

## **“Counter-Cultural Christianity”**

### **Introduction: The Golden Age**

Ah the 1950's.... Those Golden Years.... That was America. That was when life was good.

I'm not old enough to remember the 1950's. I would guess that roughly half the people here don't remember the 50's. Yet that decade has a strong hold on America's imagination. Celebrities (and non-celebrities) still imitate Elvis Presley and Marilyn Monroe. They have become modern icons.

I suppose Americans will always remember the 50's as a time when America was on top of the world. We didn't have much competition from Europe or Japan because their manufacturing had been so damaged during the war. Developing countries like India and China were not developed enough to compete with us. Our economy was by default the strongest in the world.

From what I am told, the quality of life in the 50's was pretty good. Labor Unions were strong and workers were well paid. Immigrants that had come over in the late 1800's and early 1900's were coming into their own as middle class Americans. The new wave of immigration had not hit the United States yet. Everyone knew what it was to be a good citizen and most people shared a common world view.

### **The Golden Age for Churches**

For many pastors, the 50's were a golden era too. If you wanted a new church, all you had to do was build a building. Open the doors and watch the new members file in.

I am not sure it was ever that simple even back then but there was a kind of cultural Christianity in the 1950's that we don't have today. Back then you could assume your neighbor was Christian, maybe not a great Christian but at least he went to church on Easter and Christmas.

### **Religious Diversity**

Today we live in a different world. Go to the Chinese buffet in Shawano and you can eat your meal by the Buddha statue. Stop at a gas station in Oshkosh and you can see a Vishnu poster on the wall. New immigrants bring religions that seem strange to most people in rural Wisconsin.

### **Growing Secularism**

In addition to new religions that compete with Christianity, we live in a time of growing secularism. People don't feel they need to be in church at all. There is no social pressure on them to do it. Many of them have bought into the idea that the world formed by blind chance and an infinite amount of time. It is hard to argue against so many scientists that promote that idea in nearly every public school.

### **Cafeteria Christians**

In addition to growing religious diversity and growing secularism, Christians seem to be changing from previous generations. Many Christians don't commit to one doctrine or denomination like they did years ago. They go from denomination to denomination, only staying as long as they are stimulated by that group. When the thrill wears off, they switch again. These people are often called cafeteria Christians because they go down the line of denominations picking a little of this and a little of that like they are in a cafeteria line.

Our culture loves the cafeteria Christian. Our culture says they are spiritual without being religious. Our culture says they are spiritual without being preachy or intolerant. But this lightweight spirituality comes at a high cost: the truth.

Christian denominations make certain claims that are either true or false. Either we are saved by works or by grace. It can't be both. Either Christ is physically present in the Lord's Supper or he is not. It can't be both. By avoiding answering these questions, the cafeteria Christian can flit from church to church without ever committing with any depth.

Cafeteria Christians are like the seed landed in shallow soil. At first, it sprung up. It looked like it was really alive but when the sun came out, it died quickly because it had no root.

Real Christianity will always be opposed by our culture. Real Christianity is not afraid to quote Jesus when he says, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:6) Real Christianity is not afraid to say, "You shall have no other gods before me." The truth that there is only one God and that Jesus is the only way to the one God will become increasingly offensive to our nation becomes increasingly multicultural.

We may find ourselves living in a multicultural society where Christians are the minority. If we do, we need to remember that this is nothing new for Christians. The early Church lived in just such a culture. In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus warns his disciples, "a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God." Christians have always been in danger of following Jesus to the cross.