

Give Me That Old-Time Religion - It's Good Enough for Me!

On 19 January 2004, Melbourne's *Age* newspaper published an article by the Rev Dr John K. Williams, a retired Uniting Church Minister. The article had originally been preached the previous Sunday at St Michael's Uniting Church in Melbourne CBD. Titled *It's Not Good Enough for Us*, it denigrated and misrepresented historic, orthodox, evangelical Christian faith. The Rev Bob Thomas, editor of *New Life* submitted this article in reply, which was never published. But because so-called 'Liberal Christianity' keeps on propounding itself and denigrating Orthodox Christianity, we make it available here on the *New Life* website ...

THE 'Old-Time Religion' is far older than Dr John K. Williams supposes in his article *It's Not Good Enough For Us* (*Age*, 19-1-04), and the religious modernism he espouses is far less modern. If by 'Old-time Religion' Dr Williams means 'Bible-believing Christianity', and I suspect he does, then it had its beginning not with Moses, but with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

These first-created human beings lived in perfect fellowship with their Creator, God. At first they trusted and obeyed him, but fell prey to the wiles of the evil one as they distrusted God's Word and disobeyed His command by eating the forbidden fruit, so inaugurating modernism. We don't know how much time elapsed between the Creation and the Fall, though by what we know of human nature and from the cracking pace at which the Biblical narrative proceeds, we infer that it wasn't long. Thus modernism (the art of romanticising, fantasising, twisting and explaining away the plain meaning of Scripture, turning 'you shall not' into 'you should') was born.

Modernism has gone through many manifestations ever since. Much of the New Testament was written with the direct purpose of countering it (doubtless the reason

why modernists of more recent times have been so vicious in their attacks on the Apostle Paul). It gathered momentum towards the end of the Nineteenth Century and held sway for much of the Twentieth. Although it has been well and truly answered by some of the greatest theological minds of our day, Dr Williams remains a 'bloodied but unbowed liberal Christian'.

Leaving aside the question of whether or not the term 'liberal Christian' is an oxymoron, his admission of being 'bloodied but unbowed' bears testimony on the one hand to the quality of the counter-attack made by the scholars associated with the 'Old-time religion' (one thinks, for instance, of the likes of F.F. Bruce, John R.W. Stott, J.I. Packer, J.G. Machen, B.B. Warfield, D.M. Lloyd-Jones and Melbourne's own Leon Morris), and to his stubborn and uninformed (dare I say 'fallen'?) dismissal of it.

Far from being 'people who typically knew little or nothing of church history', Bible-believing Christians (or 'Fundamentalists', as Dr Williams would probably prefer to call us) have been at the forefront of research and writing in church history, and indeed in all the theological disciplines.

We could probably most kindly describe as 'masterly understatement' his note that 'one cannot deny that this "old time religion" concerned and concerns itself with some matters other than escaping the fires of hell. It has converted many a drunkard to sobriety ... sometimes made people kinder in their daily lives. Its social influence has, here and there, been good.'

It has done that, and so much more. The Reformers of the Sixteenth Century took education to the masses. The Methodist Revival of the Eighteenth Century is credited with averting a revolution in England similar to the French. Bible-believing Christians of the likes of Wilberforce and Shaftesbury eradicated the institution of slavery and the exploitation of children. John Newton (author of the hymn 'Amazing Grace') was the one who agitated for the appointment of a chaplain to the First Fleet. Everyone who says 'Thank God for the Salvos' is in fact thanking God that He raised up one of the doughtiest defenders of 'old-time religion' this world ever knew in the person of General William Booth.

'Old-time religion', as Dr Williams rightly asserts, is largely 'preoccupied with a future existence'. Is Dr Williams', like his fellow 'bloodied but unbowed liberal Christians', simply trying to be as good as he can, so as to be a pleasant memory after he dies and his body

decomposes into the basic elements of the cosmos? If so, he earns the sympathy of the adherents of 'the old-time religion', who assert with the Apostle Paul that, 'if for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied'. Since our life on Earth is lived for a moment in time and space, but as Bible-believing Christians know from their study of the Scriptures, we live forever beyond time and space in the unspeakably glorious presence of God, we believe we are rightly preoccupied with that which is to come.

Far from being 'a religion that denies knowledge and outlaws doubt', Bible-believing Christians are well represented on the frontiers of science and the cutting edge of technology. It should be said, though, that rather than rushing in where angels fear to tread and accepting without question everything that science hands down, they generally exercise a commendable degree of caution and often see things in a different light on account of their radically different (Biblical) worldview.

'Liberal Christianity' is a pale shadow of that full-orbed, Biblical faith which underpins 'old-time religion'. Its deficiency begins with its human-centred orientation as opposed to the God-centred orientation of 'old-time religion'. Its tattered 'Bible' (consisting of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament minus everything which doesn't appeal to it, namely anything supernatural, everything miraculous and much moral teaching) is virtually content-less by comparison with 'old-time religion'. Liberalism's preoccupation with the here and now and dismissal of the there and then stands in pathetic contrast to the balance struck by 'old-time religion' in its dealing with both these states of existence.

'That old-time religion' might not be good enough for those who seek nothing more than a religion which drags God down to a size which suits them, but it's good enough for all who want to know the calm of sin forgiven, the joy of living in peace and fellowship with God, and the hope of eternal life.

Yes, 'It was good enough for Moses, it was good enough for Jesus - and it's good enough for me!'

– *Bob Thomas*