

Moral Slide of Protestantism

They used to be America's fortresses for good. From their inception, they were a counterforce to fight moral corruption. The American Protestant churches promoted values that gave its citizenry models for integrity within and without government. Faith was a driving force in people's lives.

Then in the 1960's change infiltrated the thinking of both Catholic and Protestant churches. The former by executive design, the latter because of weakening commitment to Christ. Powerful thinkers such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Johannes Baptist Metz and Jurgen Moltmann promoted *liberation theology*. They impacted the mission of Christian churches worldwide. The *charge* was redefined within greater societal and secular terms. American Protestant churches were apostatizing.

The once conservative National Council of Churches abandoned its spiritual ecumenical base and began to view its greater role in socio-political terms. Mainline churches that sat at the NCC's administrative table moved away from its Christian mission toward the "religious left."

This change in Protestant thinking led many mainline churches to ignore the cries of religious and political conservatives who stood for truth and moral reform. During the Cold War benign neglect of the persecuted belied a growing calloused heart of Christian leaders. American Protestantism, with little Catholic resistance, began a trend that would minimize truth and promote *sentimentalism* and *secularism*.

To talk of sin from the pulpit became evil in itself. Christianity became shallow. Self-denial, courage and patience were no longer required. Tolerance became the antidote for guilt. Obedience to God's laws, repentance for rebellion and the possibility that God could eternally reject the sinner were buried under a morass of religious fantasy.

Around this time new translations of the Bible emerged. In 1951 the Revised Standard Version debuted. Its authors were liberal thinkers, such as Millar Murrows, who said, "We cannot take the Bible as a whole and in every part as stating with divine authority what we must believe and do" (Millar Murrows, *Outline of Biblical Theology*), and Russell Bowie, who felt that the Old Testament was filled with "enthusiastic traditions" and "folklore" (Walter Rusell Bowe, *Great Men of the Bible*, N.Y. Harper and Brothers, 1937, p. 1).

A backlash against this trend developed from a growing number of leaders calling themselves "fundamentalist." They sought to reinforce old Biblical standards. Other men like Billy Graham; Bob Jones, Sr.; John R. Rice, Charles Woodbridge, Harry Ironside and David O. Fuller, and later, in the early 1980's, Jerry Fallwell and Jack Van Impe began what would become another backlash, the "evangelical movement."

Though claiming allegiance to the sacred Scriptures like the fundamentalist, the evangelicals have become what William Ashbrook called the "new neutralism." It has evolved into a massive movement of compromise between Catholics and Protestants with unity over community purpose and minimizing doctrinal differences. They have become "diplomats" for Christ – not separatists – but appeasers.

Early Protestantism was anti-Rome. The Catholic Church was Babylon and represented the antichrist. The new evangelical movement has set this aside. Leaders of the past who "contended for the faith" have been replaced by this growing faction, ordering unity at all cost.

A newer form of "evangelicalism" has been popularized by Charles Swindoll, Max Lucado, Charles Colson and James Dobson. Christian leaders – like the late Bill Bright, Harold Lindsell, Tony Campolo, D. James Kennedy, David Hocking, Bill Hybel, Charles Stanley, Luis Palau – have proselytized its shrinking tenets.

Evangelicals have become an interchurch movement with many para church organizations, such as the National Religious Broadcasters Association, Back to the Bible and the National Sunday School Association, supporting it. Publishing houses, colleges and universities as well as in international conferences have defined what Ernest Pickering called by his books title – "The Tragedy of Compromise."

This evangelical movement is characterized by:

1. Repudiation of denominational differences
2. Separation is replaced by tolerant dialogue
3. Dislike for doctrinal controversy
4. Repudiation of anything Biblically negative – with a "judge not" philosophy
5. Love and unity above doctrine
6. Promotion of the appearance of intellectualism and scholarship imagery
7. Dividing truth into "important" and "not important"
8. Exalting socio-political activity to the same level as the great commission
9. Neutrality towards spiritual warfare
10. Softness towards "strict Christianity" – www.wayoflife.org

This alternate thinking regarding Christianity led to the inevitable ecumenical document called *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* in March of 1994. With the bonding and unity themes driving modern Christian leadership, secular ideologies have been adopted. Worldly marketing techniques have become popular. Music that sounds no different than that of the dance hall, metal concerts or bar room is part of the "worship" experience. Commitment to Jesus and all that He stands for has been replaced by social concern, with the idolizing of peace and love. Liberation theology has arrived.

Out of this, many have come to covet the "excitement" of "church." The "happiness" of this new freedom of expression is magnetic to the masses. Secular-driven ideologies of the Bill Hybel/Rick Warren cast have become the design of many church leaders and even denominations. AND – the work of the Holy Spirit has become a foreign tool to change hearts.

What man can do is replacing what God will do within the committed individual. Rising concern and interest in membership numbers, church growth and "bigness" is driving away the final excuse to be called a committed Christian.

Man's greatest need in experiencing the perfecting righteousness of Jesus needs rediscovering. It is a commitment to a life that meticulously follows God's directives. We cannot be saved without recognizing *what* we must be rescued from. Then, the beauty of Jesus and His saving power becomes magnetic. Then we commit to Him and Him alone and not to a movement that rises no higher than the leadership of man. Grace transforms – to those who let

Him enter the heart. It requires a commitment that is eternal and resistant against sin that will not end until Jesus returns.

Any church or leader who promotes church over commitment or grace over obedience has joined the secularist evangelical movement that is sweeping the world. Though it is anti-separationist, it is the ultimate separation – from God.

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