



CROSS CURRENTS INTERNATIONAL MINISTRIES

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Our dear Prayer Supporter,

Outward Hostility and Inward Lethargy. These were the dual threats that Zerubbabel faced when commissioned by God to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. In our day, these are the same Satanic ploys that are arrayed against the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Outward Hostility:

Here in the West, the Church is relentlessly attacked by a monolithic humanistic and secular environment. Around the globe the Islamic culture (that does not deviate from the teachings of Mohammed), seeks every opportunity to control the world at the point of a sword—or in these days by inhumane cruelty and violence. In the remaining countries that are still controlled by Communist regimes Christian liberties are severely restricted under the threat of economic deprivation, imprisonment and even worse. And this is the world over which the Savior was literally heartbroken when He died on the cross.

Inward Lethargy:

Tragically, while the conflict of the ages is upon us, many professing Christians are content to confine their christianity to a respectable Sunday morning church service. And, among the mixed multitudes who attend churches of various persuasions across the nation, Satan has successfully planted growing numbers of espionage agents. Also, for us all, it appears that the Laodicean spirit of the age has anaesthetized the cutting edge of our Christian conviction. Having a form of religion without any power!

Surely the true value of a thing is not determined by how much it will cost, or by how it will enhance my image, but rather by just how much the Lord Jesus does through me which will glorify God throughout all eternity.

With these somber reflections, many of us might need to bow afresh before the Lord Jesus and confess with William Maclardie Bunting (1805-1866), as adapted by R.A.B.

*Sins unnumbered I confess,
Of exceeding sinfulness;*

*Worldly cares at worship time;
Selfish aims in work sublime;
Pride, when God is passing by;
Sloth, when souls in darkness die;
Tasting that the Lord is good,
Pining then for poisonous food;
At the fountain of the skies
Craving creaturely supplies.*

*Sins like these my heart deceive,
You, who only knows them, grieve!*

*O how lightly have I slept
With the daily wrongs unwept,
Woke to holy labors fresh
With the plague-spot in my flesh;
Still Your comfort does not fail,
Still Your healing touch avails,
See my sorrow Lord for Thee,
O be merciful to me,*

*Father, pardon through Your Son,
Sins against Your Spirit done.*

Yes, it is at the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ that revival begins. At the cross, love does not plead with justice

and say, “bend the rules, after all, they are only human!” It is at the cross that justice pleads with love and says: “Find a way, even at infinite cost, to be just and at the same time the justifier of all who believe in Jesus” (Romans 3:26). So, it was at the cross that God’s subjective love was clothed with the doctrine of objective justice. And any table of organization that does not exercise love as it is clothed with the demands of doctrine, will inevitably lead to the compromise of the Lordship of Christ in family, business and church life.

It is for this reason and with the prayer for revival in our day, that Dorothy and I gladly send you the penetrating article by the late A.W. Tozer—printed by permission—“*The Waning Authority of Christ in the Churches.*”

This month we write but a few words, and in the context of today’s multiplied church and missionary programs, this letter is a very small thing. But God said to Zerubbabel: “*Who hath despised the day of small things?*” He also said it is, “*Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit.*” ZECHARIAH 4:10,6. So please join us in circulating copies to your Pastor, your Elders, your Deacons, your Missionary Committee and your friends. At your request, this communication can be obtained for duplication via e-mail (richardanddorothybennett@gmail.com). Just a small thing but a vital message to the Church today!

With love in our Lord Jesus Christ,

Richard + Dorothy Bennett.

The Waning Authority of Christ in the Churches

by A.W. Tozer

(This article was first published in full in the Alliance Witness May 15, 1963.
CCIM has reprinted this portion of the article with the kind permission of the publishers.)

Here is the burden of my heart; and while I claim for myself no special inspiration I yet feel that this is also the burden of the Spirit.

If I know my own heart it is love alone that moves me to write this. What I write here is not the sour ferment of a mind agitated by contentions with my fellow Christians. There have been no such contentions. I have not been abused, mistreated or attacked by anyone. Nor have these observations grown out of any unpleasant experiences that I have had in my association with others. My relations, with my own church as well as with Christians of other denominations have been friendly, courteous and pleasant. My grief is simply the result of a condition which I believe to be almost universally prevalent among the churches.

I think also that I should acknowledge that I am myself very much involved in the situation I here

deplore. As Ezra in his mighty prayer of intercession included himself among the wrongdoers, so do I. *O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens* EZRA 9:6. Any hard word spoken here against others must in simple honesty return upon my own head. I too have been guilty. This is written with the hope that we all may turn unto the Lord our God and sin no more against Him.

Let me state the cause of my burden. It is this: ***Jesus Christ has today almost no authority at all among the groups that call themselves by His name.*** By these I mean not the Roman Catholics, nor the liberals, nor the various quasi-Christian cults. I do mean Protestant churches generally, and I include those that protest the loudest that they are in spiritual descent from our Lord and His apostles, namely the evangelicals.

It is a basic doctrine of the New Testament that after His resurrection the Man Jesus was declared by God to be both Lord and Christ, and that He was invested by the Father with absolute Lordship over the church which is His body. All authority is His in heaven and in earth. In His own proper time He will exert it to the full, but during this period in history He allows this authority to be challenged or ignored. And just now it is being challenged by the world and ignored by the church.

What we do is this: We accept the Christianity of our group as being identical with that of Christ and His apostles. The beliefs, the practices, the ethics, the activities of our group are equated with the Christianity of the New Testament. Whatever the group thinks or says or does is scriptural, no questions asked. It is assumed that all our Lord expects of us is that we busy ourselves with the activities of the group. In so doing we are keeping the commandments of Christ.

To avoid the hard necessity of either obeying or rejecting the plain instructions of our Lord in the New Testament we take refuge in a liberal interpretation of them. Casuistry is not the possession of Roman Catholic theologians alone. We evangelicals also know how to avoid the sharp point of obedience by means of fine and intricate explanations. These are tailor-made for the flesh. They excuse disobedience, comfort carnality and make the words of Christ of no effect. And the essence of it all is that Christ simply could not have meant what He said. His teachings are accepted even theoretically only after they have been weakened by interpretations.

Yet Christ is consulted by increasing numbers of persons with "problems" and sought after by those who long for peace of mind. He is widely recommended as a kind of spiritual psychiatrist with remarkable powers to straighten people out. He is able to deliver them from their guilt complexes and to help them to avoid serious psychic traumas by making a smooth and easy adjustment to society and to their own ideas. Of course this strange Christ has no relation whatever to the Christ of the New Testament. The true Christ is also Lord, but this accommodating Christ is little more than the servant of the people.

But I suppose I should offer some concrete proof to support my charge that Christ has little or no authority today among the churches. Well, let me put a few questions and let the answers be the evidence.

What church board consults our Lord's words to decide matters under discussion? Let anyone reading this who has had experience on a church board try to recall the times or time

when any board member read from the Scriptures to make a point, or when any chairman suggested that the brethren should see what instructions the Lord had for them on a particular question. Board meetings are habitually opened with a formal prayer or "a season of prayer"; after that the head of the church is respectfully silent while the real rulers of the church take over. Let anyone who denies this bring forth evidence to refute it. I for one will be glad to hear it.

What Sunday school committee goes to the Word for directions? Do not the members invariably assume that they already know what they are supposed to do and that their only problem is to find effective means to get it done? Plans, rules, "operations" and new methodological techniques absorb all their time and attention. The prayer before the meeting is for divine help to carry out their plans. Apparently the idea that the Lord might have some instructions for them never so much as enters their heads.

Who remembers when a conference chairman brought his Bible to the table with him for the purpose of using it? Minutes, regulations, rules of order, yes. The sacred commandments of the Lord, no. Absolute dichotomy exists between the devotional period and the business session. The first has no relation to the second.

What foreign mission board actually seeks to follow the guidance of the Lord as provided by His Word and His Spirit? They all think they do, but what they do in fact is to assume the scripturalness of their ends and then ask for help to find ways to achieve them. They may pray

all night for God to give success to their enterprises, but Christ is desired as their Helper, not as their Lord. Human means are devised to achieve ends assumed to be divine. These harden into policy, and thereafter the Lord doesn't even have a vote.

In the conduct of our public worship where is the authority of Christ to be found? The truth is that today the Lord rarely controls a service, and the influence He exerts is very small. We sing of Him and preach about Him, but He must not interfere; We worship our way, and it must be right because we have always done it that way, as have the other churches in our group.

What Christian, when faced with moral problems, goes straight to the Sermon on the Mount or other New Testament Scripture for the authoritative answer? Who lets the words of Christ be final on giving, birth control, the bringing up of a family, personal habits, tithing, entertainment, buying, selling and other such important matters?

What theological school, from the lowly Bible institute up could continue to operate if it were to make Christ Lord of its every policy? There may be some, and I hope there are, but I believe I am right when I say that most such schools to stay in business are forced to adopt procedures which find no justification in the Bible they profess to teach. So we have this strange anomaly: The authority of Christ is ignored in order to maintain a school to teach, among other things, the authority of Christ.

The causes back of the decline in our Lord's authority are many. I name only two:

One is the power of custom, precedent and tradition within the older religious groups. These like gravitation affect every particle of religious practice within the group, exerting a steady and constant pressure in one direction. Of course that direction is toward conformity to the status quo. Not Christ but custom is lord in this situation. And the same thing has passed over (possibly to a slightly lesser degree) into the other groups such as the full gospel tabernacles, the holiness churches, the Pentecostal and fundamental churches and the many independent and undenominational churches found everywhere throughout the North American continent.

The second cause is the revival of intellectualism among the evangelicals. This, if I sense the situation correctly, is not so much a thirst for learning as a desire for a reputation of being learned. Because of it good men who ought to know better are being put in the position of collaborating with the enemy. I'll explain.

Our evangelical faith (which I believe to be the true faith of Christ and His apostles) is being attacked these days from many different directions. In the Western world the enemy has forsworn violence. He comes against us no more with sword and fagot; he now comes smiling,

bearing gifts. He raises his eyes to heaven and swears that he too believes in the faith of our fathers, but his real purpose is to destroy that faith, or at least to modify it to such an extent that it is no longer the supernatural thing it once was. He comes in the name of philosophy or psychology or anthropology, and with sweet reasonableness urges us to rethink our historic position, to be less rigid, more tolerant, more broadly understanding.

He speaks in the sacred jargon of the schools, and many of our half-educated evangelicals run to fawn on him. He tosses academic degrees to the scrambling sons of the prophets as Rockefeller used to toss dimes to children of the peasant. The evangelicals who, with some justification, have been accused of lacking true scholarship, now grab for these status symbols with shining eyes, and when they get them they are scarcely able to believe their eyes. They walk about in a kind of ecstatic unbelief, much as the soloist of the neighborhood church choir might were she to be invited to sing at La Scala.

For the true Christian the one supreme test for the present soundness and ultimate worth of everything religious must be the place our Lord occupies in it. Is He Lord or symbol?! Is He in charge of the project or merely one of the crew?

Does He decide things or only help to carry out the plans of others? All religious activities from the simplest act of an individual Christian to the ponderous and expensive operations of a whole denomination may be proved by the answer to this question: Is Jesus Christ Lord in this act? Whether our works prove to be wood, hay and stubble or gold and silver and precious stones in that great day will depend upon the right answer to that question.

What then are we to do? Each one of us must decide, and there are at least three possible choices.

One is to rise up in shocked indignation and accuse me of irresponsible reporting.

Another is to nod general agreement with what is written here but take comfort in the fact that there are exceptions and we are among the exceptions.

The other is to go down in meek humility and confess that we have grieved the Spirit and dishonored our Lord in failing to give Him the place His Father has given Him as Head and Lord of the Church.

Either the first or the second will but confirm the wrong. The third, if carried out to its conclusion, can remove the curse. **The decision lies with us.**



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