

“THE CHURCH OF NATURE”

While we frequently hear of a general decline of church membership and attendance in churches, we also are reminded that spirituality is alive and well. When polls have asked people for church preference, more are responding with “None.” This trend away from what is sometimes referred to as “traditional religion” is cause for concern. While there is much within “traditional religion” that is out of harmony with true biblical Christian principles, yet what biblical standards do still remain are being threatened as well. What all must understand is that Jesus didn’t come to make man religious or what is sometimes called “spiritual.” He came to atone for man’s sins, thus making God accessible. The New Testament standard for the church has been greatly disregarded, producing a confusing array of denominations, sects and cults, all claiming to be “Christian,” while often ignoring basic elements of the teachings of Christ and His apostles. These groups bear different names in order to distinguish themselves from other “Christians.” These names usually reflect who the founder of their denomination is, or some system of ecclesiastical government or doctrine they promote.

As we see more and more in our country, and also in Europe, turning away from “organized” or “traditional” religion, another group is increasing from among the “Nones”. They were described in an article I read as “a church of nature.” Reference was made to a Baylor University study that found that regions with “beautiful landscapes and good weather” had “lower rates of adherence to traditional religious organizations.” It seems that those who appreciate the beauty of God’s creation, but reject church membership and attendance are more prone to simply finding God in nature. As one stated it, “Beautiful weather, mountains and waterfronts can serve as conduits to the sacred, just like traditional religious congregations.” Another, referring to “nones”, (people apart from traditional religion) said they “may find something of the divine in forests, lakes and mountains.”

This, of course, is not something entirely new. I’m sure we have all been told by some who are non-attenders, things like,, “I experience God on the golf course” or “fishing on the creek bank.” Nature is indeed awe-inspiring, but we must be reminded that it is a product of God’s infinite power—it is His creation. To forget this, we become as those who “worshipped the creature (creation) more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever” (Romans 1:25). When we see a beautiful sunset, for instance, let us give thanks to the LORD who “made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is” (Exodus 20:11). The “church of nature” is patterned more after the religion of pagans, wherein is no hope. Being in touch with nature is no guarantee of being in touch with nature’s Creator. Being “spiritual” without God and His direction in our lives is to be in touch with a spiritual entity that is spoken of as “spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:12). God, the Creator, is found only in relation to Christ, “in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins....” (Eph. 1:7) --Ron