

THE BEREAN

"...EXAMINING THE SCRIPTURES DAILY..." (Acts 17:11)

"CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP"

BY B. G. ECHOLS

Many churches are announcing "contemporary worship." Contemporary is defined as, "Of or in the style of the present or recent times." "Contemporary worship" seems to be an appeal to the flesh to provoke non-religious and unspiritual people to come. One of the last things on earth the early Christians would have wanted was "contemporary worship." They had two style choices at the time. They could choose Jewish or pagan "contemporary worship."

The Jewish style, even those parts authorized by God, had become encrusted with numerous human rules and traditions. Thus Jesus spoke quite severely of them. "And in vain they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:9). God had given Israel laws and rules for worshiping Him. Those they had distorted and abused by concentrating on the outward rather than the spirit (Luke 11:42). After Jesus died, the Old Testament law, with its various animal sacrifices, its yearly, monthly, and weekly days, was taken away (Colossians 2:14, 16). When some Christians did go back to the law, Paul expressed fear for them (Galatians 4:10,11). The faithful Christians did not desire any "contemporary worship" from the Jews.

Contemporary paganism provided nothing they desired either. Its manner of worshiping was full of idols, sacred prostitution, days honoring false gods, abuse of the body, animal and human sacrifice. The Christians were not to subject themselves to such regulations (Colossians 2:20-23). The disciples of the Lord, desiring to worship in spirit and truth (John 4:24), dared not look at any aspect of pagan practice. Instead of "contemporary worship," they humbly met together on the first day of the week to break bread (Acts 20:7), continued steadfastly in prayers (Acts 2:42), gave according to their prosperity (I Corinthians 16: 2), and sang and made melody in their hearts to the Lord (Ephesians 5:19). Their assemblies may not have excited the spirits of those in Christ. They knew Whom they had believed, and

knew He accepted them because they were doing as He taught, and not as they wished.

In time, however, the churches began to succumb to the fleshly appeal of "contemporary worship" and began to accept pagan practices. Oh, they camouflaged them by giving them "Christian" names. The old pagan worship of the sun during the winter solstice was changed from praising the birth of the sun to celebrating the birth of the Son. The springtime worship of the fertility goddesses, including Astarte, was changed to Easter. (You can see the similarity in the names.) While supposedly to commemorate the resurrection of Christ, all the peculiar practices associated with Easter, the eggs and the bunny, show the influence of the pagan rites of fertility. Churches began to accept idols, but called them images or icons. The worship of goddesses influenced their thinking about Mary. It was at Ephesus, the home of the Temple of Artemis, the goddess of the moon, that Mary was declared to be the "Mother of God." As more and more "contemporary worship" was accepted, the medieval church became more pagan than Christian.

When the Reformation and the Restoration movements began it was necessary to remove the "contemporary worship" added through the centuries. It wasn't an easy task. Some Protestant groups never removed it all. Others did better. Then as the centuries passed, they began to turn more and more to "contemporary worship." Thus we see the sad spectacle of entertaining the audience rather than challenging them to higher levels of spiritual service to God. Out of all the expressions of "contemporary worship" abandoned and then taken up again, consider instrumental music. Its usage is not authorized by the New Testament of Christ. John Calvin, one of the reformers, in commenting on the 33rd Psalm said, "Instrumental instruments in celebrating the praises of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting of lamps, or the restoration of other shadows of the law." Quotations from other reformers could be given. Is there a

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church that traces its roots to the reformation that does not use instrumental music?

What does the future hold? If we have learned anything from history both sacred and profane, it will get worse. Churches will have to put on bigger productions, bigger feasts, more shows and promotions as people continue to satisfy their passions and seek to satisfy their appetites

with a cloak of religiosity. Since God's people have ever felt the pull of the society around them, it will take wise, forceful leadership of all elders and leaders in the churches "to take heed to the flock", to strengthen everyone's resolve to serve the Lord in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.

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