

THE INDEPENDENT BAPTIST REVIEW

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Jack Keep, Editor

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KEEPING INSTITUTIONS TRUE

By Robert G. Delnay

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As fellowships of churches get on toward middle age, there are certain patterns that keep repeating. One pattern is that nothing stays fixed. Institutions age in somewhat the same way that people age. II Timothy 3:1-5 and 4:2-4 suggest that that aging process has a certain finality, a finality that requires in God's people a holy vigilance lest they lose what took so long to build.

A second pattern is that their schools go first. Only then does the change appear in the key pulpits, the denominational offices, the publication society and the missions. While the reason for that sequence seems almost self-evident, it is not so easy to regard a situation and see existing currents already at work. It is human to believe that at least some institutions and agencies are permanent, that whatever else turns aside, these will remain true until Christ comes for us. That assumption has dulled the sensitivity of many and permitted the loss of schools that once trained men and women of God.

One could wish that as believers we had put more time into reading history. I have had occasions, as have most of you, to observe colleges and seminaries that once were true to the faith. With the passing of years, however, they moved by tiny steps away from their founding principles. Most of them moved by the same steps that the others took, and we do well to observe, so that we may the better recognize the process when we see it again. Perhaps by learning how the process works we can succeed under God in keeping our own schools true to the Lord.

The Danger to the School

Commonly our schools come from humble beginnings but with a passion to produce men of God. From those humble beginnings each tends to move to affluence and prestige. That level of achievement tends to lead to a high level of self-confidence. In the interest of academic integrity they then bring in young men with top doctorates, men who glitter in the classroom, who attract student followings, but who do not share the founders' passions. Those young men tend in time to take control of the

schools, but with no individual commitment to the founding principles of the institution from which they draw their salaries.

In a typical case, the school would become increasing tolerant of innovative practice, meaning a breakdown in the personal standards of separation in both students and teachers. There would follow a tolerance for innovative doctrinal positions, which is to say, for heresies. As anti-biblical doctrines came to be accepted, older teachers protested the changes, only to learn that while false doctrine may now be tolerated, whistle-blowers are not going to be tolerated.

As the school continued its doctrinal shift, it would tend to drive off the more serious students. The administration would then counter this decline by talking up the exciting things happening on campus and solemnly affirming that the school was in better shape than ever. Eventually as false doctrines became evident to the alumni and as innovators took control, the enrollment slipped further, and the school would announce that it was opening a wonderful new development in its history by broadening its appeal and relaxing its rigid entrance requirements.

At that point, however, such schools do not necessarily close. Those that stay open continue to pour their graduates into the pulpits of the denomination and of the constituency. The new grads carry with them the new emphases, and eventually the church members find themselves sitting under the ministries of men who are not quite convinced of the verbal inspiration of the Bible nor of the historicity of Daniel.

The Doctrinal Shifts

As schools change, probably the key doctrinal shift comes in theology proper, the school's view of the holiness and majesty of God. In one of his books on American revivalism, McLoughlin remarked that Jonathan Edwards set a sort of high-water mark from which later evangelists moved downward. God becomes less and less majestic,

decreasingly holy but more and more accessible. As a school moves away from its founding biblicism, it takes an increasingly casual attitude toward God. The students tend to neglect or belittle personal devotion, and the standards tend to reflect the shift, but few people in the churches seem to notice it.

1. What students do notice, however, is the more evident change in doctrinal emphasis. One of the first of these changes is the way that dispensationalism goes out of fashion. It is too much to believe that a literal rapture can happen at any moment, and the teachers tend to postpone it to the remote future. The Kingdom smacks too much of pie in the sky, and the sweet here and now becomes more urgent. Some drifting schools may still tolerate the founders' dispensational approach, but they no longer advocate it.

2. The second shift has to follow the first one. Biblical literalism and premillennialism tend to go together. Accept one and you have the other. A second doctrine under attack then is the infallibility and even the verbal inspiration of the Bible. The attack begins on a low key, perhaps suggesting that maybe Paul wasn't really current on the status of women in the divine economy. Given time, however, the drifting school will tolerate the implication that the Bible is a human book and that inspiration covers only the general ideas.

3. The third shift is to modify the Genesis teaching of Creation. For a generation Christian liberal arts colleges have been teaching theistic evolution, perhaps followed by a local flood. Now schools that once accepted the reproach of the cross and taught verbal inspiration are beginning to follow the lead of others. Flat creation is no longer fashionable, and the yearning for prestige has modified the historic doctrinal position of the school. The first step is to take Genesis as myth, then to suggest that the earth is very old, and the implication of evolution can follow in a few years.

4. A fourth shift has to do with salvation itself. No longer do you talk about the lost; you are to refer to them as the unchurched. But how many have realized that a yawning abyss lies between those two words? Many schools and churches have to accept the notion that the unsaved are not so bad off as the doctrine courses

used to have it. Along with the Pauline view of depravity has gone the doctrine of justification by faith. Since that sounds too much like believism, faith alone has given way to commitment. But that is not the same thing. The book of Romans makes it clear that our works can add nothing to the finished work, and that only by faith can the sinner lay hold on eternal life. We are not saved by committing our lives to Christ; Paul in Romans 12:1 beseeches the saved to do just that

5. Along with soteriology has gone the biblical teaching of the unending punishment of the lost. We now have a creeping universalism side-by-side with annihilationism. Both have become preferable to a generation which likes its creature comforts, even at the expense of doctrines clearly taught in Scripture. An unending hell may be to our minds repugnant, even unthinkable. But to the Bible believer, it is clearly taught in the Bible, and it is but the logical implication of the absolute holiness of God.

This brings us back to the beginning of the doctrinal matter, that it is theology proper that has shifted, and God's holiness (Isaiah 6) has given way to a loose benevolence. Surely a heavenly Grandfather could not get really angry with his creations. For those familiar with the rise of Unitarianism, and then later that of Modernism, they will find the parallels striking. The current evangelical shifts in doctrine are parallel to the shifts that one and two centuries back led to such destructive apostasies.

For those who will not open their eyes and look, they will one day see their churches changing and the schools that they trusted producing false teachers. In that day let them not wonder how it could have happened. The price of doctrinal liberty is eternal vigilance.

EDITORIAL

Dr. Nettleton Responds

In our January newsletter the Editor commented on some remarks made at the Empire State Fellowship meeting related to events that took place at the Pennsylvania Association of Regular Baptist Churches. Dr. David Nettleton disagreed with our interpretation of events. In the interest of fairness we are printing his response.

February 26, 1993
A Letter to the Editor

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Dear Jack,

I have tried to maintain friendship with you men in the IBF. I pray for you.

I am disturbed that your editorial was critical of me without consulting me. Once words are published they can never be recalled nor do I have much hope that you will publish this letter of mine which explains some matters. I am further disturbed that I heard about the editorial second-hand. Since the editorial was unfairly critical of me, it would have been a courtesy to mail me a copy. I am your friend and brother. I experienced the same discourtesy in another publication which was critical of me. ("What Happened at Niagara Falls")

Regarding the Pennsylvania meeting, let me explain why and how I went. I am interested in all that takes place in God's work, in the GARBC or any Regular Baptist meeting or in the IBF. When I heard about the PARBC meeting and the scheduled discussion about the name change, I was concerned about the anti-GARBC mood in that state.

I first wrote to the local pastor and when he told me that I was welcome, I purchased a a ticket, which was non-refundable to get a good price. Then I received a phone call from the Chairman of the Council of 10, and I informed him that I had purchased a non-refundable ticket. Later, he wrote to me expressing the displeasure of the C/10 regarding my coming. He wrote that the Council did not feel that it was within their rights or authority to deny my attendance.

A copy of that letter was sent to the host pastor. He met with his deacons about it, and they asked him to write to me say, "OUR INVITATION STANDS." There was also one member of the Council of 10 who welcomed my attendance. So I went and was treated kindly by some.

In your "observations" you stated "since there is no organic relationship between the national GARBC and the state fellowships, Dr. _____ had no real reason to be at the meeting in Pennsylvania.

However, there are some real reasons. While there is no organic relationship between the national GARBC and the state fellowships, there is an inter-relationship inasmuch as many in the state fellowships are in the national GARBC.

In observation #2 you stated that my presence would be intimidating to some faint-hearted pastors. "He would notice who speaks and who votes for and against issues." Not wholly true! I would hope that none of the pastors would be faint-hearted. I have no authority to do them harm. Besides such matters are voted by secret ballot, as that one was. I simply observed out of genuine concern.

In your third observation you compared me to a Convention Secretary. Please remember that I was welcomed by the host church. I explained that.

Yes, private conversation was my business, and I do object to an influence to silence me. However, I held no private

conversation on the matter. The editor could have easily learned that if he had called me.

Observation #4. I was welcomed to attend and I was not asked not to attend. I chose to attend. Many of those messengers are my personal friends.

It was lacking in love, not to request me to stay home, but in refusing to even speak to me.

Jack, I have no recollection of saying at the convention of the GARBC in 1990 that I had served my last term on the Council. What difference does that make? I do not recall such a statement, but if I did make it and then changed my mind, is that wrong? I do not recall the statement.

Under "How My Mind Has Changed" I was also chided for my stand on Christian music. You should have printed my entire remarks. I have not changed my mind. I despise some of the music. I very much dislike canned accompaniment and loudness. I do not tolerate poor taste in music in our church.

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I meant, that despite our dislikes, we must tolerate and put up with some things we dislike if we are going to work together.

I take my stand. Before the C/18 last year I suggested that we request all musicians refrain from recorded accompaniment. One of the Council members, who is now in the IBF, objected, and so no action was taken. He called it "throwing out the baby with the bathwater", just because some of the canned music was good.

Another comment on "Observations": I still believe that "I do not want to be a link in a chain, however long, that leads back to apostasy." But I have to tolerate, not approve, some who take a weaker stand. We cannot all be perfectly agreed. Every man must decide where to separate or to work together.

Even the good RBP, which publishes for you, was the subject of a few negative remarks in your editorial. "He also boasted that one of the latest orders from RBP came from some Roman Catholics. I wonder if that is to be interpreted that the RBP material is acceptable to Roman Catholics. We certainly hope not." Jack, you know not. I was not boasting in the ordinary sense of that word. I, along with RBP, was rejoicing that truth-seekers among Roman Catholics had found out where the truth was published. Why plant seeds of suspicion and doubt?

one could have changed the course of events at Niagara Falls. The majority of the men had had enough. The vote was decisive. Moderators moderate. They do not favor either side. I was fair.

You are my friend and brother. I love you and appreciate you. Treat me like that. Immense harm is being done and it should cease.

God bless you.

Sincerely, your brother in Christ,

Dave Nettleton

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SODOMITES IN THE MILITARY

The following Bill being presented in the U.S. House of Representatives needs the support of all God's people and all Americans concerned with morality. It already has 100 cosponsors.

H.R. 667 A BILL

To enhance the readiness, discipline, good order, and morale of the Armed Forces by providing for the continuation of the policy of the Department of Defense on homo-

sexuals serving in the Armed Forces, as in effect on January 1, 1993.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

Section 1. Continuation of January 1, 1993, Department of Defense Policy Concerning service of homosexuals in the Armed Forces.

All executive orders, Department of Defense directives, and regulations of the military departments concerning the appointment, enlistment, and induction, and the retention, of homosexuals in the Armed Forces of the United States, as in effect on January 1, 1993, shall remain in effect with respect to the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps unless changed by law.

M.R. DEHAAN'S CHURCH

Remember that grand old man of the Radio Bible Class? He was the founder of Calvary Church in Grand Rapids, Mi., where as an ardent separatist and dispensationalist he held forth the Word of Truth.

This church is now pastored by Dr. Ed Dobson, a former associate of Jerry Falwell. Dr. Don Jasmin visited the church in October, 1992, while ministering in Grand Rapids. Looking from the back of the auditorium to the platform he saw a large glowing, blinking, electronic sign with pink bulbs, flashing out the message, "SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE." A huge banner in the middle of the ceiling contained a similar message with the added word, "YEAH."

On the musician's side of the platform a religious rock band was rehearsing for the night's entertainment.

How any Bible believing church would want to even use the theme of a blasphemous and wicked TV show is difficult to understand. What a blot on the memory of a good and godly man who constantly preached against such worldliness!

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