churches — usually called "sponsoring churches." This movement began, mostly, when a certain church would "take the oversight" of gospel work in a remote area and other churches would contribute to the sponsor, and when the same thing was done locally regarding a radio program. But the concept grew, step-by-step, into huge centers of oversight — congregations assuming responsibility that was far beyond their ability and definitely beyond their responsibility. The Herald of Truth, World Radio, World Bible School, etc. are all products of this gradual process of change — change from the light of truth to the darkness of human wisdom.

But we are not through. Another step-by-step departure has come in the same time period. This one relates to the recreation, entertainment concept. At first it involved occasional suppers in the basement of the meeting house, but it has grown to include receptions, parties, etc. and it now involves the churches in building special facilities such as gymnasiums, bowling alleys, elaborate kitchens, etc.

The Future

Most of those who read this paper are fully aware of those events — the gradual departures — that I have thus far described very briefly. It is not my purpose to belabor that matter. But we must look to the future — not to the future of those who have already gone so far into the darkness of unauthorized religion, but to the future of those who are, today, wandering in the dusk and will be, tomorrow, groping in the darkness. Consider the following items:

1. Even in the more conservative churches today, there are many, many people who no longer object to mixed bathing, scanty attire, social drinking, dancing and even to divorce.

2. In these same congregations

there are many active members who would not object to instrumental music in worship, who believe that some Christians have miraculous powers, who do not object to the premillennial doctrines and who do not defend the non-denominational nature of the Lord's church.

3. Many of these same people — labeled "conservative" — would actually have no objection to church support of human societies, to congregational support of "The Herald of Truth" or to social activities in the church building.

What does all of this mean to those who are devoted to the real principles of truth and righteousness — to God's authorized ways? It means, it seems to me, that we must become aroused. We must not fail to evangelize in every scriptural way, but at the same time we must put great emphasis on edification. Converts must be indoctrinated!

We have gained very little for eternity by simply baptizing many people if we do not defend, support, maintain and demand sound, faithful churches. We must be alerted to the fact that a church is not "sound" just because it may not yet be involved in unscriptural activities. If the faith of the people is not a sound faith, then it will be only a few short steps until the church wanders into darkness.

From the pulpits, in the classrooms (especially the classes for the youth) and in every way possible we must all be warned of the dangers of departures, especially the danger of one little departure after another. Like a slowly developing cancer that takes some years to destroy a life — but that does so very gradually and relentlessly — so sin in our lives and unscriptural religion in the churches will quietly, ceaselessly lead unsuspecting Christians into departures from God's way — departures that are far removed from our present convictions and practice but that will come just as surely as cancer kills and just as surely as darkness follows dusk.

— Leslie Diestelkamp

I pray the Lord my soul to keep.

The following prayer is sometimes taught to little children, that they might begin to speak to their heavenly Father:

"Our Father in heaven,
Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.
And if I die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take.
In Jesus name, Amen."

It is upon one's pillow, in the quiet of the night, when the world slows down, our hands stop and our minds finally have time for meditation, that we often think more seriously about our relationship to God. The pillow can be a very hard, non-restful place, or a very soft, wonderful refreshment. No, I do not refer to the sleep that finally occurs, but to the thoughts that go through the mind before sleep.

Many people know they could not pray the above prayer with any confidence if they understand the words, "I pray the Lord my soul to keep," as their humble petition that, should they die, they may be safe and at rest in Christ awaiting the resurrection. They know, from Bible teaching, that if they should die, the Lord will not "take" them, because they have not obeyed him in baptism, or if they have done so, they have not continued in obedience and faithful worship.

Confidence Possible

The prayer (above), though very basic and human in origin, does express the confidence that some can have of God's acceptance. Little children are safe, pure and acceptable to God. Christ said, "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 19:14).

Likewise, those "in Christ" have the promise of acceptance because of the following:

1. Their past sins were washed away in the blood of Jesus when they were baptized in water (Ac. 22:16; Eph. 1:7).

2. They are living a new and different life from their sinful past, for now they are learning and doing God's will (Rom. 6:1-18; 1 Pet. 4:1-7; 2 Pet. 1:1-9).

3. They now have the spiritual blessings that are in Christ (Gal. 3:26, 27; Eph. 1:3).

4. Even though they are not perfectly sinless in life, they are perfect in God's sight because of the continued forgiveness through the blood of Christ — forgiveness they receive as they walk in the light (1 Jn. 1:7). This forgiveness is received as they confess their sins to God (1 Jn. 1:8-10). They are acceptable to God because they will not live in sin (1 Jn. 5:5, 6; 3:2-10).

The pillow of such a child of God is indeed very comfortable because of the precious promise that God has reserved an everlasting and undefiled home in heaven for us (1 Pet. 1:4). What of you, dear reader? Can you pray the sentiment of the "childish" prayer (above)? If you know you cannot, isn't it time you changed that and obeyed and served your Lord and your God? The decision is yours. Make it today.

— Roy Diestelkamp

WITHOUT SPOT OR WRINKLE

The church is people, and the people who constitute the church are sanctified, cleansed — purified by the power of the Word and by the cleansing blood of Christ (Eph. 5:25-27). Only those people who have been thus cleansed constitute the church of the Lord.

Having been cleansed, are we always thereafter clean? No. "If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves..." (1 Jn. 1:8). (But we can be purified again and again if we confess our sins — 1 Jn. 1:7, 9.)

Many of those who have been sanctified fall, falter and fail. They do not repent and then bring forth fruits of repentance. Indeed, they continue in sin — and in so doing bring disgrace to the church and shame to the Lord.

Example: Everywhere we find churches blighted by the presence of divorce and remarriage. Can anyone believe that God is pleased? Does anyone suppose this condition brings glory to Christ? Does Christ look upon such churches and declare them to be "without spot or wrinkle"? Let those who are defending freedom for divorce and remarriage try to view the church as Christ views it — can you visualize a spotless, unblemished church as the church is now?

— Leslie Diestelkamp

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