

We Won't Lose Our Identity

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Scholars, historians, and sincere clerics agree that during the first 200 years following the death of the Apostles, drastic, unscriptural changes came about within the church that would flourish down to our day. It was prophesied in the Bible. But the Bible also speaks of a “remnant” who will be adhering to the original, scriptural truths in these last days. Lets try to understand what happened, and the urgent need today to return to the “faith which was once delivered to the saints”!

As the age comes to a close, the Church seems to have lost the original bond of unity, the clear standards, and the love of Jesus, and seem to have replaced it with an unsettling, institutionalized spirit of domination and by beliefs which are more Gnostic than Christian. What happened? We are now confronted with the possibility that the original identity and true definition of Christianity have become lost.

I believe that the chief problem is that the Church has embodied the worldly philosophy of pragmatism, and we're just beginning to taste the bitter results. Pragmatism is the notion that meaning or worth is determined by practical consequences. It is closely akin to utilitarianism, the belief that usefulness is the standard of what is good. To a pragmatist/utilitarian, if a technique or course of action has the desired effect, it is good. If it doesn't seem to work, it must be wrong.

An overpowering surge of ardent pragmatism is sweeping through the Church. Traditional methodology – most notably preaching is being discarded or downplayed in favor of newer means, such as drama, dance, comedy, variety, side-shows histrionics, pop-psychology, and other entertainment forms. The new methods supposedly are more effective or rather they draw a bigger crowd. And since for many the chief criterion for gauging success of a church has become attendance figures, whatever pulls in the most people is accepted without critical analysis as good. That is pragmatism.

Even worst, theology now takes a back seat to methodology. Formerly, a doctrinal statement represented the reason for a denominations existence. Today, methodology is the glue that holds a church together. Some leaders evidently think the four priorities of the early church, the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the

breaking of bread, and prayer (Acts 2:42) makes a lame agenda for the church in this day and age. Church is allowing self-help programs and recreation and similar enterprises to eclipse power and demonstration. Plainly declaring the truth of God's Word is regarded as unsophisticated, offensive, and utterly ineffective. We are told that we can get better results by amusing people and wooing them into the fold.

"I am convinced that pragmatism poses precisely the same subtle threat to the church in our age that modernism represented nearly a century ago."

- Bishop William L. Harris IV

Modernism was a movement that embraced higher criticism and liberal theology while denying nearly all the supernatural aspects of Christianity. But modernism did not first surface as an overt attack on apostolic doctrine. The earliest modernists seemed concerned primarily with interdenominational unity. They were willing to downplay doctrine for that goal, because they believed doctrine was inherently divisive and a fragmented church would become irrelevant in the modern age. To heighten Christianity's relevance, modernists sought to synthesize Christian teachings with the latest insights from science, philosophy, and literary criticism. Modernism began as a methodology but soon evolved into unique theology. Doctrine, they believed, should be fluid and adaptable, certainly not something worth fighting for. But We Won't Lose Our Identity....

Like the church of a hundred years ago, we live in a world of rapid changes and major advances in science, technology, world politics, and education. Like the brethren of the generation, Christians today are open even eager, for change in the church. Like them, we yearn for unity among the faithful. And like them, we are sensitive to the hostility of an unbelieving world.

Unfortunately, there is at least one other parallel between the church today and the church in the late nineteenth century: many Christians seem completely unaware, if not unwilling to see that serious dangers threaten the church from within. Yet if the church history teaches us anything, it teaches us that the most devastating assaults on the faith have always begun as subtle errors arising from inside the body itself.

The world has never really tried to destroy the church. Whenever there was a danger in the church it began within the leadership or the laity of the congregation. We need to evaluate our stand, conviction and belief structure if we are going to remain strong and vibrant within the hostile world. The church cannot afford to

lose its identity, we have to know who we are, what we believe, and where we are going.

Living in an unstable age, the church cannot afford to be vacillating. We minister to people desperate for answers and we cannot soft pedal the truth or extenuate the gospel. If we make friends with the world, we set ourselves at enmity with God. If we trust worldly devices, we automatically relinquish the power of the Holy Spirit.

These truths are repeatedly affirmed in Scripture: *“Do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (James 4:4) “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If anyone love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15).*

The whole point about Israel’s being a light to the world (Isaiah 42:6;49:6) is that they were supposed to be different. They were explicitly forbidden to imitate the Gentiles’ manner of dress, grooming, foods, religion, and other aspects of the culture. God told them, “You shall not do what is done in the land of Egypt where you lived, nor are you to do what is done in the land of Canann where I am bringing you; you shall not walk in their statues” (*Leviticus 18:3*). The idea that you are going to win people to the Christian faith by showing them that after all you are like them, is theologically and psychologically a profound blunder.

“Subtly the overriding goal is becoming church attendance and worldly acceptability rather than transformed life.”

- Bishop William L. Harris IV

Preaching the Word and boldly confronting sin are seen as archaic, ineffectual means of winning the world. This kind of thinking badly skews the mission of the church. True biblical preaching is uncommon even in supposedly Bible-believing churches, and the Church has been dangerously susceptible to almost every theological fad exported from the world. The Church has become worldly and not just worldly, but studiously so. Winds of doctrinal compromise are beginning to stir.

False doctrine and worldliness always go hand in hand, with worldliness leading the way. Christians today tend to forget that modernism was not first of all a theological agenda but a methodological one. Early modernists were not trying to hit at the core of biblical faith; they were simply trying to make Christianity more palatable to a cynical world.

The same spirit is rampant in the church today. So leaders are trying to make holiness and Christianity acceptable to the masses by softening the Gospel. The Bible does say that he that wins souls is wise, however we must not change the message to win the lost. I agree that some of our methods must change to be effective but the message must stay in tact and strong.

I am convinced that most of those behind it would not deliberately undermine biblical Christianity. Nevertheless, they have introduced into the church a philosophy of pragmatism and a spirit of worldliness that, if left unchecked, will eventually reap the same bitter harvest as the modernism of a hundred years ago.

The only hope is a return to scripture and sound doctrine. We desperately need to recover our determination to be biblical, our refusal to comply with the world, our willingness to defend what we believe, and our courage to defy false teaching. Unless we collectively awaken to the current dangers that threaten our faith, the adversary will attack us from within, and we will not be able to withstand. History will repeat itself, and the same disaster that ravaged the church a hundred years ago will also strike our generation and we will lose our identity.

It is imperative that the real church not loses its identity and return to the truths of the Apostles Doctrine. Although many are compromising and their no's are sounding like yes' and they are giving in to get along with the world. It is our opportunity to show a dying world that we know and that we are proud of who we are. That we are not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and that we will live the life that God commissioned us to live. We the Apostolic Assemblies of Christ stand unified in the fact that we will not lose our identity, we will stand for righteousness, holiness, and godliness. And let us not feel inferior to others because they may be accepted by the masses in greater numbers. Somebody must stand and show the world a better and holy way.