



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

"Young People's Formal Dinners" -- acceptable behaviour or symptomatic of a deeper problem?



And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God , Romans 12:2.

We are grateful for the following response from Mrs. Olivia Tschappler of Phenix Free Presbyterian Church, Arizona

Dear Mr. Foster,

I have read with interest the recent articles on the youth dinners.

Perhaps as an American I cannot speak with authority on the issue; the idea of a dinner sounds innocuous to me. But judging from your concerns regarding modesty in dress, I would share your concern. Whether in Northern Ireland or in America, I would encourage all young people to please the Lord and not themselves in this area. You and Rev. Thomas Martin have dealt thoroughly, even eloquently, with the problem, but could I add some almost 300-hundred-year-old comments from Isaac Watts? In his book, *The Improvement of the Mind*, Mr. Watts responded excellently, I think, to debates in his day. He devotes a chapter to "the sports and diversions of children." Obviously there were not the very young, because these young people were interested in attending operas and plays, masquerades, gaming-rooms, and midnight dances. Christians today would be aghast that a Christian would even venture on some or all of these events. But listen to Mr. Watts, as he comments on these activities.

"But the children of our age will pertly reply, 'What! must we live like nobody? Must we turn old Puritans again? Must we look like fools in company, where there is scarce any discourse but of plays, operas, and masquerades, or cards, dice, and midnight assemblies? And pray what sin is there in any of them?' "To this I answer, that I am very sorry to find that the children of religious parents choose and delight in company where these things are the chief subject of conversation. I fear lest God and virtue, and the important things of another world, are utterly banished out of such a visiting-room, where these discourses are the chief entertainment, and there is little place found for any profitable conversation, even about the most useful and valuable affairs of this life.

"But light as these pert questions are, I will consider them one after another. You say first, 'Must we look like old Puritans? Must we live like nobody?' No, my friends, I am not persuading you to return to the habit and guise of your ancestors, nor to transact your visits, nor to model your diversions by the pattern of fourscore years ago. There is a certain fashion and appearance of things that belongs to every age: modes of conversation, and forms of behaviour, are ever changing in this life; and it is no improper thing for persons, according to their rank and figure in life to conform themselves to the present customs, as far as they are innocent, and have no evil influence upon morality or religion. But where any unhappy customs prevail in the world that make an inroad upon your piety, that endanger



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your virtue, that break the good order of religious families, and are usually or always attended with some mischievous consequences, surely in these instances it is better to look like a Puritan, and stand almost alone, than to follow the multitude in the road that leads to iniquity and mischief. A Puritan, or a Separatist from the vain or dangerous courses of a wicked world, is to this day a name of lasting glory, though the enemies of God, and of your ancestors, may cast it upon them in a way of reproach. There are some things in which you must dare to be singular, if you would be Christians, and especially in a corrupt and degenerate age. . . ."

"Besides, if the families that profess religion, and desire to preserve piety amongst them, and to transmit it down to their children's children, would but heartily join together, in a resolved abstinence from these hazardous diversions, there would be no need of any one of you to stand alone, and your appearance on the side of virtue would not be singular. You might animate and support one another with public courage, and having God and virtue on your side, you might, in some measure, bear down the effrontery and ridicule of an age of vice and sensuality;" (pp. 350-51) Mr. Watts, being dead, yet speaketh.

Olivia Tschappler .

I do thank Mrs. Schappler for her contribution. Perhaps next month we will have a few further thoughts on this important matter, considering the distinction between the feasts of the world and the feast ordained by God.