

The Way vs. Religion

By George Davis

"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes unto the Father, but by me."
(John 14:6)

Jesus forever settled the issue regarding the status of His Church when He referred to Himself as "the way." For Jesus to say "I am the way" suggests several things. The term "the way" speaks of a journey, a road and destination. Moreover, it cast the disciples of the Way as sojourners and pilgrims progressing purposefully toward a particular destination. The destination is the Father!

All that Christ did, He did with one goal in view - to reconcile man to God.

Christ is the only "Way" or road, affording passage to the Father. Jesus made this very clear when He said, "...no man comes to the Father, but by me."

Jesus is speaking of more than restored fellowship with God here in our earthly walk. He is also speaking of a journey to the Father's house and of Himself as going on ahead to prepare a place for the road-weary travelers. Before the disciples were called "Christians" at Antioch they were depicted in a nomadic context as pilgrims. Even the unregenerate seemed to understand this. For when Saul went to the high priest to get authorization to persecute the believers his petition was this, "that if he found any that were of **the Way**, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem." (Act 9:2 ASV)

Later, standing before his Jewish accusers, Paul referred to his savage persecution of the brethren saying, "And I persecuted this way (hodos) unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women." Acts 22:4

The Greek word for "way" is hodos [3598] " a travelers way, road. . . journey . . . course."

In his farewell letter to Timothy, Paul summed up his legacy as follows, "But you have fully known my teachings, manner (way or course) of life, purpose, faith, forbearance, charity, patience. . ." (2 Timothy 3:10).

Paul modeled a way of life - a manner of living. A way of living that was characterized by "purpose, faith, forbearance, charity, patience. . ." Paul did not bequeath to Timothy anything remotely resembling modern-day Christianity. For had he, 2 Timothy 3:10 would read something like this. "But you have fully known my prescribed rituals, liturgy, ceremonies, and sacraments--the correct use of consecrated places, relics, incense, candles, and robes." Paul handed to Timothy the torch of the testimony, not dead rituals. Paul modeled a manner of life, not ecclesiasticism.

So we see, by way of contrast the life of the pilgrim/sojourner as opposed to the static, stationary, and stagnant status of religion. God is concerned about progress. Religion is largely concerned with preserving old traditions and finding new ones. Yes Tertullian, "Custom without truth is error grown old."

Sadly, the status of Christianity today is best described as commemorative - serving to honor and keep alive the memory of life rather than the celebration of and participation in that life. All has been confined within the four walls of a fixed institution called "the Church," and is at least in part impelled by a devotion to hallowed places, and things. Like tombs these elaborate edifices have become honorariums to the dead. What the Father had clearly manifest through His Son, and further purposes to manifest through the body of Christ is, therein, shrouded in mystery and reduced to cryptic rituals and ceremony. Hence the irrelevancy of the contemporary church, which does not and cannot relate to life! For it is by its very nature intended to be aloof and mysterious. It cannot withstand the test of scrutiny and must therefore be maintained by ignorance. Hence the mystique of mystery -- the notion that the rituals are beyond the comprehension of all but the clergy, which sets them strategically in the place of interpreter. The people are thus conditioned not to inquire but to accept these mysteries mindlessly, as though they are beyond comprehension. The real deception that is implied by all this is that the ritual itself mysteriously imparts life to the participant. So it is that much that is called "Christian" today has been reduced to the level of incantations or ritual recitations of magical words and sounds. Jesus is not just the Way but He is also the Life. Life

is found only in the Son, and the Son is not found in ritual. He is the mystery revealed!

Religion being fixed is expressed in a mindset that if verbalized goes something like this "we have arrived. We are God's most favored and enlightened elite."

Jesus confronted this arrogance in a certain company of Jews, which believed on him. Jesus said to them, "If you continue in my word, then are you my disciples indeed; And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (See John 8:32-36) This offended their religious pride. So they thought to put Jesus in His place by reminding Him of who they were. Had He forgotten that they were the chosen nation? Had He forgotten that they were a peculiar people set apart from all the rest? "We are Abraham's seed" they exclaimed, "and were never in bondage to any man, how then can you say, You shall be made free?" (v.32) It was this very pride that hindered many of the Jews from following on to know the freedom of which Jesus spoke when He said, "If the Son therefore shall make you free, you shall be free indeed." (v.36) Rather than follow on they stopped to defend their orthodoxy. They were offended that someone would even suggest that they had not arrived. Even if that someone was the Christ. All who adopt the "We have arrived" mentality will, sooner or later, find themselves arguing with God.

Thus we see why religion is fixed. For it occupies itself defending its orthodox position rather than walking the path. The true church is not a static institution but a company of pilgrims, and is therefore always in exodus, always moving, always changing, and steadily advancing in the Way.