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Contemporary Christianity is Sick

by Dr. Chester Tulga in "Alliance Witness"

The religious world is sick. The religion of our day is a curious mixture of the Bible, philosophy, the notions of the day, and a strange combination of spiritual and carnal methods.

Christianity is steadily losing its distinctive character and degenerating into a human religion based upon a syncretism of orthodoxy, sentimentalism, antinomianism and an abbreviated "gospelism."

The liberalism of our day has also lost its consistency, if it ever had any. It is a contradictory mixture of higher criticism and neo-orthodoxy; subjectivism and philosophy, realism and romanticism; secular politics and utopianism, speculative theology and churchism, flavored with existential nonsense. Its current illusion is that a half-regenerate and half-believing church would be a match for a wicked world if only united under a bureaucracy.

The evangelism of our day has a basis of orthodoxy, but its moods and philosophy have been infected by its cultural background and its desperate attempt to find a place for evangelicalism in the intellectual world of unbelief. Evangelicalism today is a hybrid, an orthodoxy trying to be effective by intellectual weapons and scholarly persuasion, resorting to intellectual jargon to demonstrate its scholarship, and largely ignoring the evil heart of unbelief which is always present in anti-Christian philosophies. It rejects theological liberalism, but it has fallen a victim to many of its moods and philosophical approaches. It has a strange tenderness toward liberal thought and a defensive complex toward fundamentalism.

All of this results in a growing theological and moral relativity. There is an almost unlimited liberty of Biblical interpretation, by which the Bible is shamelessly used to support ideas not supported by it. There is more and more evidence that the Word of God is being interpreted dishonestly. There is a widespread leniency toward sin, in both the church and the world. There is a growing looseness in defining Christian experience, by which men are rated Christian regardless of what they believe or what they do. There is a rampant antinomianism which promises cheap grace and eternal security on the easiest of moral terms.

This confusion has taken on certain patterns which may be identified and can be analyzed.

THE GOSPEL WITHOUT DOCTRINE

The gospel of our day has been vitiated by its divorce from the doctrines which give it validity. While one should not insist that the inquirer pass a theological examination, it is also true that unless the gospel is preached in an explicit doctrinal framework, the inquirer has little comprehension of the nature of the gospel he is supposed to accept. The gospel today is often preached apart from the explicit affirmation of these doctrines in order to lessen the resistance of those who reject them,

but non-doctrinal gospel is not the gospel of the New Testament.

The good news that Christ died for our sins is not valid apart from the doctrine of the virgin birth. To present the gospel apart from the virgin birth is to present a gospel without credentials. The good news that Christ died for our sins has no value if Christ is not the very Son of God. The denial of his deity or the acceptance of loose definitions of his deity destroys the credentials of the gospel. The good news that Christ died for our sins has value only if the Son of God was raised bodily from the grave. This is God's guarantee of the efficacy of Christ's death.

The good news that Christ died for our sins must have credentials. These great doctrines are the credentials. Today the gospel is being proclaimed apart from its credentials. It is not enough that the preacher believe these doctrines. If men are to have an intelligent comprehension of the gospel they are asked to accept, if men are to understand the nature of the gospel they have accepted, these doctrines must be an explicit part of the gospel message. Men today are being "gospelized" without being Christianized.

The gospel preached today depends too much upon human personality, human persuasion, and human methods instead of the inner call of the Holy Spirit. This is the peculiar peril of the evangelist and the pastor who are expected to produce results. There is a constant temptation to use methods that get superficial results. When decisions are secured by enticing words, glamorous personalities, slickly-worded invitations, high-pressure methods, or the passing emotions of the moment, the gospel is not the power of God unto salvation. Only the inner call of the Holy Spirit can lead a sinner to the Saviour.

The easygoing believism of our times produces converts without that deep Christian experience which should characterize a child of God. Saving faith is not intellectual assent to certain facts. It is not the intellectual acceptance of certain propositions. It is the gift of God. It is the product of the Holy Spirit. Without it there is no salvation. Decision is not enough to produce the new birth.

PIETY WITHOUT DISCERNMENT

Much of the pietism of our day is a mysticism without an objective standard of truth. The mysticism of the past, separated from the authority of the Word of God, resulted in all sorts of fanaticism. Pietism in our own day, with its claim of the leadership of the Spirit regardless of the teachings of the Scriptures, has made a large contribution toward our present distress.

The separation of the Spirit of God from the Word of God inevitably leads to an unscriptural and antinomian

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