

STAY THE COURSE

INTRODUCTION:

1. The Church is passing through turbulent waters. It always has - it always will. We must Stay the Course. Let our ballast be the Word of God and let our Pole Star be Heaven.

I. THE EARLY CHURCH WAS BESET WITH DOCTRINAL PROBLEMS:

- A. Judaism.
- B. Gnosticism - They denied the humanity of Christ.
- C. Church Government - Began to be patterned after Roman Government.
- D. Council of Nicea - A.D. 325.
 1. Union of Church and State in the East.
 2. Orthodox Churches have always been dominated by the State.
- E. In 1054, a formal split occurred between East and West.

II. IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY, MAN DECIDED HE NEEDED A NEW CHURCH.

- A. From the 1500's, the Protestant Reformation hopelessly split the Church. The splintered Church has never recovered.
 1. Lutheran 1517
 2. Reformed 1530's
 3. Anglican 1532
 4. Presbyterian 1560
 5. Anabaptist 1607
 6. Methodist 1739

Note: Because of this, our American Colonies - and later the Nation was saddled with Religious Division.

The Colonist from Europe brought Division with them.

7. This divided condition fostered further Divisions.

- a. Adventist
- b. Nazarene
- c. Pentecostal Groups
- d. Jehovah's Witnesses (Neither the Witnesses nor
- 3. Mormons the Mormons are
- Christian.)

- 8. NOW WE ARE SPLITTING INTO COMMUNITY CHURCHES.

III. IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY MAN DECIDED HE NEEDED A NEW CHRIST.

- A. His Deity was questioned and He was mostly humanized.
- B. DEISM - Swept European Churches - and to some extent American Churches.
- C. Voltaire, Descartes, Thomas Paine were prominent leaders.

NOTE: The Deist believed that God left His Creation to operate under natural laws; hence, there was no place for miracles, the Bible as a revelation from God, prophecy, providence, or Christ as a God-man. The Deist taught that Christ was only a moral teacher and insisted that worship belongs to God.

Deism, used the Scientific methods developed by Newton, Francis Bacon and John Locke and applied it to religion.

IV. IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, MAN DECIDED HE NEEDED A NEW GOD, AND A NEW REPROACH TO THE SCRIPTURES.

- A. Imanuel Kant (1724-1804) - Had no place for Christ as God - Man in his system.
- B. George W.F. Hegel (1770-1831) - Held to philosophical evolution to reach the ABSOLUTE (God - Karl Marx borrowed Hegel's dialectic - logic).
- C. Friedrich D.E. Schleiermacher (1768-1834) - Made feelings or the emotions the element out of which religious experience develops. Thus, the essence of religion is subjectivity. Called by some, The Father of Modern Theology.
- D. Albrecht Ritchl (1822-1889) - Accepted feeling as the foundation for religion. He made religion subjective and opened the way for extreme critical study of the Bible.

NOTE: Rationalism of the enlightenment and idealistic philosophy of the Romantic era were thus the parents of a criticism that tries to destroy the supernatural nature of the Bible as a revelation and makes the Bible the record of the subjective evolution of religion in human consciousness.

This led to REDACTION CRITICISM in Biblical Studies.

Earle Cairns has well written:

“Evangelical Christianity faced increasing attacks during the late nineteenth century and early part of the twentieth century. Ideas of the once-for-all universal nature of Christianity; the absolute God known through His propositional, verbal, inerrant revelation inspired by the Holy Spirit; and the global validity of that inspired objective historical revelation concerning Christ were challenged.”

Christianity Through The Centuries

- E. CLASSICAL LIBERALISM arose in the nineteenth century and peaked by World War I, when it controlled major seminaries, colleges, and pulpits. It broke down after World War I because of the horrors of war, major depression. Its doctrines of the immanence of God, subjective revelation, and a post-millennial future through human effort were too naive to meet the post-war challenges.

V. IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, MAN DECIDED HE NEEDED A NEW RELIGION.

- A. NEO-ORTHODOXY - Dominated the Theological Scene from 1930-1950. But lost momentum in the 1960's.

- 1. Led by Karl Barth (1886-1968) and Emil Brunner and joined by Paul Tillich (1886-1965), Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976), Reinhold Neibuhr (1893-1971), they replaced Classical Liberalism.

- B. They held that “God was ‘wholly other’ than man, an eternally transcendent holy being. Man was helplessly finite and sinful. The Bible is a human book subject to biblical criticism like any other book. It is a record of revelation and a witness to revelation rather than being an inspired, objective, historical, propositional revelation in itself. - People in Christ, already elected to salvation, need only to be made aware of this fact.”

Ibid, Cairns.

C. RADICAL HUMANISM HAS REIGNED FROM 1960 TO THE PRESENT.

1. God is Dead:

- a. Led by theologians such as Thomas J.J. Altizer, Paul van Buren, William Hamilton, and Harvey Cox, they argued that God was dead historically, or that He was dead psychologically because He had ceased to exist in their lives, or He seemed irrelevant in a secular world of wars, the Jewish holocaust, or He is dead ontologically according to Altizer, because He died in the death of Christ.
- b. Harvey Cox, a professor of divinity at Harvard University, wrote *The Secular City* in 1965 in which he argued that urbanization and secularization led to the demise of a God "out there".

NOTE: Happily, this theology never caught on in most theological circles.

D. SITUATION ETHICS: Do What You Wish As Long As It Is Loving.

1. Joseph Fletcher *Situation Ethics* argued that nothing is Absolute - everything is relative and nothing one does is wrong, depending upon the situation you are in, and if you do it in a loving manner.

NOTE: Practicing Situation Ethics seems to be what millions of Americans are doing - including some Christians.

VI. **WE MAKE NO APOLOGIES FOR THE CHURCHES WE HAVE ESTABLISHED.**

- A. Gospel preaching will produce Christians - A group of Christians worshiping and working together constitutes a Church of Christ in any given locale.

That makes us Christians - and only Christians.

1. Three Abilene Christian University professors in three recently printed books would have our historical roots in Campbell-Stone American Frontier Revivals.

C. Leonard Allen and Richard T. Hughes,
Discovering Our Roots

Leonard Allen, Richard T. Hughes, Michael Weed,
The Worldly Church

C. Leonard Allen, *The Cruciform Church*

2. They argue that Church of Christ roots are in Alexander Campbell and Barton W. Stone.

B. I CATEGORICALLY DENY THIS. CHRIST'S CHURCH IS ROOTED IN SCRIPTURE. IT BEGAN IN JERUSALEM - Not Kentucky, West Virginia, or Ohio.

1. They argue that our approach to establishing Bible authority came from Campbell who got it from John Locke, who got it from Bacon.
2. I, and millions of others, came to know our God and our Lord from the Scriptures and not from Campbell. Millions of us are Christians who never heard of Campbell.

NOTE: Books and articles and sermons are filled with such statements as OUR MOVEMENT - OUR RELIGIOUS HERITAGE, OUR HISTORICAL ROOTS.

C. HISTORICITY DOES NOT MEAN AUTHENTICITY:

1. We do not need to wade back through the trash bins of Church History to identify the Church which belongs to Christ.
2. Just because some religious group could trace their lineage back to a given point would not make it a Church of Christ.
3. The Word of God is the Seed of the Kingdom and wherever that seed is sown in honest hearts and brings forth fruit the Kingdom-Church is established.

D. THE NEW TESTAMENT IS THE PATTERN FOR:

1. How we are saved.
2. How we are to view our God, our Lord, His Church.
3. How we are to worship our God.

4. What our duties are before God and for our fellowman.
5. How I am saved from sin - in my daily life.
6. What kind of life our God expects me to live.
7. And what is my destiny.

NOTE: We are willing to affirm this pattern on public platforms.

VII. WE MUST BE INTELLECTUALLY HONEST: CHURCHES OF CHRIST ARE DYING.

- A. Rural church membership is declining. Urban churches are selling their building and are being merged with other churches. Some congregations are larger but that is because of a merger. The total membership in Christ's church has not grown.
- B. LESS MISSIONARIES ON FOREIGN SOIL SINCE 1975.
 1. Not only do we have less missionaries on foreign soil than we had in 1975 but many, many of those overseas are poorly educated, have no appreciable preaching record in the United States - sometimes none - and are poorly equipped in many other ways to reach a foreign culture.
 - a. Church leaders who support such, or permit it to happen, should hang their heads in shame.
 - b. It has made shipwreck of many foreign missions.

NOTE: A number of educated studies put the number of foreign missionaries at no more than 400. Men from the United States.

- c. And this from a group of people who call themselves Christians - and Christians only. Our God and Lord surely expects more from us than this.

WHERE ARE THE THOUSANDS OF MISSIONARIES BEING TRAINED. WHY DID WE NOT HAVE A TEAM OF 500 MISSIONARIES TO ENTER EASTERN EUROPE AND RUSSIA. The REPORTS of some who have made "trips" over there makes one sad - indeed sad - when I know their credentials are sadly lacking.

VIII. WHY ARE CHURCHES OF CHRIST DECLINING?

- A. LACK OF DEEP COMMITMENT AND LOVE FOR GOD AND FELLOWMAN.
- B. Lack of awe for God and respect for His Word.
 - 1. “O, I know the Bible says that, but”
- C. Lack of able godly leaders in the local church.
- D. A famine in the land for QUALIFIED GOSPEL PREACHERS.
 - 1. Men qualified academically.
 - 2. Men who will freely give their lives to Go Anywhere, Under Any Circumstances, - that they might save some.
 - 3. A Loss of a Clear-Cut “Thus saith the Lord” from our pulpits.
 - a. We have developed Preacherettes to preach 11-15 minute sermonettes.
 - (i) A squash might grow “overnight” but not a solid oak tree. Our Brotherhood must not tolerate “squashes” in our pulpits - but able oak trees.
 - (ii) We don’t need counselors, social workers, youth directors, outreach people in our pulpits.

Note: THE ELDERS ARE TO BLAME FOR THIS. So are the people in the pew who are bored to death. No wonder they leave the church. They leave empty each Sunday having not been fed the Word of God.
 - (iii) Brethren, GO PREACH - BUT FIRST GET PREPARED.
- E. Members Who Are in Love With Crass Materialism.
- F. We have turned the Churches into Social Clubs and Recreational Centers.

1. The same scripture which authorizes a gymnasium also authorizes:

Swimming Pool
Golf Course
Fishing Pond
Tennis Courts
Skating Rinks
Bowling Alleys

Who will defend such in debate?

2. Less than eighty years ago there were very few new Church Buildings owned by Churches of Christ.
 - (i) We were poor, less educated, and across the tracks.

Note: We broadcast all over the brotherhood when some of our men received advanced degrees. Especially Ph.D's. Now it is very commonplace.

The world tells us we have arrived.

IX. THE TIME IS WELL PAST FOR US TO END SEGREGATION IN THE CHURCHES.

- A. We can no longer afford the luxury of two churches in one small town or city.
 1. We never could afford the luxury.
 - (a) It means two buildings.
 - (b) Maintenance of two buildings.
 - (c) It means two preachers and church leaders.
- B. It is Sinful to deny attendance on the basis of race.
 1. It has always been sinful.
 - (a) God's people must be color-blind.
 - (b) Brethren, we must not deny a man fellowship with us, in our buildings, whom God fellowships.

- (c) One black lady, baptized in a small Georgia town - she had three small children - was told she could not worship there but that the church would pay her transportation over to Thomasville where there was a "black" church. She rode the bus for about three months - then she quit.

2. Segregation Must End - It Must End Now.

X. A NEW BREED OF PREACHERS ARE DEMANDING SWEEPING CHANGES.

- A. They accuse us of preaching Salvation By Works - By Merit.
- B. They want Women to have more role as Church Leaders.
- C. They inform us that we must consider some matters merely Cultural and thus no longer binding.

1. They Point to the Holy Kiss.

Let's consider this:

- a. Who should we kiss?
- b. How many times a day should we kiss them?
- c. Must we kiss them only at an assembly.
(Where do the Scriptures so say)
- d. Should we kiss both men and women? What about the children? Should we kiss all of them?
- e. Should we kiss the person on the cheek, both cheeks, the neck or the mouth?

D. They want to Jazz Up the Worship Service.

- 1. Women ushers.
- 2. Have humming during the Prayers, and singing during The Lord's Supper.

Note: Why not just have humming and singing while the preacher is preaching?

- 3. Must have new songs. The old hymns are shop work and no longer relevant for the 21st Century.

Note: If greater, lovelier, sweeter songs can be written, I say - Have at it. Most songs don't last because they don't touch the human heart.

4. We need to Jazz Things Up with choirs, solos, groups.
- E. We are going to lose the "Baby Boomers."
1. Those men and women who were born in 1946 through 1950.
 - a. The argument goes like this:
 - (i) If churches don't accommodate the "felt needs" of these people, they either will not enter the church or they will leave it.
 - (ii) What they mean is to "entertain" them.
- F. Many of us were fighting a war when they were born. Some of us were in two of them.

HERE IS MY ADVICE TO THE "BABY BOOMERS:"

"Grow up, Mister, and show yourself a man.
Get you a job to support your family -
In fact, work two shifts if necessary.

Read your Bible and find out what kind of man
God expects you to be and how you are to act
before your family and your fellowman.

Put your shoulder to the wheel and "grow up."

If you are looking for a "sugar teat," you will not find any
here.

TO THE YOUNG PREACHERS FRONTING FOR THESE
DEAD BEATS:

Find another occupation.

CONCLUSION:

- A. God is still in His heaven.
- B. The Christ who died for us still says "Come."

- C. The world still needs the Gospel - and it is worth saving.
- D. Life is still worth living - live it to the fullest, brother.
- E. And Heaven is still dear - let all of us go there to live . . .

I BELIEVE THAT THESE SCRIPTURES
FORM A PATTERN FOR THE LORD'S
CHURCH. APPROACHING THE NEW
TESTAMENT TO SEE HOW THE HOLY SPIRIT
HAS DESCRIBED THE CHURCH AND ITS
MEMBERS IS SOMETHING THAT EACH
GENERATION WILL HAVE TO DO.
HOWEVER, THE PATTERN WILL NOT
CHANGE. IT IS UP TO THEM TO FIND
FOR THEMSELVES.
LET US LEAVE THE PATTERN UNCHANGED.
IT IS JUST LIKE GOD WANTS IT.
WE CANNOT CHANGE AND TAILOR
IT EACH GENERATION TO FIT THE
SO-CALLED MODERN AGE.

Ralph T. Henley