

STRAIGHTWAY

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

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An Age of Insanity

Dr. H. T. Spence

Having concluded another year in the providence of God, we must acknowledge that the longsuffering and mercy of God are the only reasons the earth has not self-destructed. The falling away is deepening within the institutional church, sin is violently escalating, and terrorism is daily manufacturing fear in most people.

One of the evidences apostasy continues to permeate the world is found in the changes that have now taken control of man's thinking and understanding. The logic of absolutes is being exchanged for the "crazy," the "bizarre," and the "insane." In decades past such insanity was abhorred by society. For example, the killing spree of the Charles Manson clan was a rare incident

that rocked our nation's conscience for weeks. Now the violence depicted in such criminally bizarre cases seems so common an event that only one- or two-days' news coverage is the norm before another notorious crime takes its place.

Likewise, the religious world is reflecting a similar insanity concerning its thoughts about spirituality and Christianity. When I was in my third year of seminary training and working at a K-Mart on a Saturday night, a somewhat wretchedly dressed man came into my department and began talking to me about miracles and healings. As I simply listened, his conversation turned to his daughter. He told me that she had left home and had come back some months

later expecting an illegitimate child. He proceeded to say that a “prophetess” came into his home that very week and prophesied that the child in his daughter’s womb was supernatural and would be another John the Baptist. He went on to declare that the previous night in a church service other women gathered around his daughter and gave similar prophecies. About this time the man’s wife and his daughter approached us dressed in a similar slovenly appearance as the man. After introducing me to them, he made a quick purchase and left.

As they made their exit from my department, I thought in my youthful mind how “crazy” it was for that man to turn the fruit of sin into a holy thing. Yet years later we witnessed Jimmy Swaggart, after being caught the second time with a prostitute, claim that his escapade in sin was of God, so that by knowing this sin better he could help the Body of Christ.

Though these lines of reasoning seem utterly absurd to the conservative heart, the powers of neutrality and compromise have reached epidemic proportion in the Fundamental world of professing Christianity, explained away as needed changes or the evidence of “spiritual” maturity. Policy has taken the place of principle and “for the sake of evangelism” has become the cloak to hide overt compromises with the world, the cults, and Romanism.

The days we face are insane in thought, and yet if we did not have a Bible we would wonder if we were not the insane ones. The world, contemporary Christianity, and the sympathetic feelings of society have literally readjusted the mind-set of the Church, sending all running in an opposite direction to that of Scripture. Every professing Christian will have to make a decision of whether to follow the norm of Christian society or keep the heart and mind on the only infallible authority on the planet, the written Word of God.

As we conclude this year of 2007 for *Straightway*, we commend to this edition two articles from our Founder, Dr. O. Talmadge Spence, trusting that the voice of the past will clearly indicate that Truth does not change and that insight is the same among the remnant in any generation. May the Lord richly bless these year-end articles to our hearts as the “age of spiritual insanity” deepens in the coming year in contemporary Christianity.

STRAIGHTWAY

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Preaching? Or Counseling? Which Will it Be?

Dr. O. Talmadge Spence

Reprint—May 1985

In my heavy schedule of travel on preaching missions, I am amazed at a certain common attitude which I find among preachers. I am hearing more pastors tell me that they wish they did not have to go to their pulpits to deal with their church people. They wish they could perform their ministry in their study on a one-to-one basis of instruction from the Word of God.

Also, I am hearing more and more preachers declare that they have adopted Expository Preaching almost exclusively when they do enter the pulpit. The reason given is that this particular method of preaching keeps them from being influenced by the problems of their church or dealing with the sins of their people on a personal basis through their pulpits.

This double expression has been coming to me in my travels for about ten years, and I have been frankly amazed at the growing number of pastors who have taken this attitude in their pulpit preaching. Most of these men I really respect, and yet I do not quite understand their manner and method in this regard. (Be assured of the fact that this author acknowledges that he does not know who is saved, and he does not purport to know the motive of any man in the matter of his professed Christian life and

ministry.) So, without condemning their personal salvation in Christ Jesus or judging the motive of their individual hearts, I want to address these two expressions. I trust that I shall do this, having been led of the Holy Spirit in it all.

First, the switch from the public church pulpit to private church study is rather new in church history. The prophet and his public preaching follow the oldest pattern of communicating truth in the Bible. Undoubtedly, this new concept has flourished because of the seeming importance of psychology that has made heavy inroads into modern Christianity. Although there is definitely an increase over the past ten years in the practical application of psychology in pastoral counseling, as well as an influential proliferation of the methods of psychology in biblical application, I think there is a greater reason for this change from the pulpit to the study for instruction to others. Personally, I do not share the zeal for the increased mood towards modern psychology in the ministry as possibly other ministers do, although I took quite a number of such courses on the undergraduate and graduate levels. I think we are talking about a world of thought which is based on modern myths, and I do not believe methodology actually changes hearts and lives. However, I fear an even greater

danger lurks underneath this switch from preaching to counseling. Could it be that we are being conquered by the fear of saying too many things in the pulpit that might be offensive to some, and that the counseling seems more compassionate or less pointed? Oh, I am sure that I need true compassion from God, but not studied psychology for the sake of success.

I dare say that Fundamentalists and Evangelicals are less militant and plain than they were ten years ago, although they continue to have the reputation of their militancy which they did have twenty years ago. In reality, Fundamentalists have become quite suave and pragmatic. Each one of the three World Congresses of Fundamentalism of which I have been privileged to attend and participate has become less militant. At least, that is my opinion. We have approached a time in Fundamentalism when we are no longer calling the names of certain personalities that we did so strongly call before. To some extent this may be good, if the previous rendering was only an extreme, hateful act rather than being led of the Holy Spirit. But if it was extreme, we can expect the present swing of the pendulum to be an equal extreme as well. Some of the most militant Fundamentalists that I have known in the past are now telling me that they have adopted a new posture in this matter and will not call names for fear of bringing confusion among the young ministers. I am reminded

of C. H. Spurgeon, who was so very strong in his church pulpit but weak in taking a direct stand in training his ministers. And in the latter, he failed considerably.

But I must come back to this matter of *pastoral counseling*.

Equally involved is the new emphasis being placed upon *Expository Preaching* whenever the pulpit is the order of the day for pastors. I am being told that this method of presenting the contexts of the Bible in a systematic order keeps the pew from thinking that the preaching is addressed to them personally. Expository Preaching, too, is probably a compassionate thought in the matter of pastoral theology. Some also include the belief that *Textual Preaching* is weak and often sidetracks from the context, and that it is now proved that Expository Preaching is the best method of preaching for us to follow.

Lest we forget, Textual Preaching was the most prominent method a century ago and during the birth of Fundamentalism, and yet there was not only Evangelism in the air but also Revivalism in the heart. The latter is missing in our own generation amidst reputed success in Evangelism.

But when we adopt a singular method of preaching, are we not closing many doors for the Holy Spirit to work and direct both preacher and pew in the purpose which could be in the appointment

from heaven? Jonathan Edwards' great sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of An Angry God," came from a singular text. Can we arbitrarily say that a certain method of preaching is the best simply because we have our own reason for preaching it that way in relationship to the pew? Dare I go a step further in this delicate matter? Could it be that we have adopted the almost exclusive method of Expository Preaching to avoid a confrontation with the souls of men in the pew? Have we, in our sincere hope for compassion for those same souls, in wanting to handle them with care, privately, gone too far by actually closing a pulpit-door when public presentations of pointed truths are desperately needed so that all, both those who observe and those who are involved, can profit when a sin or weakness is manifest in the church we pastor? I do not believe that the magic lies in the method of the sermon any more than in the methodology of Neo-Evangelicalism, generally practiced. Method is method no matter where you find it. Most of them are only pragmatic, without Holy Ghost Power.

Biblical Theology is that larger spectrum in the methodology of Bible study and preaching where we view a truth in its unfolding throughout the Bible and down through history. Could this not be used with equal effectiveness especially in our time when the overlapping of the ages is upon us? Pulpit preaching

must affect both our personal lives and our prophetic end as we endeavor to be "perfect in our generation" (Genesis 6:9). I know churches where Expository Preaching is regularly rendered week in and week out, and the pew is fat with the context and the exegesis; yet they do not see the relationship between their own hearts and lives with the biblical presentation. Somehow or other, the Text, Exposition, and Biblical Theology needed for our time do not get through to our soul in a personal matter of conviction. I fear we could move into a position where the pew is fat with sterile, static, and stagnant truth, if you will understand the way in which I mean this. Of course, truth is not sterile or stagnant within itself; but if the soil is bad, it will not matter who is the Sower and how excellent the Seed might be. Should we not seek God's face for a direct administration of the Word of God from the pulpit? I mean, such a blessed confrontation with the pew that when the preacher concludes the sermon, you could hear their hearts ring like a large bell—"the preacher means me; he means me." Is this offensive? Of course, it would be offensive if we preach with a hateful heart and a mean spirit. But could we, as preachers, get down on our face before God and pray through about our preaching and come up with a golden spirit and lower the boom of sky-blue truth upon the souls we love who are drifting away from God? We must preach in honesty to

the needs and sins of the saints, so the sinners will respect our preaching plain to them. I am becoming more and more aware of a certain lineage of Scripture that demands our responsibility to preach directly to the pew without the psychological dodging of their sins. This is not said to be mean, but so that the pew will know we mean it.

Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear (I Timothy 5:20).

And again he [Jesus] stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more (John 7:8-11).

It is most interesting to me that in this particular incident, Jesus pled for the *sinner* while attacking the reputed *righteous* men. What Jesus really wrote on the ground, we may never know, but what the public pulpit did that day was to bring a direct confrontation with the audience; and the words in the sand were personal and pointed. Beginning with the “eldest,” he was the first to go. But that “last” man must

have been a rascal for him to stay around so long with such a personal sermon. It took much longer for the public sermon to get through to his “conscience” until he, like the rest of them, could say, “He means me; Jesus means me.”

We cannot afford, in these days of apostasy, to adopt any method of preaching, whether public pulpit or private counsel, that would obscure the burden God has laid upon our hearts as the pastor-teacher of our dear people. Whether Textual, Expository, or Biblical Theology, we should preach directly led of the Holy Spirit, not intending by any form of psychology to soften the need of truth among our people. We should not deliberately attack and bruise our people just to have them leave the audience wounded unduly; but it would be just as wrong to prevent their hearing the anathema of God upon their sin as it would be to attack them in a one-sided, gunshot, public sermon. The homiletical method of the sermon has no power of itself within itself to bring people to repentance and growth and victory. It is only the Word of God, the Sword drawn naked before the people, and the power of the Holy Spirit that shall save sinners’ souls and bring saints from their backslidings anyway.

“Dear God: help me to preach what my people need in spite of my prepared homiletical outline. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.”

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The New Year and the New Christianity

Dr. O. Talmadge Spence

Reprint—May 1981

Church history continues to become the most embarrassing of all the movements of history. In our twentieth century we are coming to a time of new definitions to the old words of the Christian Faith. We are still shocked by the Neo (New) concepts being promulgated by the electronic church and other contemporary popular presentations of so-called Christianity. We are urgently reminded of the words of the Lord Jesus: “when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8b). There will still be another new Bible to come out in 1981, and multitudes will continue to neglect humility and obedience before the old one. The true is never new! Men are in love with the new as they ever forsake the old landmarks that God has set up before us. There is the constant cry: “We need a Bible and a Church that will relate to our generation!” Oh, dear friends, if God ever prostitutes His Word and Work down to a relationship with this world of sinners, backsliders, and apostates, all everywhere throughout the entire universe will be lost! The Bible reveals the glad reality that God never changes—for nothing and for no one! We should realize just how fortunate we are since God has never been a backslider from His infallible and inerrant Word! He never will relate and become relative to this planet in its fallen condition. This does not mean He has forsaken earth in His love and provision of salvation through the Cross of Calvary. That continues to this present moment. “For God so loved the world . . .” is the legacy of the years.

In 1054 there was a division in the Church, East and West, because of the Iconoclastic Controversy. This was a division over a very meaningless thing.

In 1571 there was a division in the Church that resulted in the Protestant Reformation. This was a division well worth the suffering and agony involved.

Since those two great divisions of Church history, there has been a counter-movement made in the last 150 years to destroy so much of the biblical benefits which the Protestant Reformation brought to the world in leading it back to the Bible and the true work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts and lives of born again Christians.

In 1846 there was the Evangelical Alliance.

In 1855 there was the Y.M.C.A. and the Y.W.C.A. hopes of union of the Christian world.

In 1895 the Inter-Varsity Fellowship was born.

In 1910 the First World Missionary Conference met in Edinburgh, Scotland, under the leadership of John Mott, with about 1,200 delegates from 160 missionary societies.

In 1925 the Lutheran Archbishop Soderblom, of Sweden, supported a similar ecumenical hope with the slogan, “Dogma Divides; Services Unites.”

In 1927, In Lausanne, the second ecumenical effort of worldwide consequences came about with an assembly of about 450 delegates from 90 denominations that gathered for a world conference on faith and church constitution.

In 1937, the 1910 and 1927 efforts united into a worldwide conference in Edinburgh, Scotland, again.

In 1938, in Utrecht, the Ecumenical World Council of Churches came into existence.

In 1948 this same movement gathered in Amsterdam as the “World Council of Christian Churches,” under the leadership of Dr. Visser’t Hooft. Three hundred fifty-two delegates from 151 different churches were present. They claimed to be “a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior.” But the succeeding words declared, “This basis confesses Jesus Christ as God and Redeemer.” It was the word *basis* that later became the battleground for unbiblical definitions of *new* concepts of what the other words really meant. The word *basis* opened up for any interpretation of the matter. At that time Anglicans, Lutherans, Baptists, Salvation Army, Quakers, Coptics, and others refused the acceptance of Roman Catholics.

In 1954, Evanston, IL, further search was made for a compatible acceptance for other groups of Christendom.

In 1961 there was the Third Full Assembly of the World Council of Churches, in New Delhi, India. Six hundred fifty delegates of 198 member churches of the W.C.C. came from approximately 60 countries. Along with visitors and 300 from the press, about 1,500 participants were present. Twenty-three new churches and fellowships, including Pentecostals, comprised about 50 million people in all, including about 30,000 priests and 20,000 parishes. “The Geneva Ecumenism” was on the move with their ecumenicity. Three areas of discussions and deliberations came into being: (1) An interpretation of the previous “basis” was enlarged to include the Trinity, but the power of the blood of the Lord Jesus for personal salvation was omitted. (2) An amalgamation of the International Missionary Council,

which had been founded in 1921 in London; 1928 in Jerusalem; 1938 in Tambaram, India; 1947 in Whitby, Canada; 1952 in Willingen, Germany; and 1957-58 in Ghana, was now brought into union with the W.C.C. (3) Orthodox churches from Russia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Poland came into the W.C.C.

In 1967, in Kandy, Ceylon, further dialogue was made concerning the “Cosmic Union” of Christendom.

In 1968 the Fourth Full Council met in Uppsala with their slogan: “All Things New.” Along with this thought it was announced that the purpose was “to awaken Christ who sleeps in the night of all religions of the world.”

By 1971 the Central Commission of the W.C.C. met in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, for further dialogue and hopes of international union of all churches.

In 1983 there will be another World Council of Churches meeting in Vancouver, British Columbia, and the extent of this union includes Romanism as well as all the religions of the world in their hopes of ecumenicity.

I am simply amazed how the pulpits and the pews of former strongholds of historic evangelical and fundamental beliefs of Christianity have been shaken and fallen through these years of the ecumenical movements. Where are the biblical fathers of former times? Where are the spiritual giants of yesteryear? Well, although that question is rightly raised, we should not be discouraged by the implication; there are still those who remain faithful to God’s Holy Word and will not sheathe their sword again until the Lord Jesus comes back to the clouds! There still remains a remnant that had rather burn than bow to the current compromises among the denominations of the land. It may well be, this time, that popes and priests and dogmas and decrees will arise from a Protestant apostasy rather than a Roman one; but there is no doubt that Rome is returning to lead the New Ecumenical Movements for the final manifestation of the Man of Sin—the Antichrist—to a religious and political world deceived by their sins and their heresies!

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