

INSULTING OUR YOUTH

by James Hahn

While living in south Florida in the mid 1960's, I received announcements from churches in the area of plans to have special activities for the young people (especially juniors and seniors in high school) near the end of the school year. These activities included an annual “track and field meet” of the (as one group announced it) “south Florida district of the churches of Christ.” Another event in 1966 was a “Junior-Senior Banquet” with entertainment provided by Pat Boone (remember, this was 1966) and the “Belles and Beaux” of Harding College. Also, a “senior king and queen will be crowned” during the banquet. After the banquet, they had all night bowling and then a breakfast served in the “fellowship hall” of one of the area churches. Those promoting these activities said they wanted to provide wholesome activities so the young people would not be attending such activities as the school sponsored proms. The newspaper article promoting these activities quotes the person they interviewed as saying, “The event is not underwritten by the churches, but by the interested parents and friends.”

Even though the events were

announced and promoted by the churches and each congregation selected their own “king and queen” candidates and one church provided the place for the breakfast, they contended that it was “not underwritten by the churches.” In the years following, many of these churches got involved in openly providing recreational and entertainment activities to attract the young. One preacher in the area at that time defended such by saying, “anything that may ultimately lead one to become interested in the gospel would be an authorized work of the church.” This is just another way of saying “the end justifies the means.” See what Paul said about such thinking in Romans 3:8.

Many opposed these activities then, not because they were bad within and of themselves, but because these things were not an authorized work of the church. Even though the claim was made that they were not paid for by the churches, they were promoted as a work of the churches.

Recently, some of my brethren who spoke out against such activities as described above have engaged in the very same activities and making the

same claim. They plan a “Teen Retreat” that includes Bible study, prayer and singing and, the next day, outdoor recreational activities and hay rides with meals provided. They later sent a letter explaining that they understood that recreation and social activities are not the work of the church and that these activities were not paid for by the church. This was the same statement made by those in south Florida in 1966.

I am convinced that all of these brethren are making the same mistake. And the mistake they are making is an insult to our young people. In essence they are saying to the young people, “You are too carnally minded to respond to an invitation to simply study God’s word and engage in things spiritual.” If we truly believe that recreational and social activities are the responsibility of the home, then why don’t we let the parents plan and provide such and let the church fulfill its responsibility of teaching and edifying?

At this time of year (summer), when many groups have their “Vacation Bible Schools”, the announcements of these leave the impression they are, in the words of one young

man, "having a party instead of a Bible study."

Let's quit insulting our young people by thinking the only way to get them interested in studying God's word is to make a carnal appeal to them. There are those who desire to "remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth" (Eccl. 12:1). They respect those who are concerned enough about their souls to provide that spiritual teaching and training they need. They recognize that the social and recreational have their place, but it is not the work of the church to provide such. I am encouraged by the number of young people who refuse to participate in the previously mentioned activities because they recognize that such is not the work of the church and that it should not be made to appear such. In the words of many of the older preachers in days past, "Let the church be the church and let the home be the home."

EDITOR'S NOTE: I appreciate this article from brother Hahn, and commend it to you. I have received two announcements this month of the same nature as described in the preceding

article.

One announces the "5th annual Teen Bible Retreat...for grades 7-12. We are excited about this opportunity to encourage spiritual growth and fellowship among our teenagers.... _____ will be returning to lead our teens in a fun, interactive and serious study of the Bible. **Please pass the attached flyer along to all the teens at your congregation and post it on the bulletin board in your vestibule.**" It is said, "This event is provided by members of the _____ church of Christ." The announcement was sent "On behalf of the elders of _____ church of Christ." The announcement includes "pizza dinner provided" as well as "lunch and recreation".

The other from _____ Church of Christ features Discipline: spiritual fitness in a flabby world. Who? High School, College, Young Adult. Also... Members of _____ will provide food and fun that weekend: after the Friday night service; lunch on Saturday; and on Saturday afternoon. If you

need a place to stay on Friday or Saturday night, contact _____ for information.

Several years ago, I was given some announcements and bulletins from churches of Christ that date back to the 1950's and 60's that are eerily similar to those recently sent to us in 2019. Those churches went on to embrace the social gospel, with their "fellowship halls" and kitchens. One local "church of Christ" just had their annual "Back To School Carnival" with a dunking booth and bouncy house, among other attractions.

Realizing how these started out back then, and where they are now, makes me concerned about the direction some of our brethren are headed today. When we begin to think we must appeal to the young with something in addition to or other than the gospel, "*the power of God unto salvation*" (Rom. 1:16), use the word "fellowship" in the context of fun, dinners, and recreation, and blur the distinction between the church and the home, we are on a very slippery slope, to say the least!

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