

Faith Pulpit

What Killed the Idealism?

And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me (Luke 9:23).

There are those among us who remember the state of the churches about the end of World War II. The veterans were coming back, seeking home, jobs and education. Youth movements, notably Youth for Christ, Young Life and Hi B-A, were reaching crowds of high school people. With admitted help from the G.I. Bill, the Bible schools gained rapidly in numbers. Those who remember something of the preaching will recall the fervor of evangelism and enlisting. The passions of the war seemed to carry over into the passion to serve Christ.

Other works showed the same evidence of revival. Foreign missions drew many recruits from the returned veterans, people who had learned that they could live and work in primitive areas. Summer camps reached many young people, and even the Bible conferences had not yet gone into decline. Foreign Missions Fellowship was a power, especially in the Bible colleges of the Southeast. Howard Guinness' book *Sacrifice* was typical of a whole literature reaching young people with the message of holy idealism and surrender in the work of Christ.

That idealism lasted about a generation; then something seemed to change. The Bible colleges passed a peak about the year 1975, and the enrollments started back down. One board had used a center in Japan which prepared a hundred new missionaries a year for service; now came reports that it had closed. Most of the old youth movements had turned New Evangelical, and the Bible conference movement was all but done in most places. What had happened?

We can try several explanations. The media finally triumphed over the American mind. The youth culture, tuned to rock and roll, seduced our adolescents. The family ties came untied. Many Fundamentalists became materialists. Some Bible colleges changed to liberal arts, which then appealed

to students and parents who were career-oriented. They then openly began to sell the new gospel of the Great God Mammon. Do we need to remind ourselves that the Son of Man had not where to lay His head?

A friend of mine recently asked a deacon, “Well then, what kind of church do you want?” And the answer he got was, “I want to sit in a church where I can be comfortable, and then go home and eat a big meal.” Just so. A true child of our times.

Is there a way back, or forward, out of the materialism we have come to love? I believe that there is. It may well begin in the pulpit.

I. Preach Sacrifice

Let us hope that it is not too late in the day. Let us hope, that believers will still accept the truth that man shall not live by bread alone, that they may be taught to hold their treasures in trembling fingers, and not to cling to things. Surely most of our pastors are living examples of this principle; many qualify for food stamps. But how many are preaching Luke 12 and 1 Timothy 6? I suspect we need to warn people more about the baubles and creature comforts so many love. For the deacon I mentioned, how do we get past his guard and show him the claims of the cross?

Most leaders seem to have an honest concern about financing the works of God. We are committed to the principle of giving, and we reject raffles and bingo. But surely if the saints are to back the works, they must first be taught Bible sacrifice. And if we so preach, we can hope for several payoffs: not only a new generosity, but a new attitude toward things and comforts. And why not preach that burden to our young people?

II. Appeal to the Spiritual Life

Long enough our people have listened to the siren song of the media, whose appeal is, “Be good to yourself.” The fervent message of the cross and of the claims of Christ should touch at least some of our people. “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: . . .” (Gal. 5:17).

If that message is still capable of touching anyone, why not our young people? Indeed, why not their parents? We have something better to offer than the grubby quest for fun and comfort. We offer the highest of satisfactions: the service of the King, the quest for souls, and the ministry of the Word. Do we not owe it to our people to press on them these true riches that we enjoy? As the hymn used to say, “Solid joys and lasting pleasures none but Zion’s children know.”

III. Recruit Young People

At missionary rallies we once sang, “Give of thy sons to beat the message glorious. Give of thy wealth to speed them on their way. Pour out thy soul for them in prayer victorious . . .” It is not just for the needs on the fields. It is not to promote Bible college and seminary enrollments. It is the demand of the gospel itself, the imperative to release our grip on things and to embrace the life of sacrifice and service. We offer our young people the true riches and the highest pleasures (Ps. 16:11) when we ask them to lay their bodies on the altar for Jesus Christ.

If we do it right, can we not hope again to see the shining eyes and the firm resolve? Can we not summon others to join in saying, “I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back”? Indeed, for Jesus’ sake.

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Dr. Robert Delnay (Th.D., Grace Theological Seminary) was a distinguished theologian, educator, and author whose ministry spanned over seven decades. A graduate of Wheaton College, Dallas Theological Seminary, and Grace Theological Seminary, Dr. Delnay served in numerous leadership and teaching roles, including at Faith Baptist Bible College, where he was a beloved professor known for his commitment to expository preaching and biblical scholarship.

A prolific author, he wrote several books and articles, leaving a lasting legacy of theological insight and pastoral wisdom. Dr. Delnay’s deep love for God’s Word and his dedication to training the next generation of Christian leaders impacted countless students and ministries worldwide. He went home to be with Christ in 2023.