

The Voice

A PLEA TO RETURN TO NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTIANITY

VOLUME VIII

February 1979

Number 2

A DEFINITE DEPARTURE

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(Editor's Note: The following is taken from the FIRM FOUNDATION of October 17, 1939. Read it carefully. dt)

"The spirit of innovation is a peculiar spirit. While coming in it is the meekest and gentlest of spirits; only it is marvelously firm and persistent. But when going out, no term but fiendish will describe it. It comes in humming the sweetest notes of Zion, it goes out amid the ruin it works, howling like an exorcised demon." (Moses E. Lard in the Quarterly for 1865, page 261).

Looseness of practice is but the consequence of a corresponding laxity in theory. A man whose practice in things religious is not in conformity with New Testament usage, betrays either a lack of knowledge of what that usage is, or what is worse, a disregard of it. It is written, "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23: 7). An abandonment, however partial and apparently trivial, of apostolic precedent bespeaks a condition of heart wholly foreign to that which characterizes a loyal disciple. Adherents to the New Testament plea from the beginning

of the restoration movement have earnestly contended for the primitive purity of Christian worship, and have ever protested against the corruptions and innovations of the world. So well have we succeeded in this that we have been able to exhibit to the world a worship patterned after the ancient order. This indeed has been one of our noblest accomplishments, an achievement of which we may well and justly feel proud. Worthy heroes of the faith have labored tirelessly and battled gloriously against enemies both within and without the church for a pure faith and a faultless practice in all things religious. Other thousands have guarded, and do now guard with sleepless vigilance against even the semblance of corruption or innovation. One of the grandest achievements of an historic past laden with valiant deeds and sublime accomplishments has been the successful promulgation of the slogan early announced that "we will receive as a matter of faith and practice nothing which is not expressly taught and enjoined in the word of God either in express terms or approved precedent." The untiring and persistent advocacy of this principle by the giant in-

telleets of the past has done much to bring us to our present proud position.

But, he is a poor observer of men and of things who cannot see slowly developing among us a tendency to move away from these fundamental principles. There is reason to believe that the sturdy love for the truth of the gospel that formerly characterized us is cooling in the hearts of some in the ranks. This unwelcome fact forces itself upon the careful observer who, like the experienced seaman searching the sky for the first approach of the storm, watches with anxiety the first indications of a departure from the truth. It is certain that changes are being wrought and practices indulged in under the guise of expediency that augur ill for the cause we love. Many years ago the scholarly I. B. Wilkes warned, "Be shy of expedients. For though many expedients are right and necessary; though no church nor church work can be conducted far without adopting some things called expedients, still let the sign of danger be placed over the doorway. That is the door through which the most danger comes to the cause. It is the way of the apostate. When the sheep leave the fold and go astray it is nearly always by this expediency road. A few short steps taken, not absolutely necessary, prepare the way for more and longer ones" (Designs of Christianity, page 29). The conviction is forced upon us that there are those among us today who are no longer restrained by a realization

of the dangers voiced by this man of God, and who shrunk from practices, which a decade or two ago, would have stamped the doers thereof as digressive to an advanced degree. The reader doubtless will be able to produce out of his own knowledge many examples illustrating and confirming this fact. Some will be amazed to learn that not many months ago in a Southwestern city, a prominent preacher widely heralded as a "great local preacher and personal worker," a graduate of one of "our" Bible colleges, sang a solo each evening before presenting his lesson. The minister of this church, known to thousands throughout the brotherhood, sat silently by, acquiescing in the same. Brethren, are such practices as this to become common in churches of Christ? This solo-singing preacher is reported to have said that there is no longer need for evangelists; each church should have a located preacher, leaving the work of evangelization in his hands. Conditions have changed (we are told) and personal work is the only effectual method of evangelization! What further need have we of the certainty of the pastor-system among us than this? In a western city a prominent preacher among us coached a small group in special singing who, being before instructed, at a given signal sang during the invitation, while the congregation stood quietly, mystified and amazed at such proceedings in a church of Christ! Another young preacher, but recently graduated from a Bible college, indulged in a similar practice in a New Mexico meeting

recently. Other instances of a definite drift might be the general tendency of the times. Quartets and special songs are becoming the order of the day in many sections of Texas, while able evangelists, formerly known for their bold advocacy of the primitive worship, lift not their voices in protest thereto.

What do these unseemly practices augur? Is it the part of wisdom to wink at them, ignore them, be indifferent toward them? The sensible man who has the care of a family watches for the first symptoms of disease. He does not wait until his wife is helpless and the children prostrated. Early cures are easy cures; it is the late ones which too often fail. If it be right in the sight of God to sing one special song, quartet or solo in public worship to God, it is right to sing others; indeed, to have all of the singing done in this manner. Thus we abandon our plea for congregational singing. We have always contended that solos, quartets, special songs, etc., are the accoutrements of denominationalism, the vain trappings of a people who do not pretend to follow the New Testament in such matters. Are we prepared now to imitate them, adopt their practices, and henceforth silence our protestations? If it be right to sing a quartet and special song in Christian worship, thus depriving many of the brethren and sisters of the privilege of participating therein, how can we logically argue against the choirs of denominationalism? How can any church or preacher who

tolerates a quartet or special song ever oppose a denominational choir? Is not our plea for congregational singing rendered somewhat ridiculous by such practices?

We offer the following reasons why we shall ever lift our voices in opposition to all such practices:

1. Every example of New Testament singing is congregational. If it is thought that I Cor. 14:26 is an exception, let it be remembered that the context shows this to have been a meeting unlike any we have today, and does not therefore set a precedent for us to follow.

2. The command to sing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16), is addressed to the church as a whole.

3. Solos, quartets, special songs, etc., originated in sectarianism, and are therefore without the authority of the Lord, or the sanction of any inspired man. There is no more excuse for such things in Christian worship than for instrumental music and robed choirs. Such things constitute a definite departure in the wrong direction.

4. Their sole purpose is to entertain and to produce an effect which cannot be done in congregational singing. It is surely unnecessary to argue that mere matters of entertainment have no place in Christian worship.

5. The songs usually sung in this manner are of a type wholly unsuited to the cultivation of genuine spirituality and thus detract from, rather than add to, spiritual growth.

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The foregoing reasons are sufficient to establish the fact that solos, quartets, special songs, etc., should forevermore be expunged from Christian worship. Let every lover of the true worship of God lift his voice in protest against all such unseemly practices. More, let gospel preachers refuse to tolerate such things in the services in which they participate. It is only thus that we shall be able effectively to stay the drift that is becoming definite in this direction. And while opposing such things let us not forget the singing conventions which, with their jazzy jigs and profane taking of the name of the Lord in vain, are rapidly becoming the bane and curse of the age. These convent-

ions are doing more than any other thing to corrupt the minds of the people and to make them dissatisfied with the New Testament arrangement. Let a song leader become a regular attendant at such meetings and a devotee thereof, and soon the songs of Zion have lost all their appeal to him, and he is never so happy as when he is directing the congregation in a jazzy flippant song service from which all spirituality has long since fled. Brethren, a pure faith and faultless practice is maintained only by an unceasing vigilance. Remember that the defection over instrumental music was considered a light thing at the beginning. Let us guard jealously the primitive purity of New Testament worship.



RADIO BROADCAST

SUNDAY

Wxor

8:30 a.m.

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