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Editors' Notes

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When The Worldly Church was published about three years ago it imme-
diately provoked lively discussions both pro and con. The whirlwind which blew
through the Churches of Christ caught me by surprise, for we have had numerous
calls against worldliness in the churches in the past. As a youth growing up in
Kentucky, I can remember numerous sermons on many of the themes the authors of
The Worldly Church elaborate. These calls in the past hardly created a ripple. We
seemed vigilant in rooting out any sign or sense of worldliness or secularism.

However, change is always the order of the day for any religious tradition or
organization. Even since my days as a teenager in the late 1960's, I have seen
profound changes in the Churches of Christ. The language we use, the sermons we
hear, the buildings in which we worship, and the way we live our daily lives have
undergone some profound changes, and often our vigilance against worldliness
seemed muted. Clearly, the changes have not been uniform, for there are very
distinctive perspectives within the Churches of Christ. As Shaun Casey notes,
pluralism is present. What we are to make of these changes and how we are to deal
with this pluralism will be a preoccupation of our churches in the next decade and
into the next century.

Many of the questions that need to be addressed are raised here and some
answers proposed. Is "secularism" the best way to understand the change that is
happening? If we are secular, then how secular? or how secular are we? How can
we be both "in the world" and "not of the world?" What are the causes of our change,
however we label it? How do we deal with the diversity in our churches? Should we
participate in the wider culture in which we find ourselves, or should the church
simply be the church? How does one preach the gospel in today's culture? How does
our past inform the present and our future?

Having a civilized but spirited conversation about these questions is the place
to start. Most will quickly see that there are sharply different perspectives presented
by these articles in Leaven. Even the three authors of The Worldly Church do not
give the same assessment of what is happening and what should happen. However,
the spirit of all the authors is one of friendly disagreement. All of us hope that the
issues raised here will be contemplated, wrestled over, argued about, and taken
seriously by elders, bible class teachers, preachers, leaders, and yes, even scholars.
This issue of Leaven continues the conversation started by The Worldly Church
and moves it into important new areas.