

THE MYTH OF A SECULAR SOCIETY

In his book *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* the late Leslie Newbigin, an English theologian, had a chapter entitled "The Myth of a Secular Society" in which he shows that "modern Christianity has accepted the fact that modern society is on a steady and irreversible course toward increasing secularization. The church," he says "has accepted this idea, thus seeing itself as a religious institution apart from the secular society, but having little influence upon this society." He argues that what we have is not a secular society but a pagan one, a society which does not disallow gods, and therefore is worshiping gods which are not God. He stated that this myth is so powerful that it has in it the power of "principalities and powers" (Eph. 6:12), and should be unmasked by Christians.

We may ask what is the difference in a secular and a pagan society? Webster defines secularism as "humanistic philosophy viewed as a nontheistic religion antagonistic to traditional religion; indifference to or rejection or exclusion of religion and religious considerations." Paganism is defined as "a follower of a polytheistic religion (as in ancient Rome). One who has little or no religion and who delights in sensual pleasures and material goods; an irreligious or hedonist person." A secular society is devoid of any recognition of God or gods, while a pagan society worships gods of their own making. Theoretically a secular society could co-exist with a religious society because it does not recognize any god, but would not interfere with those in society who did worship a god. A pagan society, on the other hand, has gods of its own making and insists that society recognize their gods. The paganism of our society becomes evident when it demands that the church bow to the state by giving up family traditions, being politically correct and accepting the government's programs as a way of life. The church has accepted the myth of a secularized society thinking Christianity could co-exist with false gods. The false gods are not a part of secularized society, they exist in a pagan society. We have thus opened the door to Baalism and as a result we are confronted with every brand of evil being accepted as normal. There is a strange prohibition in Exodus 23:19; 34:26 and Deut. 14:21 which says "You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk". This according to the *New Bible Dictionary* probably "referred originally to a Canaanite ritual, which the inspired writer called for the complete rejection of this local practice. It was an idolatrous, polytheistic Canaanite fertility ritual with strong elements of cult magic". This says that Israel was to avoid such practices because of the idolatry and magic associated with it. For example they could have very easily incorporated such a practice in their ordinance of the feast of weeks. (Perhaps this would have enticed some pagans to join them and thus be converted to the true and living God). However the abstaining from such practice, not assimilating them, was what testified of the presence of the living God. The modern church is guilty of "boiling a kid in its mother's milk" by incorporating the paganism of the world into its efforts to reach them with the gospel. For example: Kelly Ettenborough in *Rocking His Praise* quoted by Gary L.S. Johnson in *Whatever Happened To The Reformation?* sites a modern minister as

saying: "When we finally get to see Christ, we will find this totally purple-haired, body-pierced guy saying, 'Man you don't know me but...'" Ettenborough describes this "enthusiastic evangelist" as an example of his adopting, not only the appearance and music of punk rockers, but also the lifestyle and worldview of today's youth culture as a means of "reaching this generation". This is paganism gone to seed! How paganism invaded the church is illustrated with the parable of the tares (Matt.13:36-43) by L.P Myers in his book *The Church Is Not Appearing Glorious And It Doesn't Seem to Be Purpose Driven*. He says: "the early church was not pure very long before it began to stray. The tares were planted in the beginning. As the church grew to fruit bearing age, the tares, or the children of the wicked one, began to manifest. From generation to generation the tares worked to look more and more like wheat. That which started out as black and white, became sort of gray. After a few hundred years one could not tell the difference. The fruit became so poor that the concept of the tares no longer existed. The tares wormed their way into the leadership of the church and the harvest was corrupt. Then the tares pointed their fingers at the wheat in every form of vile false accusation. Soon it would be hard to find any wheat at all. Socially, it wasn't a correct position any longer to be wheat."

The task of the church is not to co-exist, live and let live, divide our lives into "secular" and "sacred". Our task is to "destroy speculations and every lofty thing raised against the knowledge of God and take every thought (ideology) captive to the obedience of Christ" (II Cor. 10:5). How do we do this? How did the early church do it? They certainly did not accomplish what the book of Acts and history says they accomplished because they had no problems. In reading the New Testament we see they encountered every kind of problem known to our modern world. Nor was it that there was no competition. When Christianity came to town, the religious marketplace was already crowded with everything from Judaism to emperor worship, with Zeus, Baal, Jupiter, Artemis and the like in between. It wasn't revivals or eloquent preachers that most influenced pagan society but everyday Christians doing everyday evangelism. This type of evangelism wasn't an effort to make the pagan feel at home. Rather it was a way of life that made outsiders feel they were missing something. They had something and showed the world something that was real, the reality of Christ and the Gospel. That was how they did it. We defeat the power of paganism by taking God seriously. Remember Proverbs 16:7: "when a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord, He makes even his enemies be at peace with him." The way to change society is to walk in a way pleasing to the Lord. When enough people begin to do this the idols of paganism will be destroyed. The early church confronted the pagan culture of their day with the Lordship of Christ. Pat Buchanan in his book *The Death of the West* in speaking of the deterioration of our nation says "Societies organized to ensure the maximum pleasure, freedom and happiness for all their members, are at the same time, advancing their own funerals". This statement can be applied to the modern church as well as to society. Modern paganism influencing the church is no myth.

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE HOLY SPIRIT

Since the early days of Christianity until the present day the doctrine of the Holy Spirit has either been a neglected or an abused doctrine. Loraine Boettner, a prolific writer and theologian of the last century wrote in *Studies In Theology*: “During the first three centuries of the Christian era, theological discussion was centered almost entirely on the relationship subsisting between the Father and Son, to the almost complete neglect of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. In the nature of the case the development of a formal statement of the doctrine was a slow process.” He continues: “Historically, the doctrine of the Holy spirit, which supposedly is of lesser consequence than that of the generation of the Son, has been perverted and exaggerated out of all proportion to its real importance”. The controversy concerning the “trinity”, beginning with the Council of Nicaea in 325, that produced the Nicene Creed, continued throughout the next four centuries and produced seven Ecumenical Councils. For the most part the concern of these councils was the nature of God and Jesus, very little attention was given to the Holy Spirit. In fact in his book *When Jesus Became God*, Richard Rubenstein devotes only 7 of 231 pages to the subject of the Holy Spirit. It seems that the Council of Constantinople I, held in 381, was the first to give a lot of attention to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. In a chapter on this council in Leo Donald Davis’ book *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils*, he states: “As the Trinitarian controversy continued on its weary way the Church was being buffeted by two new dangers, the errors in the theology of Christ and of the Holy Spirit. A new chapter in Christology was being written by Apollinaris of Laodicea in Syria.” Apollinaris was bishop of Laodicea from 361 to 390. Davis further states: “With Apollinaris a new chapter of Christology was opened at the same time Trinitarian theology was extended to include the Holy Spirit in its speculations”. Evidently the Holy Spirit had not been much of a question in the former councils. Some of the thought at this time was that “the Holy Spirit was thought of as an hypostasis of third rank, one of the entities which came into being through the Son. Some believed that the Holy Spirit was the noblest of creatures produced by the Son at the Father’s bidding” (Davis). It was this council that attributed the divine title, “Lord” to the Holy Spirit, and stated the Holy Spirit should be given supreme worship equal to that rendered to the Father and the Son. Thus the doctrine of the so called Trinity, originating in the council of Nicaea in 325, was complete.

Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? was the question the Apostle Paul asked twelve disciples in Ephesus (Acts 19:2). The interesting fact of this story is that they had believed and were disciples, yet had never heard if there was a Holy Spirit. Paul then questioned their baptism and found they were baptized unto John’s baptism. After explaining that John’s baptism was a “baptism of repentance, telling people to believe on Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus, they were baptized in the name of the lord Jesus”. And when Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying (Vers. 14-16). The coming of the Spirit brought the phenomena of the gift of tongues. The religious world argues about the purpose of tongues. The Apostle Paul plainly states the purpose in I Corinthians 14:21-22: “In the law it is written ‘By men of strange tongues and by lips of strangers I will speak to this

people and even so they will not listen to me’ says the Lord. So then tongues are a sign, not to those who believe, but to unbelievers”. Who were the unbelievers to whom tongues were a sign? Throughout the N.T. the Jews who rejected Jesus as the Christ, their Messiah, are said to be unbelievers. The miracle of tongues was a fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophesy against unbelieving Israel (Isa. 28:11-19). The tongues of Pentecost were a sign to unbelieving Israel that the Cornerstone had come and Israel had rejected Him to their own destruction and the kingdom was given to another people (I Pet.2:9). The coming of the Spirit with its prophecy of indwelling all men and the prophecy of Jerusalem’s demise and the speaking in tongues ushered in the kingdom which is not of this realm.

Back to Paul’s question. There is an element of sadness in this question. John had passed off the scene before his prophecies about Jesus had come to pass. The gospel had been preached several years when Paul met them, yet they did not know all that was available to them through the Holy Spirit. It is through the Holy spirit and only through the Holy Spirit that what Christ accomplished and made available to us as his people can be experienced. Many Christians are like these men of Ephesus. They are unaware of who they really are in Christ and many are looking forward to some future day “over yonder” to realize what they can now have because of the presence of the Holy Spirit. I Corinthians 2:11,12 states: For who among men knows the thoughts of man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God.” The last verse (16) makes a remarkable statement: “...we have the mind of Christ”. The purpose of the Holy Spirit is not to make us feel good or enable us to receive some kind of mysterious “prayer language”, but to enable us to know the things given to us by God. Alexander Campbell in commenting on these verses in *The Christian System* stated: “The active power of man is in his spirit. The Spirit of God is therefore often used for His power, hence in all the works of God the Spirit of God is the active operating agent.” The following Scriptures show that the Holy Spirit is parallel with the *power* of God: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you (Mary) and the power of the Highest shall overshadow you” (Luke 1:35). “The power of the Holy Spirit...mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God” (Rom. 15:13,19). “Our gospel came...in power, and in the Holy Spirit” (I Thess. 1:5). The promise of the Holy Spirit to the disciples was spoken of as their being “endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). Jesus had been “anointed with the Holy Spirit and power” (Acts 10:38).

The KJV translated the word “spirit” as “ghost”, thus, the Holy Ghost. To the translators the word “ghost” meant the “presence” of someone who had died. The Holy Ghost, then, was the “presence” of someone. It was therefore the “presence” of Christ and God. Jesus told the Apostles “I will not leave you as orphans I will come to you (Jn.14:18) and “you heard that I said to you ‘I go away, and I will come to you’” (Jn. 14:18). Also “I will be with you, even to the end of the age” (Mt. 28:20). The best definition of the Holy Spirit’s relation to the believer is John 14:23 where Jesus says “If anyone loves me he will keep my word and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode (dwelling place) with him”.

