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HAMPERED BY CONSERVATISM
Compiled by Duane V. Maxey



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INTRODUCTION

In His book, "Sketches Of A Life Of 75," Friends minister Luke Woodard wrote the following:

"The next General Meeting I attended was held at Glens Falls, New York, at the beginning of the year 1872. As Friends had not at that time any church in that village, the meetings were held in the large Methodist church, which was kindly opened for our use. My co-workers in this meeting were John Henry Douglas and David B. Updegraff, the former from Wilmington, the latter from Mt. Pleasant, Ohio. The house was filled, and from the very first the meetings were characterized by an unusual outpouring of the Spirit. Traditional professors knelt by the side of the openly sinful, and many of both classes found peace with God. One Friend, whose home was in Brooklyn, who, while consistent in his outward life, had never been converted, and who came to the meetings with some feeling of fearfulness, if not of opposition, became deeply convicted, bowed and sought and found peace with God. He was so overjoyed that, unwilling to wait till his return home to tell his family the good news, or even for a letter to reach them, he sent a telegram to announce that he had found his Savior. On his return he took his wife and children (several in number), and in the public meeting in Brooklyn, where he resided, told his experience, and then publicly consecrated himself and family to the Lord.

"The result of this series of meetings was the accession of quite a number to the churches. I think the larger number joining the Methodists, as Friends meeting was some two miles out in the country, and was hampered by conservatism."

Luke Woodard was a sanctified Quaker who realized that, like those mentioned above, people within a Church group can be "hampered by conservatism" -- i.e., hindered from spiritual progress by an undue and rigid adherence to their traditions.

The purpose of this compilation is not to say that there is no true and necessary conservatism for the Church, but rather it is to show that too much of the time conservatism within a Church Organization is a false conservatism -- one that holds fast the traditions of men while rejecting the God-sent, living spiritual fire that ushers in real revival and continually moves the Church forward on its earthly mission for Christ.

I am indebted to Evangelist Lowell L. Foster for sending me the article used in the first part of this compilation. -- Duane V. Maxey, Surprise, Arizona, September 20, 2007.

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01 -- WHEN CONSERVATISM DEFEATS ITS PURPOSE

By J. B. Chapman, Herald of Holiness, May 23, 1949

The province of conservatism is to preserve that which is established. It is therefore closely akin to both radicalism and liberalism, and oscillates between the two with the passing of time. and the change of emphases. For just as luxuries of today tend to become the necessities of tomorrow, likewise the reforms of yesterday are the heritages of today.

All this means that the field soldiers of the past are wont to become passive guards of the present. The flaming evangelist is likely to wind up as a "money raiser," and the evangelistic pastor completes his course posing as "a teacher." Lay Christians who once fasted and prayed "until the fire fell" come to the place where they contend for detailed rules of thumb regarding pet moralities, and call this "asking for the old paths." But in all such instances, conservatism has defeated its own purpose, and presents a spectacle much like that of the miner who stood guard over his hoard of gold until he himself starved to death.

Saint Paul does indeed commend moderation; but manifestly this was a call for use as against abuse in things permissible, like eating and drinking, working and playing, coming apart and engaging in social contacts. It cannot apply to morals; for whosoever is moderately honest is dishonest, whoever is moderately truthful is a liar, whoever is moderately right is wrong. It cannot apply to vital Christianity, for Christ distinctly said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." It is then true of religion in the positive sense, as of morality in the negative sense, that one who is religious with reservations is really irreligious. That love which is given to God just because it has found no object elsewhere is unacceptable. It was that love which made Isaac -- the only son -- its sacrifice, that brought Abraham into the circle of "friends of God." And, it was the gift which was so large that it left no remainder, that brought the widow to the Master's mention.

Sometimes attachment to an old building hinders the construction of a new and needed house of worship; sometimes devotion to an outmoded organization blocks the road to accomplishment; sometimes reverence for a historic form causes a contagion of death to spread; sometimes regard for tradition may lead even to the crucifixion of the just, as it did once before when it nailed Jesus to the cross. In all such cases, conservatism defeats its purpose. The injunction of St. Paul is, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." In the test of time we discover values that are timeless; to these let us hold fast."

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02 -- THE TENDENCY TOWARD CONSERVATISM SOMETIMES MISAPPLIED
From "Christian Living In A Modern World" By James B. Chapman

There are a few words and phrases like "Faith of Our Fathers," "Back to the Bible," "Old-time Religion," and "Pentecost" which have precious meaning within limits, but which have often been maligned by the assigning of undue latitude. These words and phrases are applicable to the message of Christianity, but not to its methods. They are synonyms of type, and not assignations of dates. When they are applied to methods they lose their meaning, and may even become placards of deadness and earmarks of spiritual exhaustion.

It has been remarked that the Church is the conservative element in society, and that it is the last to accept any new idea or to adopt any new reform. This is partly because the Church has moorings, while the rest of mankind are always at sea. People who hold to the Bible as the Word of God are not easily excited by the sudden announcement of some revolutionary idea, and by the time the Church gets around to examine the thesis of the novice, the first converts to the idea have become remiss, so the Church never does become involved.

But this tendency toward conservatism has sometimes been misapplied. When Sunday schools were first proposed many good church people opposed them as being out of harmony with the spirit of the Sabbath day. When it was first proposed to provide heat in New England churches "the old guard" violently opposed the idea on the ground that it was a concession to fleshly ease and comfort and out of harmony with the heroic spirit of worship. John Wesley and the early Methodists opposed the use of musical instruments in the church on the ground that such instruments in the history of true worship as represented by Judaism and Christianity always made their appearance in times of spiritual decline, and that inanimate instruments were incapable of expressing praise to God. It has not always been easy to satisfy immersion congregations with indoor baptisteries, on the ground that Jesus was baptized in a river. It was with reluctance that many modern churches abandoned the common cup in the communion service before the urge of new ideas of sanitation because the change seemed to be a step toward "modernism."

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03 -- CONSERVATISM CAN CAUSE A TRAGIC DELAY

From "The Ivory Palaces Of The King" By J. Wilbur Chapman

The Incorruptible Crown.. is for the man who leads an aggressive Christian life. Paul had this in his mind when he said, he was striving for the crown that is incorruptible. We will get a better meaning of the closing part of the chapter if we translate the word "castaway," as it should be and make it "disapproved." We thus have the picture of the great apostle striving on the race course to reach the goal, which is a picture of what many a Christian should be doing in his life here below. It was the spirit which Paul had when he said, "Now behold I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem;" and again, "This one thing I do;" and again, "Laying aside every weight I press forward;" and again, "I am willing to suffer the loss of all things."

It is the spirit we should have if we realized the lost condition of men. The church is all wrong in its ideas when it says, "we have opened our doors, the music is good, the pews are free, the preaching is of the very best, the people are welcome, let them come." This is not the spirit of the Master. He said, "Go out after the lost," and if you will read the parable of the lost sheep, the lost piece of money, and the prodigal son, you will find how far you are to go and how long you are to seek. It is all summed up in the little word "until." This is the warrant for changing your method if the old method will not work.

It is said that the great conflagration in London could have been easily stopped if the firemen could have proceeded at once against it, but they could not do so until they had received the order from the Lord Mayor, and he could not give the order until he had entered his office, seated himself in his official chair, donned the robes of office, and in the regular way sent forth the message for them to fight the flames. By that time they were beyond control.

We sometimes find this spirit in the church of today. There is such a thing as a church being dead because of dignity and conservatism, and it is an inspiration to know that there is a crown awaiting the man whose spirit is exactly the opposite.

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04 -- THE CAUSE OF FAILURE NEITHER RADICALISM OR CONSERVATISM From "All Out For Souls" by J. B. Chapman

[In this piece, Dr. Chapman lays the blame for the Church's failure neither at the doorstep of radicalism nor conservatism, but since men tend to gravitate to one of these extremes or the other, it seems possible that both of them contributed to that which created stagnation and "hampered" the progress that he saw to be so vital. -- DVM]

It is almost easier to reverse a man who is going in the wrong direction than to start one who has stopped. Stagnation is a more dangerous estate than faulty agitation. Brethren of the Nazarene superintendency, we are not in so much danger of going the wrong way as we are in danger of not going at all. We are not so menaced by unseemingly agitation as we are paralyzed by an increasing stagnation. I read those statistics a while ago, and I don't think some of us heard them; or if we did, we did not analyze them; or if we did that, then we did not take them as applying to us personally. We are all too complacent for any of these things to be true. Last year -- 1945 -- it took fifty Nazarene laymen and more than one Nazarene preacher to add one single member to the church. The gain was approximately one member to the church on the average. And it took fifty Nazarene churches, nearly three thousand members, fifty Nazarene preachers, one Nazarene district superintendent, and one -- fourth of the time of a general superintendent to add one church to the denomination. Fifty Nazarene churches, fifty Nazarene pastors, one

district superintendent, and three months of the time of a general superintendent equals one new church. And yet, unless a new kind of vision comes to us here, before this conference is over, we will all be saying we had a fine year and were the subjects of much blessing last year. But, brethren, how can it be that we had a good year and the net results, in the main thing by which success is measured, be no greater than that? One district superintendent for every church we gained, one Nazarene pastor for every church member gained! I know we had a war on part of the year, and that we had the excitement of a war closing for the other part of the year. But these are excuses, not reasons. We were made to serve in times like these, and neither our successes nor our failures have their roots entirely outside ourselves.

I do not want to press this proposition further. Some good districts lost churches and some good churches lost members. I am not too worried about that. But I am worried over the fact that we are not worried more than we are. It is our complacency that agitates me. If our hearts were really broken, if we were taking the matter to heart, if our eyes were fountains because of it, I could then believe that some of these barren women -- sterile Nazarene churches and Nazarene districts -- may yet break forth to singing, and bear more children than some which have been more fruitful in the past.

Let no one say the cause of failure was radicalism or conservatism. I want this message to apply to us all. None of us have done well enough to feel truly happy, or to qualify us to criticize the rest. Let the egotistical study his own membership charts. Let results commend or condemn your theories. The best could have done better. It is the sight of the wagons that prove that Joseph is alive. Some had their slump for the first time, but others have had slumps until slumps have become a habit, if not indeed a character, and still they are not stirred. Is it possible that the beautiful Church of the Nazarene is going to be turned into a mutual admiration society where the general and district superintendents meet in their annual conference just to pass compliments, and go back home to grind at Samson's treadmill? Is it possible that we have brought to the fore in this Pentecostal church a band of leaders who want to be area -- serving generals and time -- serving district superintendents, who have no soul passion, and who can live the whole year through without revivals? Is it possible that we are so enamored of the paint on our houses that we are not disturbed when there is dearth and death inside? Is it possible that we can be content to raise money, make pastoral arrangements, conduct district assemblies, and yet suffer the spiritual leadership and soul -- saving success of the movement to atrophy before our eyes and pass away forever? Is there no one that can wake us up? Is there no way to start a fire in our bones that will cause enough heat to make the water of our concern boil and become powerful steam?...

I am afraid of that kind of leadership that concerns itself principally with its own ease and safety. I am afraid of that cautious leadership that is so afraid it will make mistakes that it makes the greatest of all mistakes -- not undertaking

anything worthwhile. I do not come here today to criticize you or myself for the way we do things. Rather I feel deeply criticized about the way we don't do things. And I know you know I appreciate all that all of you are doing and trying to do. But my soul is stirred because we have not seemed to do the one thing most needful -- lead on in a soul -- saving crusade. We have run the machine; we have made some noise; we have reached an all -- time high in liberality by giving \$75.54 per capita in money this past year. But, brethren, these ought we to have done and not to have left the spiritual aggressiveness undone. We have done good things, but we have made a poor showing with the best things. We have been occupied with the means, and have not in sufficient measure reached the end. We should have done what we have done without accounting it the purpose. We should do these things again, and better, but should turn more definitely to the one thing that can keep us from becoming just another denomination. Just a people with a circle of influence, and a nest of static contentment!

I have called this paper "All Out for Souls," and I am thinking of the future -- the near future -- when I ring the changes on the battle cry once and again. I know we have some matters of policy to think about in this conference, but I wish these matters might take their places as spokes in a wheel, the hub of which is soul passion, soul burden, souls! Souls! Souls that are lost! Souls for whom Christ died! Souls which are near and dear to us! Souls for whom we care and for whom we pray! Souls for whom no one cares and for whom no one prays! Souls! All out for souls! Nazarene general and district superintendents, all out for souls! All out for souls in 1946! All out for souls! All out for souls!

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05 -- THE PERVERTED CONSERVATISM OF A DEAD CHURCH From "Centenary Thoughts" By Randolph Sinks Foster

[This is part of a message delivered when the M. E. Church stood on the threshold of its second Century. -- DVM]

Brother ministers and laymen, in these addresses I have mainly called your attention to your respective duties, and to motives to the faithful performance of them. May I now, in conclusion, add some words of warning? The interests you have been called to contemplate are not ordinary interests. You have seen and felt how great they are; how transcendently sacred; how far-reaching; how they affect your dearest welfare for time; how they spread out over all eternity; how they concern humanity; how God himself is interested in them.

There are some points of danger to which your attention ought to be called. Interests do not prosper simply because they are great and deserve to prosper. The dangers often are in corresponding ratios with the interests involved. It is so here, Though God is himself the head of the Church, and though his heart is set on its welfare, and though all his power should be employed for its success, it is,

nevertheless, beleaguered with many dangers. It is the purpose of its Founder that it shall take the world, but he has made its success depend on its fidelity to him, It is nothing without him, and he will dwell in it and work through it and for it only as it is faithful to him. It is an easy thing for the Church to lose its power. Of this the Greek Church, spread over wide regions, is an example today; likewise the Romish Church It may be doubted whether they are not worse, or but little better, than absolute heathenism. There are other Churches which have degenerated to a scarcely less deplorable condition. As with the individual, so is it easy for the Church to miss the way. The descent to the inferno is sometimes rapid and noiseless, and the gulf is reached before the danger is apprehended. Signs of apparent prosperity are often but symptoms of real degeneracy; and when the Church is dizzy with joy over its assumed successes, its joy often is but the wild frenzy of delirium which denotes approaching death. Much of the opposition to Christianity has its source here: it is not opposition to the real, so much as to the apostate and degenerate, Church which has made the name odious. The Church is detested because it has become detestable, and the hate is turned against Christianity, which it is assumed to represent, but of which it has, in fact, become only a sad travesty. The worst foe the Church has is often the Church itself. It becomes its own accuser and its own executioner. If dead, it is worthless; if perverted, its zeal becomes a consuming fire of mischief and hate, and all things beautiful and holy turn to rottenness and death under its manipulation. Its conservatism becomes the conservatism of priestly fables, and its aggressiveness the aggressiveness of worldly ambition and despotic power; it is thenceforth the enemy of progress and liberty, perverting truth, forging gyves [shackles] for conscience, and enslaving souls and bodies with fetters of superstition and tithings, There is perpetual danger that the Church either become dead or perverted -- animate with a life which is worse than death.

If we take warning from the past, we shall find admonitory signs of danger ominously hovering about our own Church at the present moment. The rocks which threaten us are not concealed; they lie in full view; they are right abreast of us; they stand out thick and threatening across the mouth of our second century. Will we rush madly, with all sails set, upon them? or will we have the wisdom to clear them, and magnificently sail down another century of glorious history? Is it not well that we look carefully about us, brothers, and take our reckoning?

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06 -- FALSE CONSERVATISM OPPOSES CHURCH PROGRESS

From a Sermon by George C. Wells
Published in the 1871 Publication,
"Penue!, Face to Fate With God"

The agencies in her own body which oppose the progress of the Church are skepticism, formalism, conservatism, and worldliness...

[False] Conservatism, which seeks to preserve that which is established. It appropriates the names of Christianity, truth, and charity, and extends the right hand of Christian fellowship to a moderate degree of error. It deprecates no religion at all, while too much religion is no less an evil in its eye. It would strengthen the weak and weaken the strong, apply fire to such as are cold, and ice to such as burn, and it claims to be the umpire in religious fervor, and judge whether a man has too much religion or too little.

The only true conservatism in religion is to be found in keeping within the Bible limits. Whoever has no religion, or less than the Bible warrants, needs to be exhorted to strive after it; whoever has more religion than the Bible allows, -- which requires the utmost of every physical and moral power, -- he is to be checked and brought down to the Bible standard. Dr. Cumming, the eloquent English divine, says: "Some people say that we ought to have more moderation. The apostle says moderation is good. In your preference of form, yes... but how can you be moderate in Christianity? Did you ever hear of a man being moderate in honesty? Moderate honesty would be positive theft. Did you ever hear of a moderate truth? A moderate truth would be a lie. If a thing is right, you are to do it with all your heart; if it is wrong, you are not to do it at all. The moment a man becomes earnest in his attachment to the truth and in his worship of the living God, that moment men will declare that much religion has made him mad." So far is moderation from being recommended, that Christ said distinctly, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind." Not much moderation in that!

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07 -- CONSERVATISM A HINDRANCE TO ENLARGEMENT

From "Fire From Heaven" by Seth Cook Rees

One great hindrance to spiritual enlargement is our conservatism. We are wedded to our old wheel ruts, and find it difficult to leave them even for a better road. Your chariot has rolled along the old track with unchanging monotony until the law of habit makes enlargement almost impossible. Our love of what we call "propriety," "regularity" and "system," must go, for the Holy Ghost will not operate by our rules and regulations. It is time we were beyond the conventionalities of culture and the observation of what "they say". All great movements begin in great ideas. There is no progress without fresh, vital thought. China is the same for three thousand years because her teacher is dead. If China should listen to the voice of America calling across the Pacific, she would be rejuvenated and revolutionized in a few years. We, too, must have larger conceptions of God's promises and a larger appreciation of the magnitude of our inheritance. The tendency of the age is toward ease and quiet and rest. But God wants to push us out of our drowsy nest into the great beyond, into a larger place.

We need a larger love. The world is dying today for pure, holy, sweet, humble love. Men need flowers and sunshine and kind words while they live. Bouquets and wreaths and crosses from the florist's on the casket or grave are worthless; smiles and cheer and encouragement during life are invaluable.

We need a larger faith; a faith that will grasp the fullness of God's great promises, a faith that will rise to the level of every emergency. A larger joy is needed; a joy that will not only rejoice in the gifts of God, but will rejoice in God Himself, and find in Him our portion and boundless, everlasting delight. Can we not "count it all joy " when in divers temptations, as saith the Scripture? Can we not "rejoice evermore"?

We need a larger work. We are too narrow in our interests and in our prayers. We may not be able to devote ourselves to but one thing, but we should feel interest in and sympathy for every good work. In this way we can "abound toward every good work." By way of the throne we should be in touch with all lands and all Christian enterprises.

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08 -- THE PERIL OF REGIMENTATION WITHIN CONSERVATISM From "Beyond The Moral Divide" By Foy Bullock

The bulk of Christendom rests entirely upon direction from its hierarchy, however, conservative, evangelical Christians claim direction from God and it is within this segment of Christendom that the hope of revival rests. Even with conservatism a peril has arisen through regimentation because of the necessity to maintain biblical standards of righteousness. While battling to uphold an outward conformity to the standards, the throttle of evangelism has been sorely neglected. Thus, a weakness has developed because this negative regimentation has not been accompanied with positive soul winning efforts. The evangelistic effort is designed more to refine the Church rather than win the lost. While both are necessary, neither should be neglected. A negative regimentation without the positive thrust to evangelize the lost creates stagnation, and stagnation is the breeding ground for sickness, disease, and death.

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09 -- NO GLORY IN CONSERVATISM WITHOUT INTENSE MORAL FORCE From "From Glory To Glory" By Joseph Henry Smith

His [Christ's] is an intense nature. Next to man's animosities is man's apathy. Lukewarmness in righteousness is akin to wickedness itself. But the nature of the Lord is not only true, it is fervency. His sympathy is not sentiment but succor. He is not only ready to save, He seeks to save. No strong impulse of our nature more

than faintly suggests the almighty propulsions of the divine heart to usward. Men may sometimes glory in their conservatism, but never can they command admiration if manifestly feeble in moral force. God's love, like sunlight, may sometimes appear as gentle beams; but it always rises to a meridian heat.

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10 -- HE WAS GRIEVED BY COMPLACENT CONSERVATISM
From "Roy T. Williams -- Servant Of God" By G. B. Williamson

Roy T. Williams was an evangelist and he believed the church should be the bearer of the evangel always. Nothing could grieve him more than for the church to lapse into an attitude of complacent conservatism losing its evangelistic fervor and its vision of the world-wide task of evangelization. It was his conviction that the whole church should be engaged in the work of soul saving, with every department geared to this purpose and every member harnessed to the program of giving the glorious gospel of full redemption to all mankind. He was a profound believer in the psychological soundness of revivals. To him they were essential in the life of the church. He was also convinced that the whole church should be engaged in the work of personal evangelism, so that it could succeed as a soul-saving-institution.

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THE END