

OBSERVATIONS CONCERNING EFFORTS TO CHANGE WORSHIP

In the initial issue of *Wineskins*, a magazine edited by Rubel Shelly, Mike Cope, and Phillip Morrison, the following statement is made: "*Wineskins* is committed to the stimulation of bold but responsible change in the church of God" (May 1992, Page 1). In the book, *The Second Incarnation*, by Rubel Shelly and Randall J. Harris (Howard, West Monroe, 1992), the authors state on page 13: "The tired, uninspiring event called worship in our churches must give way to an exhilarating experience of God that simultaneously exhibits and nurtures life in the worshippers." It is obvious that among the changes some want to make are changes in the way we worship. These statements represent a disposition on the part of some to make some changes. They would say the changes they wish to make are in reference to matters that are non-essential, but when they begin to make the changes, those changes are in connection with things that are essential.

Notice some observations about the disposition to change our worship.

DISCUSSION

I. STATUS QUO IS LOOKED UPON AS AN UGLY WORD.

- A. If it has been around a while, then it must need changing, seems to be the attitude.
- B. A caricature of Scriptural worship is drawn, and then the caricature is ridiculed.
 - 1. Caricature defined: "A representation...in which the subject's distinctive features or peculiarities are deliberately exaggerated or distorted to produce a comic or grotesque effect." "An imitation or copy so inferior as to be absurd." (*American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*.)
 - 2. We sometimes call it "building a straw man." It is easy for us to make things look ridiculous if we are allowed to exaggerate it and make it the way we want it to look to others.
- C. Sometimes abuses and mistakes are attacked as if they were an essential part of the system of worship. The whole system does not need to be scrapped because of some abuses.

II. WORSHIP IS LOOKED UPON AS BEING UNSATISFACTORY BECAUSE OF A LACK OF HUMAN FEELING AND EXCITEMENT.

- A. "I didn't get anything out of the service."
 - 1. If that is the case, then you came as a spectator.
 - 2. Besides, who is supposed to be pleased by worship? We worship God to do honor to him, not to ourselves.
- B. The effectiveness of worship is erroneously judged by how much human feeling and excitement it generates.
 - 1. If it is not in line with their ideas, it is not worthwhile.
 - 2. It is not considered relevant, but to whom? To each other.

III. THEY SAY WE NEED TO CHANGE THESE OLD TRADITIONS.

- A. But tradition is not an ugly word. Used to refer to ordinances of God in II Thes. 3:6.
- B. If a thing is nothing more than a human tradition, then it may need to be changed, but not necessarily.
 - 1. It may be a tradition that is altogether good, and cannot be improved upon. In such cases,

why change?

2.If it is a bad tradition, it should be changed.

C.But if those who clamor for change are allowed to change things from our traditions to their way, it will simply be a matter of change from one tradition to another.

IV.THOSE CLAMORING FOR CHANGE TAKE ADVANTAGE OF A "VICTIM SOCIETY" MENTALITY.

A.Let me illustrate: The Civil Rights Movement succeeded because people saw themselves as victims of an unjust and unfair society. I certainly would not deny that.

B.The Women's Suffrage Movement succeeded because women were made to see themselves as victims of unjust and unfair laws. Cf. Now the Women's Liberation Movement.

C.The L. A. Riots, when those who beat Rodney King were acquitted. They were persuaded they had the right to do what they did. (Woman working at Parisian in Birmingham was fired because she was caught stealing from her employer. One of her friends said, "I know if she is guilty, there must have been a good reason.")

D.The drunkard, the gambler, even the murderer is really the victim now in the eyes of some. Clarence Darrow, famed criminal lawyer, obtained hundreds of acquittals by appealing to the jury to consider all the disadvantages of the accused that led to his doing what he did.

E.Worship changers have appealed to that mentality. "Look how bad you have had it all your life in the church of Christ with its dull, boring worship. But it's not your fault. Now it's time to correct that situation."

V.ALL THE CHANGES THE CHANGERS WANT TO MAKE TEND TOWARD DENOMINATIONALISM.

A.Instrumental music

B.Solos, choirs, quartets, etc.

C.Singing during the Lord's Supper. (I called two First Christian Churches in Birmingham and asked if they play the organ while they eat the supper. Both said they do. Even they--at least one of them--do not sing while eating the supper.)

D.Hand clapping

E.Are the denominations that much closer to what the Lord wants in worship than we? Or is it merely a matter of wanting to do in worship what appeals to the most folks, as are the denominations? Or is it just wanting to be like the denominations?

VI.GOD IS HOLY.

A.He is not a casual God, when it comes to worship. We must be aware of his holiness, and be dignified in our worship. God is not our "buddy." He is our Heavenly Father.

B.Worship is not a trivial thing. A thing for our entertainment.

1.Churches are now hiring ministers of worship, whose job it is to choreograph the worship.

2.One large church published its order of worship in the bulletin. It went something like this: "songs, call to worship, a word from the Lord, prayer, songs, a word from the Lord, song, prayer, a word from the Lord, Lord's Supper, song, blessing."

3.What this amounts to is a period of entertainment with a few very brief remarks from the preacher scattered throughout.

4.Such may appeal to our emotions and our feelings, but is it a period of mental devotion to God?

C. One denominational church I read of advertised a 22 minute service on Sunday. They began at eight o'clock and guaranteed to dismiss no later than 8:22. That appeals to the flesh. Is that what we are appealing to?

VII. CHANGES BEING MADE ARE MOVING TOWARD PERFORMANCE INSTEAD OF SPIRITUALITY.

A. That is the appeal of what is called "special" music in worship.

1. Look at the denominational TV programs and their performers.

2. Have you attended a denominational funeral recently, and noticed the kind of music they have?

B. Even some preachers think it is their job to keep the people (audience) entertained.

C. We must remember that each Christian is a performer, and God is the only one in the audience.

VIII. SOME APPROPRIATE SCRIPTURE OBSERVATIONS.

A. II Kings 17:15 "followed vanity." Hebrew word means "something transitory and unsatisfactory." Even change can become dull and boring.

B. II Samuel 6:1-17. (Cf. Ex. 25:14; Num. 4:15). New cart! How appropriate! No doubt David thought the culture of Israel in the wilderness was the reason the ark was to be borne on staves. It took 90 days to get back to the Bible way of moving the ark after the death of Uzzah.

C. Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:1ff). Look at how many things they did right.

1. They were the right ones to burn incense.

2. They put it in their censers. That was the right place to put it.

3. They each had a censer. That was as it should have been.

4. They put fire in the censers. That was what they were supposed to do.

5. But they made one small change; strange (unauthorized) fire.

D. II Peter 2:18-19. "For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage." Some have become slaves of change.

CONCLUSION

Change within itself is not wrong; neither is it necessarily right. If worship is not satisfactory as it is taught in the Bible, and as it has been carried on in churches of Christ, then a change needs to be made. But the change needs to be made in the worshiper.