

IF ANOTHER CENSUS WERE TAKEN

In 1906 Mr. S.N.D. North of the U.S. Census Bureau went to Nashville to speak with David Lipscomb. He wanted to know if he were correct in assuming that there was a division within the ranks of the our brethren? North was not a member of the church, but he detected significant differences between those who styled themselves “progressives” and those who wished to continue in the same way and manner their predecessors had served the Lord. Bro. Lipscomb sadly confirmed his suspicions. Plans were then made for a more discriminating census to determine the specific numbers for each camp. Bro. J. W. Shepherd was commissioned to supervise the project for our brethren. He found that only 149,658 members gathered in 2,649 congregations could be found within the churches of Christ while those who preferred to worship with instruments of music and have societies to do the work of the church numbered 982,701 members in 8,203 churches. That was a sobering day for those of our people who did not think the problem was all that severe; those who felt it would eventfully fade away if just ignored; for those who could not bring themselves to stand up and fight for the truth of the gospel; for those who felt the issues were not all that important.

A few brethren had seen the flood approaching, they knew it was sweeping all before it. They had warned and pleaded but many turned a deaf ear, some even thought they were alarmists, or narrow mossy backs who were not keeping up with changing times. Some blamed them with being troublemakers.

Churches of Christ of today are greatly indebted to Bro. David Lipscomb and the little band of men who stood with him in the face of that flood of apostasy. They saved the day by their determined stand for the ancient gospel and for the purity of the church. We now see them as heroes, but it took a few years before folks realized that they were the true and faithful knights who had risk all to save the kingdom of Christ from those who were bent capturing it and distorting it into something other than what Christ had ordered.

Since the 1960s another band of progressives have been busily at work among us. At first there were just a scattered few of them. Some of them found a fertile breeding ground in the tolerant environs of some of our Christian schools. There they quietly labored to strengthen their grip on the schools and to influence the young men and women who came under their influence. Now that second generation has arisen to leadership posts in our churches and schools. We know them as change agents. No longer are they a small minority, working quietly behind the scenes, they are numerous and bold. They have ensconced themselves in many of our largest congregations and in many of our schools. Their advocates are on the lecture circuit among our schools and churches, spreading the doctrine of change. They are openly calling for a change in our worship, our faith and our practice. They want women in leadership posts in the church, they want choirs and special singers in our worship. They want to change the terms of salvation and membership in the church of Christ. They want a different atmosphere in worship, despising the worship of the past they want entertainment and excitement. They want a new approach to preaching. No more of the old book, chapter and verse proclamation. They want story telling and drama. Some of them want instrumental music in their worship.

As dangerous as this band of rogue change agents is, another danger confronts us of even greater magnitude. It is the lack of concern, the unwillingness to address the issue, the failure to take a strong stand against these innovations that affects large numbers of our brethren. Peace at any price is another name for surrender to the enemy. For at least 20 years this spirit has prevail among us. If tomorrow a census were taken to determine which congregations are willing to tolerate and go along with the change agenda and which are determined to continue in the old paths of the gospel, I tremble to think what the results would be. If such a poll were taken in your congregation, what would the finding be? Brethren, our situation is just as critical as that of our brethren a century ago. While so many sleep the enemy is sowing tares of error in the fields of the kingdom (Matt. 13:24-30). I plead with all who love the church to awake to the danger arm yourselves

and man the walls while you can. To tarry is to invite disaster. JHW