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Dr. MacRae Interviewed by Jim Neher

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We might say a little about a word that has occurred and recurred during my experience a great deal. The word separation. It's strange how in Christian history words come into prominence. They become much used and bandied about. Sometimes they get their meaning exactly reversed, and then they up and disappear and are replaced by other words.

When I was in high school and college I don't think I ever heard the word separation. I did hear people talk about certain practices which they considered as wrong for a Christian to engage in, and that was simply among the people with whom I had contact with at that time in church, etc. these practices were simply things a real earnest Christian would not engage in. I don't recall the term separation being used much in that connection.

Now, of course, the word separation is used in two different senses. Separation in matters of practice, and in ecclesiastical separation. The two are really quite different.

First, a little about matters of practice. In those days earnest Christians very widely considered that at Christian would not (at least in the north here) smoke, would not use alcoholic beverages, would not play cards, would not attend movies. I remember when Dr. Vos retired from Princeton Seminary and went out to Santa Ana California, and I visited him, he spoke about the church that was evidently the most orthodox church he could find in the area. He was attending it. He said the pastor there the greatest sin to him was drinking alcohol; the next greatest is going to theatre; the next greatest is smoking. I forget the order. The next is playing cards. It was sort of amusing to him coming from a Christian Reformed background.

Yet, I don't think he approved of that; other matters were far more important. I myself always felt that these matters of conduct are matters in which one has to make one's own decision. In connection with each of them, one has to think what are the real evils connected with it? What are the situation in the group with which one is associated? etc. I feel, for instances, alcohol to excess makes a danger for other people, as well as for one's self. But the idea that just touching alcohol or drinking a small amount is per se wrong, I see no warrant for it.

But the people I've been associated with most of my life-- the earnest Christians-- had that general attitude. I personally never had any desire for it, any particular interest. I've followed the practice. I've never felt there was anything wrong with my associating with other people who might occasionally to a mild extent use alcohol.

I remember the shock I had shortly after I went to Germany and talked to a fellow there who told me of taking a girl out to dinner. They had a private room, and they had what they thought was just light use of alcohol. I gathered from him that it had quite unexpectedly to him gone to her head to where she was completely out of control of herself and he took full advantage of