

## The Church Must Not Conform

From *God Tells the Man Who Cares* by A.W. Tozer.

A stimulating little book written by a thoughtful observer of the religious scene attempts to explain Christian sects and denominations as reflections of the social conditions out of which they sprang.

The idea is, if I understand the author's arguments correctly, that differences in doctrine and in forms of church government among various Christian bodies have resulted from different economic, political, racial and cultural patterns throughout Christendom.

According to this theory, a democratic state would tend to produce a democratic church, whereas under a political dictatorship the authoritarian form of government would naturally prevail within the Christian community. In a highly cultured society, ritualism would mark the worship of the church along with much rich symbolism and forms of external beauty.

Whether this conforms to historic fact I am not ready to say, though my limited knowledge of history would lead me to believe that this explanation is probably an accommodation of fact to theory and, while partly true, does not tell the whole story. One thing is certain, however; it is that wherever the Christian religion differs from itself there will surely be found elements that are unscriptural and altogether without Biblical authority, and it is always those elements that divide the church against itself.

In whatever language they appear, the Scriptures continue century after century to say the same thing to everyone. The Spirit that inspired the Christian revelation never differs from Himself, but remains from age to age the same. God works according to an eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus before the world began, and our Lord assures us that till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled. God's truth is the same wherever it is found and if the church conforms to the truth, it will be the same church in doctrine and in practice throughout the entire world.

There are in the Christian religion three major elements: spiritual life, moral practice and community organization, and these all spring out of and follow New Testament doctrine; or more correctly, the first must and the others should. Life is and must necessarily be first. Life comes mysteriously to the soul that believes the truth. "He that heareth my word, and believeth on

him that sent me, hath eternal life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). And again, "He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive...)." "

The message of the cross offers eternal life and the blessedness of the Holy Spirit indwelling the soul. These distinguish Christianity from every other religion; and it is significant that these distinguishing marks are of such a nature as to be wholly above and beyond the reach of man. They are altogether mysterious and divine and are unaffected by race, politics, economics or education. The life of God in the soul of man is wholly independent of the social status of that man. In the early church the Spirit leaped across all artificial lines that separate men from each other and made of all believers a spiritual brotherhood. Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, Greek and Barbarian were all baptized into one body, of which Christ was and is the Head.

Along with the gift of eternal life, the entrance of the Holy Spirit into the believer's heart and the induction of the newborn soul into the body of Christ comes instant obligation to obey the teachings of the New Testament. These teachings are so plain and so detailed that it is difficult to understand how they could appear different to persons living under different political systems or on different cultural levels. That they have so appeared cannot be denied; but always the reasons lie in the imperfect state of the believers composing the different groups. They permitted the unauthorized introduction of extrascriptural matter into their beliefs and suffered spiritual weakness and debility as a consequence.

Undoubtedly Christian groups have been influenced in their moral practices by the society in which they lived, but we should see it for what it is and not try to explain it away. "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven."

That we Christians modify the moral teachings of Christ at our convenience to avoid the stigma of being thought different is a proof of our backsliding, and the shame of it will not be removed until we have repented and brought our lives completely under the discipline of Christ.

The third element in the Christian religion, that of church polity or the political organization of the religious community in worship and service, is subject to the pressures and influences of society to a greater degree than

are the other two. A modern example of this is the Salvation Army, which is to all intents and purposes a Christian denomination imitating the military in its organization and nomenclature. Other examples may be found in the historic denominations which have often followed rather closely the organization of the state. That some may deny this and quote scripture to justify their organizational pattern does not invalidate my statement.

Christianity does vary from itself from place to place and from time to time as it permits itself to be influenced by political, economic, racial or cultural factors. Without doubt neither I who write this nor you who read it can be said to have escaped completely the molding power of society. As Christians we are somewhat different from what we would have been had we lived in a different period of history.

I think we do well to admit this, but we should not accept it as normal; and certainly we should not accept it as inevitable that we continue to be shaped by the world. Paul said, "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). That we have to some extent conform to the world is a proof of our weakness. We must begin at once to correct matters. By consecration, detachment, obedience and unceasing prayer we must escape the clutches of the world.

Pure Christianity, instead of being shaped by its environment, actually stands in sharp opposition to it, and where the power of God has been present over a sustained period the church has sometimes reversed the direction of things and exercised a purifying effect upon society.

*May Ambassador Baptist Church always be in opposition to the culture of this world, the culture of sin and seek to bring those who are spiritually lost back to the Saviour who loved them and shed His blood to save them.*