

# THE NEW REFORMATION

By

Curtis Dickinson

“To the law and to the testimony.” (Isaiah 8:20)

Writing in “Present Truth” (May 1974), Robert Brinsmead said that we are in the beginning of a “new Reformation” and quotes the editor of “Christianity Today”: “There may be a new Reformation aborning somewhere...” This new Reformation has been going on for several years but is just now gaining momentum and strength to be noticed by those who for a long time have been searching for light on the confused church situation.

There are two radical changes taking place on the religious scene today, one negative and the other positive, and the tragedy is that many people cannot seem to see the difference. On the one hand are the typical revolutionaries, people who want change for the sake of change, who want change for the sake of destroying the old traditions, who are filled with a spirit of destruction, not only of themselves but of their institutions. They destroy church forms with nothing to take their place. They bring Satanic rock music into the church, not because it fills anyone with greater aspiration for the image of Christ nor because it brings a spirit of humility and devotion into the heart of the singer, but simply because they have the desire to abolish the old religion and recast it in the form of humanism. In the same manner they reject the old Bibles and bring in innovations, paraphrases, editions of scripture which are easily understood but which do not give the message God gave through inspiration. In every way possible they divide the church. They want a separate group for every age. They even segregate the worship hour into adult worship, college age worship, young people’s worship, junior worship and children’s worship. They would deny that they are dividing the church, but it is hard to see how a church could be any more divided than when even members of the family cannot worship together! While loudly proclaiming superior knowledge and understanding on the part of today’s youth, at the same time they contend that these youth must have their own worship program since they cannot be expected to understand and appreciate the adult worship hour. The inconsistency is obvious.

This radical element also wishes to challenge all of the traditions of the parents, including the way they dress, cut their hair, the form of family life which is ordained by the Bible and about every facet of living which has been based upon Christian understanding for the past 1900 years. Leaders of this religious mod squad may be conscientious in thinking they are right, that they are helping to awaken the church from the doldrums of mere ritual — “playing church” as some call it — and that such destructive measures are necessary to get every church member participating in something that has to do with Christian worship and life. Actually all they are doing is changing one form of ritualism for another and changing one manner of dress for another manner. For example, many of these religious rebels would not dare be seen in a church with a tie and coat on because they have to conform to the type of dress that distinguishes their philosophy of rebellion. By rebelling against one form they are conforming to

another. Some of them go so far as to remove chairs and pews, and follow the eastern custom of sitting on the floor. When I mentioned to a friend that a certain group desired to sit on the floor for their religious instruction and fellowship, she remarked that “apparently none of them are old enough to know what back problems are.” While rebelling against the well known customs of the church under the pretense of getting back to the original Christianity of the apostles, they are making issues over such things as church pews, clothes and other matters that have absolutely nothing to do with the spiritual progress of the Christian. It is significant that in this climate flourishes the so-called “Charismatic” movement and a quest for “signs”, such as speaking in tongues.

But there is another radical element which is working positively for reformation. R.J. Rushdoony recently wrote, “A new culture is in process of formation...In many cases, Christians are leaving their important churches, sometimes to build new ones, often to find in associations, fellowships and in their homes, the new foundation for a new Christendom” (The Chalcedon Report, June 1974). He does not have reference to those who make it a habit to visit one prayer group after another, seeking experiences, tongues and other signs to indicate that they have at last found a secret key to Christian power. These are simply the ones who are never grounded in faith and who follow every wind of doctrine, always searching for some new experience and some satisfaction for their ego as if the Lord would say to them, “Well done,” before they have run the course. Probably there are millions of these people who have left their regular church fellowships and are “ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (II Tim. 3:7). These certainly are not the ones who are going to find a foundation for a renewed church.

The new reformation involves an entirely different kind of radical. He is the one who has looked objectively into the unfailing truth of God, who has searched the Scriptures and found that there is in them a complete chart showing man’s origin, his purpose for being and his destiny. Furthermore, he is one that is not only able to see from the Scriptures the truth about himself and about the course that the world is taking which, as Rushdoony says, is suicidal, but he is also the kind of courageous person who is willing and able to take the step that Jesus demanded when He said, “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34). This was the position Martin Luther took before he was willing or able to nail his 95 Theses on the church door. One must go into himself and clean house of everything external to the purpose to which he is committed, even to the point of being willing to leave father, mother, husband, or wife if necessary. He must deny himself, that is, deny his own ambition and deny himself the pleasure that we generally associate with being congratulated by our friends and exalted in our communities.

The new reformers are men who care not for the traditional reverence afforded the “Minister”. The modern ministry has become a separate “priesthood” in which the minister is seen as a kind of mediator between congregation and God. With the title of Reverend or Doctor he loves to occupy the chief seat at public functions and to be extolled by his associates. Often the whole church is built around his personality and pulpit power. To return to the kind of church Christ established we need men who count all such pulpit prestige as garbage (Phil. 3:8), men who can give up the center of the church stage and enthrone Christ there, who like Paul can say, “We preach not ourselves, but Christ” (II Cor. 4:5).

For generations the success of the preacher has been measured by the size of his congregation, and the congregation is measured not only by size, but by the number of members with wealth and worldly success. A genuine reformation will not come by looking to such leadership, but by “looking unto Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith” Who made himself of no reputation, endured the cross, despising shame, and left us an example that we should follow in His steps.

The new positive radicals are not the least interested in the chief seats in the synagogue or being addressed as Doctor in the market place. They could not care less about having their names headlined in the newspaper. Already they are often quoted without their names being mentioned. This doesn't bother them in the least. They are dedicated to heralding the message of God and calling men back to the basic harmonious fact of salvation through grace by faith in Jesus Christ, and that, not for the purpose of pleasing men, but for the single purpose of pleasing God.

Churches of Christ and independent Christian Churches and some Baptist churches have talked of a Restoration movement for generations, but they have mainly talked among themselves. The new reformation is comprised of men from many organizational backgrounds who are speaking boldly and in love to those in every sect across all the denominational fences. They are calling men back to the truth in Christ and to a fellowship that is based not upon organizations nor upon certain Bible college connections nor conventions, but a fellowship based upon God's purpose: to have men transformed into the image of God through the power of Jesus Christ the Lord.

Where God leads there is no need for all the machinery of organization that generally goes along with most movements. In fact this remnant operates completely individually, separate and apart from each other, yet in concert, striving for the same goal. They have never held a convention, but each one in his own segment of God's world and according to his own ability and upon the basis of the understanding which God, through the holy spirit, has given him proceeds to call men to Christ, out of the chaos of the cults, and the confusion of the denominations and out of the human movements into the one movement of bringing men humble to bow to the Lord Jesus Christ, to be taught and moved by Him, to serve Him and to grow from faith unto faith into His likeness.

Some of the new Reformers fill the place of the traditional minister, calling out whole congregations to forsake the carnal and worldly concepts for a spiritual understanding of the truth and purpose of God. Others are men who have never been hired as preachers in the conventional manner but have taken upon themselves to speak and write wherever the opportunity is given, to show the way of the spiritual kingdom of God.

Young people, following the lead of humanism as taught in the public schools, have been leaving the churches in droves. In order to head off this stampede of youth out of their churches leaders have developed a program of gimmicks appealing to the worldly desires of youth in order to keep them coming. But even while holding to some connection with the church, the same young people, when the chips are down, find they have no basis for faith and nothing upon which to base a purpose for living. The new Reformation abolishes the god of the gimmick and calls upon young people to accept the challenge of Christ to self-denial, to abandon the “fun and games” idea of church and to direct their youthful zeal to the serious and significant business of doing the will of God.

Like the noble Bereans, they will labor over God's word, not accepting the consensus of opinion in a "rap" session, but rather by the leading of the holy spirit and with confidence that the Scripture is able to furnish a man complete unto every good work, they will study to be approved of God.

Much of the church has fallen for the carnal trap of Satan and his offer of a world kingdom. The religion of the church cannot always be distinguished from the religion of the lodge or the religion of politics or the religion of socialism, religion which is grounded in the hope of a world-order formed out of unregenerate men dependent upon the state and enslaved to subjective thinking. The new Reformation is made up of those who look not to an earthly utopia but have their eyes set upon the "things that are above, not upon things that are upon the earth" (Col. 3:2). It is spearheaded by men who have the courage to act upon their convictions because they hold Jesus Christ as **already** King of kings and Lord of lords. It is these who go forth to tell the world, "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand."

Like charity, reformation begins at home, with the individual, when he begins to take seriously the word, seriously enough to study and begin living by it. There can be no progress to the image of God until one turns his mind to God's revealed purpose, which is found only in the Bible. The power for reformation is God's, through His recorded word.

But let optimists beware. While the new Reformation is already under way and will have great impact on the saints in the future, it may never get any publicity in the world. It is not likely to change the general course of man's mad race to suicide. If you read the history written in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, you will note the absence of reference to John the Baptist or the apostles. The world tries to silence the Good News. So do not look for a sensational sweep of reforming power. It will work gently, quietly, like seed, and will bring forth fruit in those who are fertile ground. It is nothing really new, but only the ancient seed of the word of God, finding lodgment where it may have free course to produce a new creature. That is where reformation begins, when the believer abandons the fossilized human traditions, denies himself his own opinions, and actually begins to feed on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.

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