

STRAIGHTWAY

"And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him" [Mark 1:18].

CHRISTIAN PURITIES FELLOWSHIP

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A Ministry, Not A Market

(The following is taken from the writings of Dr. O. Talmadge Spence, founder of the Foundations Ministries.

It is as pertinent today as the day it was written.)

And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not. (II Peter 2:2-3)

Undoubtedly, anyone and everyone who has followed the history of the Christian institutional ministries in the last twenty-five years, as presented on radio, television, and through publishing houses, has seen a very dangerous trend. Christianity is becoming a market, not a ministry. Of course, this observation has exceptions, and there are dangers in all of

our ministries. In the field of Christian music, this danger is even greater than in any other.

Having made a complete exodus from pentecostalism, I have come to realize even more so that the apostasy of the Charismatics really began in a rather peculiar manner shortly after World War II. The change from an old-fashioned pentecostalism of modesty and holiness to modern charismatism with all of its worldliness and materialism came about with an initial catalyst of electing businessmen to church boards and institutions. The former presupposition of building the church through a spiritual ministry became, more and more, one of building a church of prosperity, health, and

materialism. Prosperity theology became synonymous with neo-pentecostalism. Of course, this ultimately led to a change in doctrine, too. When the orthopraxy of a people changes from a spiritual to a materialistic motive, the orthodoxy then must change.

Back through history, there has been a similar pattern, whether in the sale of indulgences by the Roman Catholic Church or in the backsliding publishing houses in Protestantism that sought pragmatic success of business. Many of the publishing houses were started by Christians.

But in this present time, the charismatic catalyst is also paralleled with the methodology of the neo-evangelical. These dangers also are deepened when a good ministry, a fundamental ministry, a separatist ministry moves away from its Biblical moorings to go "where the fish are." More and more, we are hearing it openly stated that we must spend more to

reach more to save more souls. I have often wondered how Noah did it without modern inventions, communications, radio, or television. His base was a boat; it sounds so horizontally simple to me. More and more, the institutional church reminds me of a huge network of machinery functioning like "workaholics," bringing nervous breakdowns and heart attacks among its most prominent administrators. Whenever a church has learned to function sufficiently within its own powers, without the urgency of the Holy Spirit, then that church becomes an institutional church. It becomes a market, not a ministry.

On the other hand, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, by its original pattern of Jesus and His Twelve, was an uncomplicated organism. With the presence of Judas, it was not perfect; with the presence of the other eleven, it was not always strong. But I do believe it was spiritually efficient—a ministry, not a market.

Some may say of those who plead for faith, thrift, prayer, Scripture, and the Holy Spirit that they are not alive, progressive, successful, or zealous for souls. I cannot speak for everyone, but I must witness for my own ministry. We have fifty acres of land, eleven buildings, a mobile home park, fifty-four ordained ministers and students from thirty states and eleven foreign countries in our history. This has taken twenty-five hard-working years. We are still unpretentious. Some have spoken of the Foundations Ministries as

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"thrift with style." We have undertaken one of the most far-reaching facilities we have ever envisioned: a 45,000 square-foot, new divinity facility, towers, and sanctuary. I am delightfully as busy as before, but most of it is in Bible study and prayer and writing. I have reached my full capacity. My coworkers have reached about the same capacity. We have never wanted more than five hundred college students, not because we think small, but because we cannot achieve our purpose of dealing individually and spiritually with the character and counsel needed through the Word of God in our time.

A general superintendent of a denomination once told me that he thought my preaching was Biblically sound and true. However, he also followed that, in our time, people will not give money to support Biblical ministries and you have to preach with the people's financial support in mind. "You can only reach a large number of people if you have a lot of money," he added.

I responded with tears, "But is there not a God Who is able to provide support for a Biblical ministry?"

He said, "Yes, that's what we preach, but it does not work out quite like that at all. You must preach so that material success will result from the people. You must be pragmatic about it."

I have thought much about this matter and very often; I have prayed much about it, too. I must

acknowledge that only God gave us our ministry—through people who loved the Truth. It has not succeeded because I was an unusual administrator. We must be in existence because we are a ministry, not a market. There are some things we must not borrow monies for in our ministry. In the main, it is my opinion that except for building and properties which stand for themselves, we must plan to pay the whole bill, so we may, if necessary, distribute publications as freely and as inexpensively as possible. God is not displeased with a small work, a low-key financial plan, a modest investment. I must say this in light of Foundations Ministries' having come from a \$26,000 annual budget to almost \$1 million in the annual operation over twenty-five years.

However, with all of these blessings, I do not believe we had to reach this modest plateau to please God; and I am very doubtful that we now please Him more than we did the first day we came out into this nut-grass, potato field back in April of 1974, when the first purchase towards a Bible Church, College, and Academy was initiated. In reality, I am more fearful now of my own frailties and failures in the preciousness of God's grace than I seemed to be when we began. I know that I am not a greater man now than before, since we have accomplished something in our ministry. Frankly, I have made many human mistakes during the time of accomplishment. However, I do believe I am a more thankful man and that I magnify the grace of God more.

We must not follow “where the fish are”; we must follow “where the Lord’s Word leads.”

In these days when many radio and so-called Christian television networks, book and music publishing houses are compromising with the philosophy of this age, we

need to consider placing a statute of limitations on an increased ministry. There is but so much that we can pray and preach about. Only what is done for Christ will last. We must, therefore, restrict ourselves to a ministry, but never a market.



When God Has A Crisis: Change the Audience

(The following is taken from the writings of Dr. O. Talmadge Spence, founder of the Foundations Ministries.

It is as pertinent today as the day it was written.)

Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.

And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he (Paul) shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own hands; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.

(Acts 13:46 & 18:6)

Adam's sin brought God to a crisis. When God has a crisis, He always has a route He takes to deal with it, and often His route follows a pattern. When Adam sinned, instead of giving in to the inevitable consequences, God presented the revelation of “the seed of the woman” — in the crisis.

When the Cainite world plunged

headlong into a secular civilization, God revealed salvation through the Ark of Noah — in the crisis.

When Nimrodian idolatry came after the flood, in the incident of the Tower of Babel, God separated Shem to the Messianic Hope — in the crisis.

When Sodom sinned, the “Lord” saved Lot, of Abraham’s seed — in the crisis.

When Israel sinned and was sent into the Assyrian Captivity, God saved Judah for Messiah — in the crisis.

When Judah was sent down into the Babylonian Captivity, God saved a remnant and returned them to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple for Messiah’s sake — in the crisis.

When the Jews crucified the Lord Jesus Christ, God gave Christ to the Gentiles — in the crisis.

When the Day of Pentecost had come, and it became clear that the Jerusalem principle of the Gospel could not continue, because of circumcision, God gave the Antioch principle and the Apostle Paul to the nations of the Gentiles—in the crisis.

When the apostasy of the Gentiles comes in the last days, God will turn once again to the repentant orthodox Jew to give to the world the Gospel of the coming Millennial Kingdom of Christ away from the Gentile Church (who have been either raptured or left in the apostasy)—in that crisis.

There remains the matter of the fall of Lucifer, a crisis that seems to have not been dealt with adequately yet as these other crises have. But, to be sure, God has a very definite plan to finalize the matter of the crisis-fall of Satan and his long history in the path of fallen man. It is planned during the thousand-year reign of the Lord Jesus Christ. Satan will be bound in hell for the thousand years, and the earth shall enjoy a blessed relief from the actual presence of Satan. We believe that the demons will be bound with Satan during that same period of time. These examples portray something of what God does in a crisis.

The pattern of God when He has a crisis is to replace what failed with a new audience with a new purpose with a new man—a new human spirit. At least the previous examples give way to the fact that God does not accept what happened against His will to hinder

Him from proposing an alternative to the crisis.

Let us notice at least two examples in history in the Christian era of how God provided an answer to the crisis for His people.

In the examples we will choose for this pattern, we will see God use George Whitefield and John Wesley.

On the very same day George Whitefield sailed out of the harbor in London, England, John Wesley sailed in. John Wesley was returning with disappointment from a ministry in the new world. He had sent a call to Whitefield, "Come to Georgia and help us." Wesley, Oxford-reared, scholarly, and cultured, found himself miscast in the wilderness and was returning to England and the hope of the Church of England. But this was not the England Wesley had left six short months before. The Holy Club from the university days had broken up and scattered, its members preaching their thoughts and experiences from college. However, they made such an impact upon England's mind that the Church of England was stirred against them. Their preaching of conversion, regeneration, and the new birth angered the clergy and the church whose vague messages on morality and a blind allegiance to His Majesty the King were all they knew.

So Wesley had left Georgia and was entering the harbor from which Whitefield was leaving. In a matter of days, Wesley would

realize what Whitefield already knew—a crisis! The Church of England had closed her doors to the upstarts of the Wesleys and George Whitefield.

They barred them from their pulpits and made them outlaws, men with much to say to England and no place to say it. Charles Wesley tried to say it in the open air but found himself called on the carpet by his bishop and threatened with excommunication. John Wesley, loving the Church and reluctant to desert it, hesitated. Where now? They were in a crisis, at a crossroads, and waited; and while they waited, Whitefield called.

Whitefield had gone to Bristol, where eighteen months earlier thousands had come to hear him. But there was the sound of the closing of doors in Bristol as back in London with the Wesleys. Whitefield tried to preach in a prison, but the State-Church authorities informed the jailer that Whitefield was to preach no more to prisoners. The jailer inquired, "Why?" The Church authority responded: "Well, he talks too much about 'being born again.'"

We really believe the Wesleys for this brief time were stymied: "Would it be George Whitefield or the Church of England?"

George Whitefield walked four miles out of Bristol to Kingswood, to a deserted race-track, "to a wild, brutal, no-man's land where timid preachers never dared to show their faces; to a ribald, drunken crowd of colliers who lived in filth

and faithlessness and fighting ferment; to the most ignorant and savage and forgotten of all Englishmen." He went there and preached to them in the open air!

The audiences grew in Kingswood. There were sixty listeners to the first sermon; there were ten thousand two days later; within three weeks, the audience covered three acres. And yet, more and more thousands came. Whitefield called and sent for help! He sent for John Wesley. Wesley demurred. He was still a loyal priest in the Church of England. In the crisis, in desperation, he closed his eyes, opened his Bible, placed his finger at random on a text that he thought might help him decide; he read, "Get thee up into the mountain." That was plain enough for John's crisis, but he tried once more, and this time it was, "And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days." That was plain, too, for John Wesley. Still hesitant, he decided to draw lots to see whether he or some other "Methodist" should go; he drew the fatal slip. He packed his saddlebags and rode for Bristol. It must be acknowledged: John Wesley's heart was in revolt against all this, even yet. Preach in the fields, in the streets! It was vulgar. But he went. On Saturday night he listened to Whitefield preach in the open air, and he shuddered; his sensitive soul still "thought the saving of souls almost a sin if it had not been done in a church." On Sunday he consented to talk to them in a house on Nicholas Street. On Monday he capitulated: "I sub-

mitted to be more vile, and proclaimed in the highways . . . to about three thousand people." His text: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor."

John Wesley had been won, and the great Wesleyan Revival, to last more than forty years, had begun.

The human spirit of George Whitefield and the human spirit of John Wesley had been prevailed upon by the Lord.

If Wesley leaves Georgia and returns home in personal disappointment, so be it. If George Whitefield leaves London and goes to Bristol, so be it. This is the way God works when He has a crisis among His own dear saints. And if the Church of England refuses

the Word of God, He will turn His Words towards the commoners of this world and have a mighty awakening from a different people in life. God changed the audience.

To change the tragedy of art and the invasion of contemporary music in the modern churches will never be accomplished through the churches that have yielded to the plague of bad art and music—the contemporary audience. The cure will come only through churches that have made an exodus from the tragedy—where God has given them a change of audience with a change of preachers and songs. That is God's pattern for the return, not only to God but to art and song.

God will have to change our modern audience!



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