

1. The modern Church is in imminent peril from *secularism*. This word is perfectly intelligible; it marks the drift toward the world that now is—the control of the spirit of that present evil age, which always was and still is opposed to the Spirit of God, who emphasizes the unseen and the eternal.

The true disciple of Christ may be briefly defined as one who looks above and beyond. To him what is below and present belongs to a lower and lesser realm. So far from doubting or denying the reality of the unseen, it is to him the highest reality, and that “which now is” constitutes but the insignificant threshold over which he steps into the boundless “that which is to come.” The Church is but the collective body of disciples, and therefore, so far as it deserves the name, bears the same marks as the individual child of God; its highest aim is to make real to men the unseen and the eternal. Does the modern Church correspond with this scriptural idea?

Behold it, so permeated and penetrated with secularism that separation unto God scarcely survives! The New Testament gives a brief definition of the true “circumcision” as embracing those which “worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh;” and it adds a brief outline of the activities of the early Church: “continuing steadfastly in apostolic teaching and fellowship, in breaking of bread and in prayers.” Contrast, with this, modern Church worship, with its elaborate ritual, stately ceremonial, and artistic choral performances by costly professional musicians; with its proud confidence in numbers and wealth, and in the patronage of the worldly, so that unconverted men sit on its boards of trustees; with its emphasis on good works and alms deeds, and outward forms of organization. May we not say, without intending a parody, that the Church of to-day continues in irreverent criticism of apostolic doctrine, sedulously cultivates social fellowship, breaking bread once in three months, but having church socials, fairs, and festivals with alarming frequency; and prefers, to prayers, an entertaining lecture by the pastor or a conversation among the members?

2. Connected with and inseparable from this secularism is what, for want of a better term, is called *sensationalism*. This is not a correct term, for its classic use confines it to that form of philosophy which makes our ideas to originate solely in sensation. But, in the “dialect of the marketplace,” it has come to mean the effort to attract toward Church services by appeals to the sensuous and the æsthetic, to excite interest by the entertaining and the spectacular, the oratorical and artistic, or even the humorous and the grotesque. This tendency finds not only apologists, but defenders and advocates in the Church and even the ministry. It is said that, to instruct we must first interest; that we cannot win disciples until we draw hearers; and Dr. Duff’s remark is often quoted—that he would stand at a place where two ways meet and slap together a pair of old leather soles if by so doing he could get an audience.