

Secondary-Issue Syndrome

A consideration of some things that get swept aside

by

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Previous articles in this magazine (BRJ No.s 19; 20; 21; and 22)* have dealt with weaknesses within Welsh evangelicalism in former times. This brief note seeks to show that, sadly, generally speaking, the "Reformed" scene in Wales today is seriously flawed.

From about the nineteen-sixties onwards, there were apparent hopeful signs of spiritual growth in Wales as many people confessed conversion and appeared to be concerned with Biblical truth. Many ministers, with their congregations as well as individuals up and down the land, left the liberal denominations to form evangelical fellowships and churches. Those of us who lived through the sixties and seventies remember days of good fellowship around the Word of God with deep discussions centred on things of eternal value. But, gradually this interest in the Word of God waned. The vibrant discussions became a thing of the past, being surreptitiously replaced by insipid conversations about a need for "revival" and gossip regarding evangelical people and their whereabouts.

What caused this sad decline? What was it that made people give up a desire to share their beliefs and to grapple with the deep things of God? It was nothing less than "secondary issue syndrome". This syndrome is a sickness, that stifles spiritual growth in an insidious manner, and, judging by the results in Wales, seems to be extremely infectious. In too many cases those teachings of Scripture that present a problem to people are classed as "secondary issues".

At this point we will just list some of the Biblical teachings that are considered to be secondary issues. Wearing of hats, which version of the Bible we should use, baptism, charismatic gifts, church government, women speakers, election, the extent of the atonement, free will, who is allowed to preach, - no doubt there are others that could be added to these.

Let us not underestimate the havoc that is wrought by secondary issue syndrome. These so-called "secondary issues" concatenate to such a degree as to form a complex system of non-theology which forces those who may begin to show an interest in the Word of God to believe that there are large tracts of the Bible that are unimportant. What it actually does is to rip out pages of Holy Writ in a similar way to the modernists, except that this syndrome

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BRJ No. 22 April-June 1998: *"Revivalist Propaganda and the Cause of Truth in Wales"*. Part 2.

All the articles except the first of the above can be obtained together in booklet form from BRF Committee member Mr. Paul Hayden, who can be contacted at: 67 Ffordd Garnedd, Y Felinheli, GWYNEDD LL56 4QY, North Wales. Or Telephone: 01248 67 02 60. The title of this booklet is: *"Wales: Land of Revivals"*. The cost is £2 sterling plus post and packing.

does it in a much more roguish garb. It is done in the name of 'love' and 'peace' and 'truth', and is therefore probably much more harmful than the modernistic approach, for its symptoms are much more difficult to spot.

The main carriers of secondary issue syndrome are ministers and elders of so-called "reformed" churches. The major symptom is a nice, kindly gushing in a theological debate which is always looking for the "balanced view", and is accompanied by a well-worn phrase "beware of being too doctrinal". To ensure peace and harmony it is held that, "we must not go too deeply into secondary issues, for the devil can use these things to wreck our churches. We evangelicals must keep united on the primary issues." The reality of the situation is all too often that these church officers wish to hold on to their flock come what may.

Let the reader beware, here is a veritable wolf in sheep's clothing! Can we ever be too doctrinal? Indeed, from the scripture, it is patently obvious that we cannot be doctrinal enough! (Matt. 4:4; John 16:13; Rev. 22:19). Further, we must not overlook the fact that secondary issue syndrome is anti-Confessional. Cf. Westminster Confession of Faith Ch. 1 para. VI:

"The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from scripture..."

Another symptom is the assertion that it is not doctrine but experience that counts. The fact of the matter is that we cannot recognise true experience apart from doctrine. Many Arminians and Charismatics, JW's and Mormons can all testify to an "experience of God". There is no way that we can say that their experience is in any wise Biblical.

Secondary issue syndrome seems to produce a type of religious being that quit themselves like wimps rather than men. There are far too many in Wales today who are wearied with just running with the footmen. (Jeremiah 12:5). A searching scriptural diagnosis would reveal that numerous so-called evangelicals are either not converted at all or are open to a heavy dose of secondary issue syndrome.

Is there a cure? Indeed there is, the only cure is a heavy continuous dose of unadulterated biblical doctrine. Let the reader beware again, there are painful side-effects to the cure. Those who flee secondary issue syndrome will be persecuted, branded as being unloving and of being too doctrinal. Our hope and prayer is that those who are afflicted by this spiritual plague in the land of Wales and further afield (for this illness, as all others, is no respecter of borders) will be humbled by the authority of the Word of God, and may truly see that:

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."
(2 Tim. 3:16 - 17).

There are, of course, some things in the Bible that are more important than others, but the verses quoted in no way allow us to label certain doctrinal truths as "secondary issues".