

Mark Bair Sept. 1993

The Church

Last Week:

Titus 3:3-8 Salvation

Tonight: Corporate or social dimensions of salvation

The Comic on church shopping("They do have racquetball")

Modern Amazing grace

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a stunted self concept like me,
I was once stressed out, but now am empowered,
Was visually challenged, but now I see.

Doug Marlette(in Wells, *No Place for Truth*, p. 135)

How we see the church is affected by how we see ourselves...are we the starting point?)

Me and unmet needs(that are intermingled with wants and demands)

Chuck Colson, *The Body*

The roots of the church's identity crisis are found in the consumer mentality so pervasive in our culture...It's what some have called the "McChurch mentality. Today it might be McDonald's for a Big Mac; tomorrow it's Wendy's for salad bar...Thus the church becomes another retail outlet, faith just another commodity. People change congregations and preachers as readily as they change banks or grocery stores. "Christian Lite" p. 41

Unlike earlier religious revivals, the aim this time is *support*, not salvation, *help* rather than holiness...a group affirmation of self is at the top of the agenda which is why *some of the least demanding churches are now in the greatest demand.* p. 42

Spiritual consumers are interested not in what the church stands for but for the fulfillment it can deliver. (p. 43)

The main question of the consumer mentality is, "what has the church done for me lately?"---with little thought of how they can participate and fund the things demanded.

This J.I. Packer calls "Hot Tub religion"(p.45)

Cultural values have so captured the church that we equate success with size. If "customer is King," then the church has to react as any organization does to consumer demand, which means finding the right marketing strategy. It's simply a matter finding the right formula.(p.47)

Charles Sykes, *A Nation of Victims*

In place of that society of restraint(delay of gratification), there arose a culture built on consumption, in which impulses were both encouraged and gratified. It was a new society, defined no longer by its needs than by its *wants*. (p. 48)

Crabb, *Finding God*

"In today's world we have shifted away from finding God toward finding ourselves. Fondness for ourselves has become the highest virtue, and self-hatred the greatest sin."(Crabb, *Finding God*, p. 16)

"Our agenda is to fix the world until it can properly take care of us. God's agenda is to bring all things together in Christ until every knee bows to Him. " (Crabb, *Finding God*, p.35)

"The historic church taught that the chief end of people is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever; the modern church too often teaches that the chief end of God is to gratify people." (Finding, p 46)

While expressing his joy that the church has become more aware of and sensitive to people's pain, he comments:

But this sensitivity has backfired. Rather than drawing us closer to God and freeing us to care more deeply about others, this sensitivity has made us more aware of how intensely we long to feel better about *ourselves* and more determined to find ways to do so! The spotlight has fallen upon us as abused, wounded, needy people, and God has been cast as the great Higher Power, waiting in the wings for His cue to come heal our hurts and restore us to responsible living.

Helping people feel loved and worthwhile has become the central mission of the church. We are learning not to worship God in self-denial and costly service, but to embrace our inner child, heal our memories overcome addictions, lift our depressions improve our self images...

Recovering from pain is absorbing an increasing share of the church's energy. And that is alarming. Although the gospel does bless us with a new identity that was meant to be enjoyed, it calls us to higher values than self-acceptance, values like turning the other cheek, esteeming others as greater than ourselves, going the second mile, enduring rejection, living not for the pleasures of this life but for those of the next one, and clinging to the promises of God when we don't feel his goodness. But these values have fallen on hard times.(p. 17)

Feeling better has become more important than finding God...

God becomes *incidental* in the church

What I am going to do

Let's look at one of the earliest pieces of evidence we have on *what a church is* and what a church *does*. It was a new church like us...because it was in the early days, before traditions were added...and was under apostolic oversight(Paul)

What is it? What is its purpose?

Titus 2:14

"...and purify for Himself a people that are His very own, eager to do what is good"

1. "A people," not simply persons(as isolated individuals)

This letter does not even mention the word church. The church is not a building or place--eclessia=people, a gathering of people

OT Backdrop- God's chosen people

Gen 12:1-3

Exod 19:5,6 special treasure among all the nations, kingdom of priests, a holy or set apart nation

Notice a *people*, not a *person*. *God is not dealing with a bunch of islands...."not a heap but a house"*

Modern Christianity tends to be heavily individualistic--- *because American culture prizes that as a cardinal virtue, we are desensitized to it's harm*

Colson, *The Body*

"I am my own church"(Gallup poll respondent)p. 29

But the fact is, even Christians who understand their personal identity as followers of Christ will not make a widespread difference in the decline and decay around us--unless we have a high view of our corporate identity as the body of Christ.

Many Christians have been infected with the most virulent(deadly) virus of modern American life, what sociologist Robert Bellah calls "radical individualism." They concentrate on personal obedience to Jesus Christ as if all that matters is "Jesus and me," but in doing so they miss the point altogether. For Christianity is not a solitary belief system. Any genuine resurgence of Christianity, as history demonstrates, depends on a reawakening and renewal of that which is the essence of the faith--that is, the people of God, the new society, the body of Christ, which is made manifest in the world--the church.

The church is not incidental to the great cosmic struggle for the hearts and souls of modern men and women. It is the instrument God has chosen for that battle--a battle we are called to by virtue of being members of His Body. (*The Body*, p32)

Does the church reinforce *individualism*?

While the church should affirm *individuality*, individualism tears apart unity. Our personal identity has to go beyond just seeing my diversity from others....

We want neither uniformity nor individualism

For us...

2. "That are *His* very own," not *our* very own

Or His Special treasure or possession

His church, not our club

--as Jesus said, "Upon this rock, I will build *My* church..."

--as Ps 100 puts it, "We are the sheep of His pasture and we are not own own"

Far from being conscious of God's leadership in our lives and in our churches, we can sometimes make Him incidental to the church...like a retired board member whose picture hangs on the wall to inspire us.

Whereas God seeks a people who are His very own, we want a God who is "*our very own*"

Crabb, *Finding God*

We have learned how to praise God like we do an especially attentive waiter. Good treatment we expect, but exceptional treatment deserves special recognition. And certainly God qualifies for extra notice: He has gone to great trouble to feed our souls and bolster our self-esteem. We therefore leave Him a big tip, feeling benevolent and noble, and He, in turn, beams with humble appreciation as He hears us say, "Well done! You have served us well."

But this is backwards! We have rearranged things so that God is worthy of honor *because* He has honored us. "Worthy is the Lamb," we cry, not in response to His amazing grace but because He has recovered what we value most: the ability to like ourselves. *We now matter more than God.* (p. 18)

Our hunger does not obligate God. He is not a waiter who, at the snap of our fingers, runs out of heaven's kitchen loaded down with trays of food to fill our empty stomachs. With His blood Christ purchased a people for God and made us priests to serve Him (Rev. 5:9,10). We exist for *Him*, not the other way around.

But bowing before God, living for His pleasure rather than for our own, does *not* reduce us to slaves whose personal feelings do not matter. God cares about our hurts. He wants us to enjoy our new identity as unique, forgiven, valuable men and women with something important to contribute...

But God matters more. He invites us to enter into relationship with Him on His own terms...He invites us in short to find *Him*. And He knows that in the process of finding Him, we'll find ourselves. (in your light we see light, Ps 36:9) p. 19

I must surrender my fascination with myself to a more worthy preoccupation with the character and purposes of God. I am not the point. He is. I exist for Him. He does not exist for me.

Does the church today reinforce man's autonomy? encouraging him on how he can *make live work* through the resources of the church?

Lovelace suggests that *"many people in the churches are in effect paying their pastor to protect them from the real God."*

3. "Purify for Himself," not simply assist

He does not say empower, assist, comfort...Purify(or cleanse)

Implies something is *impure*, something is not right. As we saw last week, a process of rescue from sin's power in us.

God is "more appalled by unholiness than by discomfort."

Some balk "That's uptight, makes me feel guilty, I need deeper help"

Crabb: Alternatives to the purification

Another way to make life work is to join the counseling bandwagon(remember-he is a counselor). Realize that the church is dangerous to your health. Learn to hate denial more than anything else. regard it as the unpardonable sin. demand satisfying answers to every question. Figure things out. avoid mystery. Face everything within you that hurts. and then develop a theology that zeroes in on shame and self-hatred as the problems that burden God more than all others.

Make it your top priority to become personally healthy. Keep pressing toward a happier life, greater wholeness, and a non-shame-based identity. Disguise the ugliness of your selfish pursuit by defining your goal as spiritual maturity. See to it that you stop at nothing to overcome you addictions, your low self-esteem, your codependent patterns of relating. Remember, *you* are the point--and God is there to remind you of your values to help you solve whatever problems interfere with your personal fulfillment.(*Finding God*, p. 80)

Is the church today just a reflection of the world? As Paul says in Rom 12 :2 conformed to the world

God wants to set apart His people from the rest of the world---not separate from contact, but a society of different values and a quality of love

The purpose of this purifying is for the sake of *mission*(not merely *maintenance*)

4. "Eager(zealous) to do what is good," not simply zealous to receive

- a. Implied here is people in the church have *responsibility*(contra just a consumer, customer)
See 3:9,3:14 also(contra breeding dependence)

Here is where help comes in: Certainly the church should provide comfort for the grieving, the suffering and the needy. The point is that *we all do it*-not just a certain professional class. And as *we* do it, we gain wholeness and health.

- b. And that they are *motivated* to fulfill it(contra "do we have to?")

Enthused, enthusiasts for God

Sykes

What is notable about the new doctrines of fulfillment is their rejection of{the old ideas that character was essential to living a good life} of any reference to the *duties, obligations, and sacrifices* that might inconvenience one from laying one's hands on "all kinds of freedoms and experiences."(p. 42)

Nothing perhaps separates modern man from his forbears more definitively than his attitude toward adversity...No title deed to happiness....happiness was seen as a consequence of a well lived life... adversity was a central fact of life. (p. 45)

Other Notions in Titus

Assumes the church is socially engaged, but also opposed by some:

2:5,8,10-living above accusations

3:1,2-never returning hostility: "peaceable and considerate"(contra the culture wars)

Is the church opposed today for its Biblical message or its political and social wars?

Some churches are not opposed at all because unwilling to offend

About the Pastor(s):

Plurality: elders in every city

Ordination: Today, you go to pastor school and try to get hired....what kind of problems does this lead to? For one, a pastor can be held hostage by the fact that he can be fired if he offends by speaking truth....second, men and women are brought in that are not God's choice and not familiar with the flock

The role of the pastor in society is reduced to irrelevant--someone from another world

Back then, not by popularity poll election, but by appointment(1:5) really it is not man's choice as much as it is recognizing God's person. That is why criteria are spelled out(1:6-9)

Character and strong in truth(2:7 be an example of....)

Why is this so important? 1:10 there are many deceivers

Pastors Role

1. Teaching

1:9(rooted in what 1:1 Know of the truth that leads to godliness)

Sound Doctrine--some today dismiss it as dry and impractical. Is it really true that we are doctrine free? Paul warns Titus about deceivers(1:10)In the this doctrinal vacuum, we are being inundated with a lot of "psychobabble".

2:1 *a summary statement*. Much of what he says is teaching self-control(2:12 to "say no to ungodliness"). Today we teach the church how to say "yes I can." The only thing we say no to is *other* people("how to deal with jerks" Minirth)

Some today would say you can't teach people self control...classify them as addicts....teach dependence

What are we saying when we offer therapy instead of teaching? Therapy w/o transmission of truth?

2. **Applying the word in specific situations** i.e. more than sermons that lift to new platitudes, he is expected to make the word practical and useful to the people--precisely because it is true! and relevant!

1:13 rebuke

2:15 encourage and rebuke with all authority

3:10 warn

Summarize our findings

A New Reformation?