

# Is Your Church a Subculture or a Counterculture?

Millions of Americans are suddenly awakening to the realization that the great “American experiment” is failing. The life blood of Americanism initially surged forward through powerful spiritual forces from Judeo–Christian beliefs. This is all now crumbling under a new force called Secularism.

The Church did preach that freedom represents a life lived in conformity to God’s will as revealed in His Word. Secularism teaches that freedom is self-legitimization.<sup>1</sup> The latter has now influenced church leadership. Modern churches have begun to adopt a social gospel that eulogizes self-esteem and self-love. Concern for feelings is so deep that repentance and truth are withheld for fear of “hurting” the seeker.

Instead of acting like strangers and pilgrims (Hebrews 11:13, I Peter 2:11) whose citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20) and coping with life through the power of Jesus Christ (Philippians 4:13), houses of worship are using feeling experiences to attract and “excite in the name of God.”

From a Biblical world view the window of hope lies in the future. However, the here and now has become the most relevant to a growing number of worshipers and pastors. That appeal always emphasizes the physical realm and minimizes the spiritual. Happiness and freedom is oriented to the present and not the eternal.<sup>2</sup>

Secularism says, “Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow you die,” contrasted with what God says, “Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.” His Word stands for something far more than the here and now.

Far deeper than a sensory experience, which only validates narcissism and hedonism, God has invited us to prepare for the future. He has admonished us to “Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). When is the last time you heard your rabbi, priest or pastor address man’s responsibility? Churches have become a subculture of secularism instead of a counterculture to reform.

The Bible tells us that faith comes from hearing God’s Word (Romans 10:17). The God that transcends the now time and space exists in the realm of eternity. His appeal is to discover the avenue through which man can join Him in that sphere of ceaseless time. Those directions are explicitly spelled out in the Bible.

A world groping in darkness is benefitted through disciplined lives seen in that “chosen generation, a royal nation, a peculiar people.” I Peter 2:9. Jesus wants His people to be the “salt” and “light” of the world (Matthew 5:13-16). That means we are to bring change and a message to society, not society changing the church or altering the Gospel’s restoration theme.

Modern America prides itself in its pluralism. This cultural belief suggests that there are many

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<sup>1</sup> Will, George, F.; *Sunday*, 4/17/05, Washington Post, “Suicide by Secularism, p. 307.

<sup>2</sup> Lamont, Corliss; *The Philosophy of Humanism*, p. 203.

“right ways” to live, and this philosophy is being adopted by many churches. Moral absolutes and distinctive doctrines are increasingly unpopular.<sup>3</sup>

A growing number of members haven't even an elementary knowledge of what Christian commitment means. It is not a matter of rejecting doctrinal teaching. They have not even been instructed as to what it means to follow Jesus all the way. In the great Gospel commission Jesus said, “teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20). To be a member of a church should represent a commitment to a way of life that is unique and in harmony with Biblical mandates.<sup>4</sup>

When people join a church for social, charismatic or experiential reasons, a cultural identity with secularism remains. If they are given leadership positions, truth is further compromised. Enlightenment is then related to man's ideals of worth and not what the Spirit longs to do in man. Appeals to religious authority are disputed. Individual preference rises above God's directives. This dilutes the church mission. It becomes a social enterprise and not a spiritual force.

The preservation of “truth is absolutely vital for the Christian faith. The destruction of that idea is key to legitimize a secularist culture, since the idea of truth touches on secularism's greatest vulnerability.”<sup>5</sup>

True Christianity is obligated to the past and appeals to the future. It never minimizes Biblical injunctions and promotes its messages as fully relevant to its members today. It recognizes that communion with God makes us free (John 8:36, II Corinthians 3:17).

The worst way to respond to the challenge of secularism is to adopt secular standards in the worship experience with its music, language, dress and way of life! This relegates Christianity to a subculture of the world. If members of society at large meaningfully turn to religion, it must be on the basis of something other than through cultural ideals. “It is counter-productive to offer them religion in a secular mode that is carefully trimmed in order not to offend their secular sensibilities.”<sup>6</sup>

Divine truth must stand up against critical inquiry by every member and those seeking for deeper meaning in life. Any attempt to prevent that is unbelief and a betrayal of spiritual appeal. What will provoke churches to cherish the wonders of Jesus and His Gospel? The loss of the comforts of affluence and/or trials that have no human solution. Seeking for answers in a Scripturally based countercultural movement inspires hope and deepens trust.

God has a design on His Church. Soon He will rise up and begin a strange work that will demand absolute loyalties for or against Him. The Bible makes it clear that at the end His people will be holy and His church pure. The body of Christ is to be a counterculture.

“Fearful tests and trials await the people of God. The spirit of war is stirring the nations from one end of the earth to the other.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Turner, Allan; *Christianity: Counterculture or Subculture?* [allanturner.com/secular.html](http://allanturner.com/secular.html)

<sup>4</sup> O'Fill, Dick; *e-mail ministry*, message of 8/24/05.

<sup>5</sup> [www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft9606/articles/pannenberg.html](http://www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft9606/articles/pannenberg.html)

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 17. (1909).

“It is difficult to hold fast the beginning of our confidence firm unto the end; and the difficulty increases when there are hidden influences constantly at work to bring in another spirit, a counterworking element, on Satan’s side of the question. In the absence of persecution, there have drifted into our ranks some who appear sound, and their Christianity unquestionable, but who, if persecution should arise, would go out from us. In the crisis, they would see force in specious reasoning that has had an influence on their minds. Satan has prepared various snares to meet varied minds. When the law of God is made void the church will be sifted by fiery trials, and a larger proportion than we now anticipate, will give heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils. Instead of being strengthened when brought into strait places, many prove that they are not living branches of the True Vine.”<sup>8</sup>

“Oh, that the people might know the time of their visitation! There are many who have not yet heard the testing truth for this time. There are many with whom the Spirit of God is striving. The time of God’s destructive judgments is the time of mercy for those who have had no opportunity to learn what is truth. Tenderly will the Lord look upon them. His heart of mercy is touched; His hand is still stretched out to save, while the door is closed to those who would not enter.”<sup>9</sup>

“The ungodly cities of our world are to be swept away by the besom of destruction. In the calamities that are now befalling immense buildings and large portions of cities, God is showing us what will come upon the whole earth. He has told us, ‘Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: so likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it [the coming of the Son of man] is near, even at the doors.’ Matthew 24: 32, 33.”<sup>10</sup>

A church that is “part of” feels no need to warn. One that is “counter to” senses a mission.

Franklin S. Fowler Jr., M.D.  
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<sup>8</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Maranatha*, p. 28.

<sup>9</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 97.

<sup>10</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Counsels on Health*, p. 268.