

When Persecuted She Blossoms

"The good Samaritan is dressing, getting ready for the show;
there will be carnival tonight on Desolation Row.
Ophelia is near the window, for her I feel so afraid,
on her twenty-second birthday, she's already an old maid.
To her death is quite romantic, she wears an iron vest,
her profession is her religion, and her sin her lifelessness.
Arid though her eyes are fixed upon Noah's great rainbow
she spends her time peeking in to Desolation Row."

Bob Dylan's song does not give a flattering picture of the church: Desolation Row! The modern church does not present a good image of herself. She is broken and wounded, confused and controversy ridden. Does it make sense to write a brief article about the church since the world demands so much attention? Many have no longer any use for the church. They have written her off. Someone recently claimed that in due time the church and Christianity will be history. Many deride the church and multitudes don't take her seriously. She is considered to be just a relic of the past. True, I realize, as an evangelical Christian, that we are living in hard times. It is difficult to be an evangelical as the tide seems to be against us. And as we look around we see a great culture breaking down about us. Pessimism can really take hold of us, if we are not careful. Yet these are exciting times! God has called the church to be a witness at a very critical point of history. It is not only exciting to be a Christian now, but also a great privilege and responsibility. I am not pessimistic about the future of the church. I cannot be. The church is the Lord's and not ours. Christians talk about the church as if her very existence stands and falls with them and the problems they face. This is unrealistic. The church is not new on the scene. She has a long and turbulent history behind her. The church has gone through difficult times before. The evangelical church, when she took the gospel seriously, has always found the going tough. She has always been the church of the cross. The blood of the martyrs has been her seed for growth; and when persecuted she blossomed and became strong. I am optimistic about the church. She has a great future. Why? Her future has been secured for her by Jesus Christ. The church conquers daily. She shares in the power and the triumph of the Christ who is the head of the church." We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us." When you look at the church she appears rather aged and worn out on the one hand, but on the other hand, many new and exciting things are happening within her "walls." The victory is the church's already. This is a fact of faith!, as the church is an object of faith. And as the church is an object of faith she will always continue to be a foolish phenomenon in the eyes of the unbeliever.

Christians have always had a very high concept of the church. Therefore we believe that you can only criticize her when you deeply love her. Bob Dylan's song describes the church as "Desolation Row." But some of the great hymns of the church express just the opposite, none more so than Samuel J. Stone's masterpiece:

The Church's one foundation

is Jesus Christ her Lord,
She is His new creation
By water and the word:
From heaven He came and sought her
To be His holy bride:
With His own blood He bought her,
And for her life He died.

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