

SANITY IN THE CHURCH

By

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It was said of Jesus that He had a demon, the He was beside Himself. In other words, He was insane. Paul was accused of being mad. His learning, according to Festus, had driven him insane (Mark 3:21–22, Acts 26:24).

Jesus warned that his disciples, if they truly followed Him, would be treated with hatred and scorn and falsely accused. The world sees godliness as insanity. Parents who uphold the rights of their children against the secular teaching of evolution, sex education or values clarification, are held up to ridicule as paranoid and superstitious. God's wisdom continues to appear as foolishness in the eyes of men (I Cor. 1:21–23).

The teachings of Christ are accepted as generally worthy in principle, but not to be taken literally. Surely no one is expected to turn the other cheek! And to forgive 490 times the same offense? Who would turn his back on worldly acclaim and give up prestige and power among men in order to be a servant?

The church cites the teachings of Jesus but in practice agrees with this worldly view. Success is whatever the business and professional world champion says it is. The successful church is the one boasting of the biggest crowds and a multimillion dollar structure where the stars of TV and Las Vegas feel at home.

In the words of Bernard Iddings Bell: "There is small expectancy, then, that those who belong to the Church will be able to set this reeling civilization of ours right side up and then steady it. The Church and its people too largely conform, unconscious that they do conform, uncritically conform, almost automatically conform, to the compulsions of current culture...The world, hurtling on toward political, economic, psychic catastrophe, is not going to be saved, if it is saved at all, by the Church if the Church remains an uncommitted host of politely respectable people, willing to be led by professional ecclesiastics whose methods of promotion and administration are just about as worldly as those of the sick society they say they wish to reform but which, as a matter of fact, deforms them almost as easily as it deforms everybody else. If the Church is to help in restoring the world to moral sanity, there must first be revolt and recovery of moral sanity within the Church." (Quoted from a speech by George C. Roche III of Hillsdale College on Oct. 4, 1981.)

The church has lost its witness to the world precisely because it seeks the world's approval. We have seen how the church that confronts the world suffers, and we have no stomach for suffering. Peter followed Jesus into the courtyard, but when he saw the awesome powers aligned against Him,. He left Jesus and joined the throng around the fire. The church finds comfort around the fire, from which it can safely denounce abortion and communism. But don't say anything about usury; we got to sell those bonds, you know.

We follow Jesus to church to sing hymns of praise to his name, but how many follow Him to the poor, the destitute, the prison? Inside the church house there may be a strong sense of commitment and conviction that this is the body of God's people who stand for truth and holiness against all deception and evil, but when dispersed into the

world, the commitment loses its edge. To take a stand against all the deception being presented in the media and even in religious circles is to be branded as man, or at least radical and fanatic. It is one thing to sing hymns about God's mercy and grace to a lost and condemned world, but it is quite another to forgive the guilty and to speak to affluent and sophisticated men and women about sin, judgment and salvation.

Well, what are we to do? For one thing, we must be willing to break the barriers of traditional thought and begin thinking for ourselves in terms of Christ's own words and example.

Christians are in the habit of identifying with movements, groups, leaders, denominations and theological systems, almost anything except identifying with Christ! Not one of these systems has a corner on the truth. Christ said it is the truth that sets free, but truth that has to be filtered through any sect or movement or system is defective and powerless. We must be willing to wear the stigma of religious madness, as Paul did, in order to stand free of all human tradition and opinion and let the word of God work His power in our own lives and reach to others.

Second, loyalty to the Kingdom of God must take precedence over all other connections. This is not to say that we have no responsibility to the world or in the world. It means that we take our responsibility seriously, because our first responsibility is to tell the world about Christ, His death and resurrection and their meaning. It is this, and only this, which can establish moral, spiritual and social values.

Christians working in organizations advocating moral and political values often must conform to the world of that organization, because its unbelieving members certainly will not conform to Christ. For example, in one such meeting I attended, half of the time was spent in considering how to take advantage of inflation and grow rich while the other half was largely spent in honoring certain persons for their worldly and political exploits. Christians present were being pressed into the world's culture with no opportunity to witness for Christ. Perhaps this is the worst temptation, to follow the ways of the world in order to establish the order of Christ! But it neutralized the Christian witness and therefore defeats it.

Third, we must return to a view of life as seen in the New Covenant Scriptures. Life is of value only in relation to God. The world is anxious to purchase security at any cost. The major issue of the day is security; how to secure ourselves against economic problems of sickness or any other kind of loss. The Church has become more concerned with material and physical security than with faith and righteousness. Jesus said, "Whosoever would save his life shall lose it, and whosoever would lose his life for my sake and the gospel's shall save it" (Mark 8:35). Church leaders, preachers and teachers must return to the faith that says, "I count all (the human and worldly things and attainments) as refuse...that I may gain Christ" (Phil. 3:8), the kind of faith that rejoices in suffering and persecution, that leads one to stand firm with Christ when everyone else takes another course, the faith that looks only to the Lord and not to any system or ecclesiastical body.

Life is of value only if it is considered so in the eyes of God. To save our lives for enjoyment in this world not only will bring failure and emptiness, but it is a sure way of losing life in the world to come.

To adopt such an attitude toward life is foolishness to men, and anyone who does so is considered a bit insane. But if we believe that Christ died and rose again to "redeem

us from this present evil world” and give us eternal life in the next, we see it as the only sane way.

Our nation is noted for a great variety of sin and wickedness. Yet nowhere else in the world are there so many churches and so large a percentage of people professing to be Christian. How can it be? Because Christians to a large extent conform to the world. We have escaped the stigma of fanaticism and insanity. But in doing so we have also missed the joy of bearing light and sprinkling the distinctive flavor of salt into the lives of others that they may be transformed.

If we really mean business, if we actually believe the church to be the remnant that will populate the new creation for eternity, if we believe Christ is Who He said He is, then true sanity is to abandon all that stands in the way of full obedience to Him. Nothing can rob us of security. Christ is our security. Nothing can take away our lives. They are given to Him, already. To return to Christ, truth and faith may be madness to the world, but it is the way of sanity in the Church.

An added short encouragement by Curtis:

THE JUDEO-CHRISTIAN ERROR

Often we hear of the so-called Judeo-Christian ethic, as if God had combined Judaism and Christianity to produce a universal faith and moral code. The expression is self-contradictory. The true honest-to-God Jew was one under the Old Covenant. A Christian is loyal to the New Covenant. You cannot be in both covenants, especially since the Old Covenant was abolished at the cross (Eph. 2:15).

What God promised to Abraham was that He would bless THE NATIONS, all the people, with his “seed” which Paul says is Christ (Gal. 3:16). When Christ died and rose again He fulfilled the promise, in that people of every race and nation who respond to the Gospel are acceptable to God.

What God did in Christ was to destroy a division by flesh among His people. This was not done by having Judaism and Christian faith bonded together, but by eliminating the old so all could embrace the new. God does not have two classes of people. Paul wrote that God has abolished “the law of commandments contained in ordinances; that he might create in himself of the two one new man, so making peace; and might reconcile them both in one body unto God through the Cross...” (Eph. 2:15–16).

Paul’s letter to the Galatians shows beyond question that Judaism “will profit you nothing,” that you cannot have Judaism and Christian faith at the same time; to put your trust in Judaism is to renounce and lose the grace of God in Christ (Gal. 5:2, 4).

Christians do not look to Judaism for ethics, but to Christ. His commandments and example are far higher than anything known and practiced in Judaism.

To link Christian faith to Judaism with a hyphen is to denigrate Christ, and exalt that which He abolished. Let Christians not speak or write of Judeo-Christian ethics, or anything else. Christ can stand alone, and is deserving of all the credit and the glory.

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