



The Reflector

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The Church Mimicking Society

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It is amazing how the attitudes and actions of “Christians,” who are especially involved in movements away from the New Testament pattern, manage to mimic secular and political movements in the world around them.

As the early apostate church evolved into the Catholicism it’s organizational structure became more and more patterned after the Roman government. The Pope paralleled the Emperor. The Cardinals paralleled the Senate. Then the various levels of authority from there on down to the parish priest had their counterparts in the government of Rome.

The “liberal” and “conservative” views of political authority is often mirrored by similar mind-sets in the church in this country. Both vocally express respect for the authoritative documents that are supposed to govern our behavior. In national affairs, it is the constitution. In church affairs, it is the Scriptures. The political conservative believes that as a country we can only do what is expressly permitted by the constitution. The political liberal believes that as a country we can do anything that is not expressly forbidden by the constitution. When it comes to the document itself, the liberal is a “loose constructionist” while the conservative is a “strict constructionist.” The conservative believes in following the “letter” as well as the spirit of the law. The liberal believes that following the “spirit” of the law is sufficient. In the church and spiritual matters, the conservative believes we can only do what is expressly permitted by the Bible. The liberal believes we can do

anything not expressly forbidden by the Bible. The similarities between the two views in both the political and religious realm is in deed striking.

In recent years, I have noticed a striking parallel in a movement in society that is mimicked among some in the church. It is the hippy movement. Those of us who are a bit older can remember the height of the hippy movement. It was a movement that professed to see all the wrongs of our society, or as they often called it “the establishment.” It was a movement to act differently and to appear differently from the rest of society – mostly different for the sake of being different. They found creative ways to show their disdain for anything they considered “mainstream.” They loved being known as non-conformist, yet they came be conformists in that they all conformed to a similar attitude, a “non-conformist” dress code, a kindred spirit and similar M.O. wherever they were found.

As this movement declined we have seen a parallel movement in the church. It is the so-called “non-traditionalist” movement. An element arose, and is still very much with us, that seems to have a disdain for anything that has been practiced in congregations for more than as long as they can remember. Like their counterparts in society, they are short on solutions but long on what they see as wrong in the *way* things are being done. They seem not to know the difference in being different as a natural consequences of doing right in the midst of a crooked world; and marching to a different tune just for the sake of being different.

The Apostle Paul did the very opposite. He was unwilling to be different just for difference sake. On the other hand, he conformed to the customs (that did violate the word) of those among whom he worked for the overall good of the Cause. (1 Cor. 9:19-23). Would he yield or conform in those things that would harm the gospel and the church? Never. (Gal. 2:5). But, in those things he could, he yielded for the good of the Lord's church.

Before I quit, let me point out something about "tradition." Tradition just means it is something that has been handed down. There are the traditions handed down by the Bible writers that must be kept. (2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6). There are traditions handed down by men that set aside the commandment of God that must not be kept. (Matt. 15:2,3,6). Then there are traditions or customs that have been handed down over a long period of time that are not wrong within

themselves. Most of these involve unspecified ways and means of carrying out the traditions received from the Apostles. Many of these were developed over many years and are still practiced because they have proven to be effective. There is something to be said for "if it ain't broke, don't fix it." It seems to me that one would have to be some kind of egotist to think that replacing expedients, that have proven effective over many years, with his unproven and untried "new" way of doing things (because it is more "meaningful" to him) – especially insisting on it to the disturbance congregational peace.

I need to note also that these new hippies, in some cases, have gone beyond disdain for old ways (expedients) of doing things, to a disdain for old traditions (doctrines) handed down by the Lord through His apostles as well. ■

He That Is Without Sin among You

Bob Waldron

One time the Pharisees brought a woman who had been taken in adultery to Jesus and asked Him what to do about her. Should she be stoned as the law said? They were not really interested in the law, nor right and wrong, nor the woman. They were trying Jesus "that they may have whereof to accuse him" (Jn. 8:6). After a pause and further questioning Jesus said, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her" (Jn. 8:7). The statement Jesus uttered on this occasion has often been violently and blatantly misapplied. His reply was strictly in keeping with the law which said, "At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is to die be put to death; at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death. The hand of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. So thou shall put away the evil from the midst of thee" (Deut. 17:2-7).

The case Jesus dealt with was not simply one in

which a woman had committed adultery. Jesus always dealt with the primary issue and then with the subordinate issues. Here the primary issue was the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and their incredibly intense hatred of Jesus. There were actually three issues involved in the episode: the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, the demands of the Law of Moses, and the fate of the woman. When Jesus said, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her," He convicted the Pharisees of their sin of hypocrisy, because not even they had the audacity and gall to step forward and say, "Well, I'm perfect. I'll cast the first stone." They particularly knew that in this matter they were not innocent. One by one, beginning from the eldest, the people began to walk away. When Jesus said, "Woman, where are they? Did no man condemn thee?" He satisfied the requirement of the law because, with no witnesses, the woman could not be stoned. Then Jesus dealt with the woman and her sin by saying, "Neither do

I condemn thee: go thy way; from henceforth sin no more.”

Men and women who are stubborn of heart and who desire to walk in their wicked ways very often use this statement of Jesus to reply to any who would attempt to rebuke them or to condemn their ways. Thus the drunkard, the adulterer, the liar, the homosexual, the child abuser, and a host of others will defend themselves by saying, “He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone.” Jesus’ words in Mt. 7:1 are similarly used. “Judge not, that ye be not judged.” Let us bring the question into clear focus. Since all of us are imperfect and do sin, does any one of us have the right in God’s sight to condemn the actions of another or to rebuke another for wrongdoing?

It was the same Jesus that said, “And if thy brother sin against thee, go, show him his fault between thee and him alone: if he hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he hear thee not, take with thee one or two more, that at the mouth of two witnesses or three every word may be established. And if he refuse to hear them, tell it unto the church: and if he refuse to hear the church also, let him be unto thee as the Gentile and the publican” (Mt. 18:15-17). It was Jesus who so severely condemned the Pharisees (Mt. 23). It was Jesus’ forerunner, John the Baptist, who condemned the adultery of Herod Antipas and Herodias (Mt. 14:1-4). When Jesus uttered the above condemnations He had the same awareness of man’s weak nature that He did when He said, “Let him that is without sin cast the first stone.” Therefore, when Jesus said this He did not mean that it is wrong ever to rebuke anyone for sin.

The writings of the apostles make the issues in this dispute very clear. Someone will usually say, “I like Jesus, but I think His apostles missed it.” It would be humorous, if it were not so deplorable, that these people do not realize that the only impression we have of Jesus is that which His apostles have left us. Matthew and John were apostles. Mark was a personal disciple of Jesus, though not an apostle. Luke was, seemingly, a later convert. Only through these men’s testimony do we have any record of Jesus’ deeds and words. The apostles who testified about Jesus, such as John,

were unaware of any discrepancy between Jesus’ teaching and theirs. When people talk about liking what Jesus said but not His apostles, they are speaking from ignorance and prejudice rather than facts. Please consider the facts.

Jesus told His apostles to go out and teach or preach. He said, “Teach all nations.” He then said, “Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Mt. 28:20). He said, “Preach the gospel to every creature” (Mk. 16:15). Earlier Jesus told His apostles, “But the Comforter, even the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you” (Jn. 14:26). The apostles went out and did as Jesus commanded. What they taught was what Jesus said to teach. If the Spirit did not guide the writers of Acts through Revelation, then He did not guide Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. One may reject Jesus and His apostles, but one cannot accept Christ and reject His apostles. The apostles were inspired by the Spirit and they spake the truth.

No apostle stressed the need for love, forbearance and forgiveness more than Paul, but it was also Paul who said to the Corinthian brethren, “Put away the wicked man from among yourselves” (1 Cor. 5:13). Consider the implication of Paul’s statement, “Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?” (1 Cor. 5:6). In the context, the lump would be the church at Corinth. The church at Corinth was, however, composed of imperfect people. Yet there was one among the rest who was a danger. His example would be a leaven of bad influence. Therefore he had to be purged out. There is a difference between sinning occasionally through human weakness, repenting, calling upon God for forgiveness and, on the other hand, wallowing in sin. Also it seems that there are some sins which are more flagrant than others. In addition the nature of some sins is such that they have a more pernicious influence on others. Through all facts and all arguments one thing stands out clearly. Paul told a church of imperfect people to put away a wicked man from among themselves.

The brethren at Thessalonica were told to withdraw themselves from every brother that

walked disorderly (2 Th. 3:6). To walk disorderly means to walk out of step with others who are marching. The passage clearly implies that there are those who, though not perfect, nevertheless do walk in order. Then there are those who walk “disorderly”. Those imperfect people who are walking orderly are commanded to withdraw from anyone who walks disorderly. Paul told the saints at Ephesus to “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather even reprove them” (Eph. 5:11). He told Timothy, “Preach the word; be urgent in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine. . .” (2 Tim. 4:2, 3). One wonders if Paul imagined that those who would not endure sound doctrine would wrest statements of Jesus to attempt to silence the rebukes and reproof that His word says must be given.

Condemned is hypocritical judging. It is not required that one have a perfect record before he has the right to reprove and rebuke. The commands we have studied were given to flesh and blood people who were imperfect. Yet they were clearly told to condemn, to reprove and rebuke. If one condemns another when he himself is not even trying to do right or when he is doing something much worse than the one whom he is condemning, he is guilty of the judging the Lord condemned. When we must rebuke or reprove, let us look to ourselves, lest we also be tempted (Gal. 6:1). Let us beware of Satan’s influence when we ourselves are rebuked, lest we give him an opportunity to close our eyes to the truth by causing us to resent the reproof. ■

A Question from a Reader:

“Is it scriptural for the church to pay a secretary out of its treasury?”

A good question. To properly answer the question, two other questions need to be answered.

1) Is a church treasury scriptural? The church at Corinth was told to “lay be in store” on the first day of the week (1 Cor. 16:2). “In store” is from “thesaurizo” meaning “*to amass or reserve (literally or figuratively):--lay up (treasure),*

(keep) in store, (heap) treasure (together, up)” (Strong).

The Jerusalem church had a treasury under the apostles’ direction. Many of the disciples sold their goods and brought the price and laid it at the apostles feet (put it under their authority). It was used for the church to meet the needs of the needy Christians. Then there is the case of collecting money by local churches to send to the needs of saints elsewhere. We also read of preachers receiving “wages” of churches -- necessarily inferring that those wages came from the church’s funds – a treasury.

2) What is the purpose of the treasury? It is to provide the expenses involved in the churches activities. When asking what the church may use its treasury for, it is a mistake to demand that an example or command *expressly* stating that the treasury can be used for that. Sometime authority comes in the form of necessary inference. When the church is authorized to do something, it necessarily infers that the church may supply any expenses involved out of its funds (treasury). The local church is commanded to meet together in one place for worship. There are expenses involved. Paying for the building, the Lord’s Supper elements and utensils, the song books, the utilities, cleaning and upkeep etc. all have expenses involved. How are they paid for? Out of the treasury, because the treasury is the only means that the church has for paying for anything.

Now about the “secretary.” In most congregations, there are letters to write and other work that a secretary might do. The size and nature of the congregation would dictate whether it would be expedient to hire someone to do it. In most cases there are those who will volunteer to do it. Assuming that the circumstances in the congregation is such that there is a need for his/her work, the church may pay him/her for their time and efforts. Just as the church may pay a grounds keeper to take care of the lawn, etc.

Really the question is not so much about what the treasury be used for, but what is the church authorized to do. If it is authorized to do it, it may use its treasury (funds) to pay the expense of it. ■