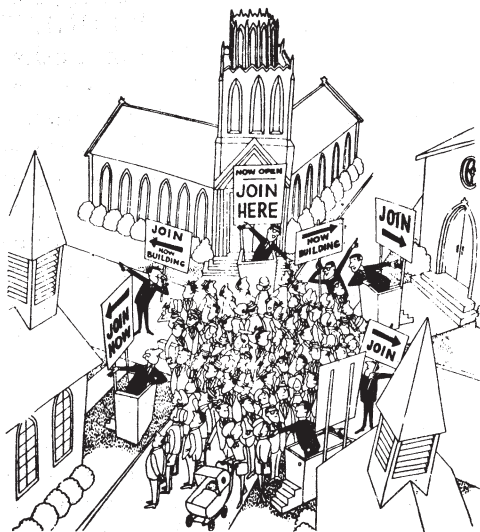


The Origin of **RELIGIOUS MISUNDERSTANDING and FALSE TEACHING**



READ the New Testament Scriptures. Carefully take notice of the simple message and pattern of things. Then take an unbiased look around the religious world today. Aren't you bewildered, somewhat amazed, and even startled by what you see? Where did all these denominations, traditions, and *isms* come from? One who has spent some time with the Scriptures knows that something is amiss, and he must confess that there are many, many denominations and doctrines in divergence with the Bible. Surely this is not what the Lord prayed for in the 17th chapter of John (John 17:20-22). Surely this is not the will of the Lord who through the inspired apostle Paul stressed the *oneness* of His plan (Ephesians 4:3-6), and showed the sinfulness of division and the party spirit (I Corinthians 1:10-13; 3:3,4,17; Romans 16:17).

Just exactly what are the origins of religious misunderstanding and teachings foreign to the Word of God?

We do not claim to have all the answers, nor is our position altogether an arbitrary one. However we speak from the vantage point of one who has disassociated himself from denominationalism (of which we were very much a part) to search our souls and the Scriptures. We humbly present these observations, reflections, and suggestions.

Roman Catholicism

We are convinced that Roman Catholicism represents a primary source of misunderstanding, false teaching, and erroneous practice. The Roman Catholic Church, with her sister bodies and offspring, came into being as a direct fulfillment of inspired prophecy (II Thessalonians 2:1-8; I Timothy 4:1-3; II Timothy 4:1-4; etc.). The falling away came as an admixture of Judaism, paganism, and human philosophy with a sprinkling of Christianity. This finally crystalized into the Catholic politico-religious system (with the Eastern Church being very similar).

The Protestant Reformation was an effort to reform some of this apostasy, but Protestantism has carried over much of the teaching and mentality of Catholicism (and it seems in many circles to be headed back toward Rome today). Sprinkling for baptism, as well as infant

“baptism,” came out of Catholicism; also, the presumptuous use of human tradition and creeds to supplant and even replace the Holy Scriptures, the elevation of human beings and church government unheard of in early New Testament times, the artificial distinction of clergy and laity, unwarranted titles of religious leaders such as “Holy Father” and “Reverend,” observance of Holy days—to name a few of the carry-over things from Catholicism.

The Protestant Reformation

The Protestant Reformation first began within the Catholic Church, but the zealous Reformers were soon compelled to leave this arrogant system. They exposed many evils of Catholicism, but (sad to say) they were greatly reactionary. In the heat of theological battle in the midst of, and on the fringe of, the Dark Ages, it was hard for them to sit back and view everything objectively. The pendulum made its swing to the other extreme, and with time their reactionary views were crystalized and canonized into denominational creeds; hence a snare for unborn generations to perpetuate denominationalism by fostering loyalty to their respective man-made creeds.

Let us elaborate. In the Catholic Church the Reformers found God dethroned with the Pope and priests in His place. They saw men attempting to be justified by prescribed human works. Faith (in the New Testament sense) seemed to have been left out of the picture. Trying to correct such erroneous religion, the reactionary Reformers were the unintended cause of other misunderstandings which were equally wrong. Some went to the ex-

treme in the other direction. They stressed the sovereignty of God to the point of complete predestination (Calvinistic style), with “once in grace always in grace” being the natural offshot. The favorite and most characteristic doctrine of Protestantism became “FAITH ONLY” and still is today. Martin Luther reportedly called the epistle of James an epistle of “straw” (denying it was part of the Bible) because it ran counter to his theory of “faith only” (James teaches that we are not saved by “faith only,” James 2:14-26). Other reactionary teachings came later, but took more of a localized character in various denominations.

Deluded Deceivers

We call this grouping “deluded deceivers” since the Bible does mention “deceiving and being deceived.” All false teaching comes as a result of deception in one way or another, but we are aptly applying this to the sects and cults of more recent times.

Men and women have “arisen” claiming the gift of inspiration or prophecy, and even claiming that angels have given them lost books of religion (Galatians 1:8). It is amazing what followings denominations oriented in this direction have today. These people usually have a fierce (but not rational) sense of loyalty to their religion and it human founder. Thus, they are overtly joined in unholy wedlock to teachings other than the HOLY SCRIPTURES, and arranging a separation is most difficult because of their delusion.

These people need to realize that the gift of prophecy is not in the church today (I Corinthians 13:8-10; Ephesians 3:3-5; 2:20), and the Word

of God is not to be added to (Revelation 22:18). The Bible is a completed book. The man who claims the Holy Spirit tells him what to preach without studying is deluded indeed (he equates himself with an apostle or prophet, or even beyond that). Feeling without fact in religion is nothing short of delusion. After all, a man who must rely altogether on his feelings (in the everyday physical world) is a blind man and cannot see. But by the truth of God we can KNOW through faith.

Modern Liberalism

This past century saw the beginning in a large way of Modern Liberalism (this liberalism is very radical). It is a swing away from historic Christianity and the authenticity of the Bible itself in the name of "Higher Learning." The supernatural, if not denied outright, is down-graded. This school of religious thought (which has made a wide cut across most party lines of all old-line denominations) is obsessed with the theory of evolution in reference to the origin of life, and it is applied to the Bible in almost every sense (as well as to man and society in general). Naturally the inspiration of the Scriptures is not held in the usual historial sense. These pseudo-religionists want to redeem society, but not necessarily souls.

For one who accepts the Bible for what it says, these views are nothing short of rank and unvarnished infidelity. Can any thing be more radical and false than to deny our historic religion? to deny the virgin birth and miracles of Christ? His redemptive death? His bodily resurrection (and consequently our resurrection)? Modern Liberalism has a wide influence in

this religious world, and most old "respectable" denominations (or their institutions of Higher Learning, so-called) are not untouched by this pseudoism.

O Beloved! Beware of this modern unbelief. Get out of it and avoid it like the plague! (II John 9-11).

Closing

Obviously we have not covered every phase of the origin of religious misunderstanding and false teaching, but at least we have called your attention to the problem. Most people foolishly close their eyes and say there is no problem. The majority are offended if you even imply there is something or someone wrong. We are told: "Go to the church of your choice; it doesn't make any difference what you believe, just so you are sincere" (However, examine II Thessalonians 2:10-12; Galatians 1:8; I Timothy 4:16; John 8:32). Beloved, in all honesty and sincerity, this is but naive and wishful thinking (or lack of it). The wish seems to be the father of the thought. An undesirable situation must be justified, excused, or recognized for what it is—and *then corrected!* Most people try to excuse and justify denominationalism.

The Lord Jesus forewarned (and may we listen): "And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" (Matthew 24:11-13). And the apostle Paul warned and charged Timothy: "But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou

hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (II Timothy 3:13-15).

BELOVED, the situation in the religious world today is not what the Lord Jesus wants. Would you search the Scriptures (and your own heart) for yourself to find out just exactly what is taught and what the Lord wants? A true Christian's loyalty is

to Christ, not to some man-made denominational system. Let us lay aside all human names, man-made creeds and traditions of men. Yes, let us completely return to the church of the New Testament, which is not a denomination.—*James E. Gibbons*

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THE SWORD AND STAFF

Post Office Box 147

Mt. Airy, N.C. 27030

U. S. A.

