

Three Stages of a Movement

“The history of a nation, or a movement, can roughly be divided into three main periods. Firstly the period of the pioneers, when foundations are laid down, and principles set forth. The path of action is clearly defined, the issues are all fundamental, for opposition is virile. At that stage, obstacles are so great, difficulties so immense, that little time can be spared for anything apart from essentials. The continuance of the Movement seems to hang by a thread, for its friends are few, and this demands the complete dedication of those associated with it as "their reasonable sacrifice" if it is to prosper. The spirit of such a period is that of "no compromise," for the demarcation between enemy and friend is unmistakable. The history of the Christadelphian Movement entered that stage a little over one hundred years ago.

But pioneering days do not last forever. A movement establishes itself or goes out of existence. In the former case, it gathers to itself a little strength, and some results are seen for the heavy, exacting work expended and it then enters the second stage of its existence. There is time for things other than the mere essentials. It is the period of consolidation, when the principles established in the early days are given form and substance. Under wise administration, a nation or a movement reaches its greatest heights, and exercises its greatest influence, during this stage.

This is followed (inevitably as history shows) by a third stage — that of decline, when, as in Jeremiah's time, the need for walking in the "old paths" is not so apparent. The line of demarcation becomes obscure; the complete dedication demanded in the early days now seems a little fanatical; the outspoken opposition then manifested now seems a little ridiculous. A more liberal outlook is urged in the attitude of members towards those who are not of the Movement or who oppose it, and impatience is manifested towards the pioneering spirit that at one time was responsible for its establishment. Desire for respectability, comfort and ease takes the place of hard work, self-denial and constant effort. The Lord Jesus warned that the Ecclesia would drift into such a state. He declared that "as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matt. 24:37). The days of Noah were days of decline both for the world and the ecclesia (Genesis 6: 1-3). They witnessed a spirit of tolerance which proved fatal and ended in disaster. Prophet and apostle both warn that this will be repealed in the "latter days" — the days in which we live.

Trends within the Body indicate that Christadelphia has entered this third stage. The period of decline is settling in. The pioneering spirit is fast fading out. Earnest contention for the one faith seems a little ridiculous to many in these enlightened, liberal-minded days. To be too much in earnest is to risk one's popularity with some. Instead of close study of the Word (to prepare our minds to live and preach the Gospel) and hard work in extending its message, there is demand for more social evenings, for more respectable preaching of the Word (do not be too sure, too forthright, too outspoken in prophecy or doctrine), a blurring of the sharp line of demarcation between the world and Christ. There is nothing wrong in a social evening, or the desire to be respected, but too much of that sort of thing is not conducive to that self-denial which the true soldier of Christ is expected to manifest (2 Tim. 2:3-4). The well-trained soldier needs to deny himself some of the luxuries of life. Things that may be lawful are not always expedient for him if he is training. He needs to discipline himself that he may the more effectually campaign on behalf of Christ.

If the decline mentioned above is not stopped, Christadelphia could, in time, become but another sect manifesting a "form of godliness but denying its power." The antidote for the situation is supplied by the exhortation of Jeremiah to Jewry: "Seek ye the old paths". Let us revert to the spirit of the pioneers; let their uncompromising attitude to the world, their unceasing "contention for the faith," their repudiation of shams and evils, be emulated by us today. The appeal of Jeremiah was to the individual, and that remains the basis of appeal today. The individual can assist himself, his brethren, his ecclesia, by his personal attitude towards the Truth, and the Word of Cod on which it is based. In that regard "the old paths" can help him. Such works as *Elpis Israel*, *Eureka*, *The Ways of Providence*, *Nazareth Revisited* and so on can aid in the better understanding of the Word of Cod. The faith-invigorating first volume of "Eureka" packed full of warning and exhortation its outline of the prophetic message, its tracing of the growth and decline of the early ecclesias — will well repay constant reading and meditation. The record is there, showing how the Truth was slowly but surely submerged by apathy and error in the early centuries until the lightstands of the seven ecclesias in Asia flickered out and we live in similar days. The Truth's literature is not to be despised. From a literary standpoint, the writings of brethren Thomas and Roberts are outstanding; from the standpoint of Scriptural exegesis they are incomparable. However, it is becoming popular to deride these writings today; much the same as the college educated descendant of a pioneer might ridicule and be contemptuous of his uneducated forefathers who, by self denial and long hours of hard work, laid the foundation of the family-fortune he has inherited..."

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