



Fruitport's water tower now sports a new coat of paint and a fresh smiley face. Workers applied a base coat before adding the bright yellow trademark.

The beat goes on

By Reverend R.A. Shackles

In a recent interview, a leader of a group of women who make a point of attending every funeral of a veteran told the interviewer that they have been told not to say the words "God" or "Jesus." She noted, "we can't even say the comforting words, God bless you." My reaction to that was "This thing is getting out of hand!" I truly believe it is and I must admit I am rapidly coming to the point of, in fact, *doing* something!

What makes it so frustrating is that more and more I hear the question, "Why doesn't the Church do something about it?" And *that* is becoming more and more embarrassing because by and large the question is very definitely a legitimate one. As a retired clergyman, I *know* it's legitimate! One reason is to recognize and admit my own complicity, for I do not want to count the number of times in the face of a "put up or shut up" challenge, of course — in the name of discretion — I shut up.

As I see it, I believe that is what too often the churches do. It's that old business of not rocking the boat, often for no better reason than that it might cause someone to dislike us. And I find it a frustrating experience that when I did try to do something about it, I was usually treated as merely being an alarmist. And it does not make anything better to find out in time that I was right. I recall, when active with a national organization, I tried to get people to realize that the homosexual issue would be the one to divide us (the Episcopal Church). Largely, I was either ignored or told I was unduly alarmed as no one buys into that.

By our silence and unwillingness to deal with "messy" issues, we have enabled those who oppose the church to succeed in suppressing us — like telling caring, concerned people they could not even say to families of veterans "God bless you." There is no question in my mind that we have brought this on ourselves by being far too comfortable with what had been a privileged status. Being comfortable is surely one of the most dangerous places for any Christian to be. It lulls us into thinking evil just can't touch us, for we mistake comfort for "righteous." So bemused, comfort becomes complacency and, as has happened, complacency is like an addictive drug that makes us unable to arouse ourselves even when, sadly, we suggest "somebody ought to do something about that."

It gets to be like Augustine's famous plea to God to "reform me, Lord, but not just yet." Gone to present extremes, there is a question whether the so-called "mainline" churches are even capable of lifting a hand to change things. In any case, those who had dropped out because they have lost faith in any hope the church will be true to Christ and fearlessly start to object to the secular abuse, fight against such moral and spiritual oppression. Paul, to the Ephesians, said, "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." I hate to sound snide, but I suggest what St. Paul did *not* mean was we should buy some glorious new vestments so that we may stand against the wiles of bad taste! He meant what the church is *not* doing — making the witness of the church against the secular forces who are telling us we can be Christians all we want to — just as long as we don't make unbelievers uncomfortable.

Clearly, the mainstream churches will not stem the outward flow of members until they have the courage to stand "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might" and forthrightly proclaim the Good News without restriction, refusing to submit to secular demands to be silent. The sad truth is that as yet those "valiant" warriors are not even well-practiced in proclaiming "I believe in Jesus Christ," let alone risk their comfortable closets by actually "doing something." As for myself, I confess that for every "ought to" sermon I preached, I likely have one hundred "did nots" to account for to my Lord. Something we never seem to learn is that doing nothing is more debilitating by far than doing something. But then nobody much listened before! Why think anyone will now? Oh yes! One will — me! I hope I can match my witness to my big mouth and hot pen! That's the way it is for me. How about you?•



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