

THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE

"...then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel..." (Amos 7:8)

THE NEW FACE OF FAITH

Peter Drucker, a well-respected management and business guru, writes in his book *Post-Capitalist Society*:

Every few hundred years in Western history there occurs a sharp transformation. Within a few short decades, society rearranges itself—its worldview; its basic values; its social and political structure; its arts' its key institutions. Fifty years later, there is a anew world. And the people born then cannot even imagine the world in which their grandparents lived and into which their parents were born. We are currently living through just such a transition.

Talk to any young person under thirty, and he will hardly know what you mean by a manual typewriter or a skate key. Howdy Doody and Mr. Green Jeans have no place in their lives, and were it not for reruns, neither would the "Brady Brunch." You will tell your age if you remember Bible reading and prayer in the public schools.

The 1960s "down-with-the-establishment" crowd has come of age, and the rebellious youth of forty years ago are now philosophical leaders demanding that we reinvent government, education, and religion after their postmodern desires.

We are living in a time of spiritual discontent. The number of adults who have had little or no spiritual training in life increases daily. The fastest growing religious group in American identifies itself as "no religion" (15%). Nearly one in four Americans (23%) are unattached to any faith group. The number of adults who attended worship as children but now disdain it is growing rapidly. Six in ten so called "unchurched" people once attended church. Protestant America has become a concert and a show. Seeker-sensitive, it has often sold out to the desires of the crowd.

People steeped in postmodern culture are often distrustful of Christianity and think it to be a humanly developed religion, filled with man-made rules. Many people no longer consider the Bible as inspired of God but merely a book of humanly constructed myths.

Discontent breeds new movements, and we are seeing a new face in religion as multitudes of house churches are emerging throughout America. These relational gatherings often have little teaching and little "traditional" worship. They, rather, focus on "experiencing" God. They believe that if they live good lives, then their doctrine (whatever it is) is true. For them, orthopraxy, however, the way traditional Christianity does.

To the postmodernist, orthopraxy is more defined by global issues like compassion on the poor and climate change than sexual orientation or right-to-life issues. For them Christianity is more about picking up trash in the park than talking to souls about salvation. Postmodernists don't care whether one believes in six literal days of creation or whether Braham was a real person or not. They don't know and don't believe anyone can know. For them, what God tells us is just another way for churches to have power over us.

Emergents share with the unchurched many of the postmodern criticisms of Christianity. Leaders in this movement are disgruntled with established dogmas, rituals, and institutions of modern, organized Christianity. They argue against the many abuses they believe arose out of the modern ear. They believe they must deconstruct traditional Christianity and rethink how to follow Christ in order to reach a postmodern culture.

The postmodern culture is seeking power by "deconstructing" all the traditional beliefs and values of the modern past. Their utter disrespect for the limits and negatives

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arising out of the power structures of modern society has led them to seek ways to reinvent Christianity so that it no longer points a finger at the social sins of our day, especially homosexuality and abortion.

The new faces of religion do not like the doctrine of revealed religion, since they regard doctrine as divisive and offensive. It does not matter that the doctrine comes from God; it is divisive. In their minds it is a whole lot better to get rid of offensive doctrine than it is to break down communication with those they are seeking to reach.

Postmodernists have an especially difficult time with the concepts of sin, repentance, and Hell. For them Christ and Christianity is a negative religion to be excluded, since it holds the fires of Hell over people's heads and demands compliance. Since they know and are friends with some homosexuals, they would rather get rid of God's negatives than to consider the possibility that their friends are lost in sin.

Postmodernists would rather withdraw into agnosticism when it comes to whether we were created or whether Christ is the only way to Heaven, or whether only the Bible is a divine book. They don't know the truth, and they will contend no one can know the truth. For them there are no absolutes, and they are absolutely sure of it. This absurd notion in their minds allows them to escape moral responsibility; they think they don't have to obey the moral teaching of the Bible.

The new face of faith dismisses God and His revealed will in the Bible, while claiming to be authentic. To be authentic is to be real, true, or genuine. One might think, then, that being authentic means listening to the revealed will of God and following what God says. Instead, these "authentic" Christians are true not to God, but to themselves. They are true to what they imagine and invent.

Some "preachers" who have embraced" this emerging new philosophy have actually decided that to be authentic and to be able to reach out to this negative culture, they would downplay their moral standards. One preacher in Seattle is known as the "cussing pastor." Several in the emerging church movement believe it is morally acceptable to drink a beer, use four-letter words, or watch a sexually explicit movie with someone they are trying to convert. They believe allowing sin in their lives gives them the ability to connect with worldly people.

One must wonder at this new face of religion: How can a person lead another to faith, when he isn't himself sure of what he believes? Can he lead another to consider creation, when he is not sure how long the days of creation were? Can he point to the Scriptures as authoritative, when he says that it is full of myths? Can he point to Jesus as the only way to Heaven, when he speaks reassuringly about other religions?

How can a Christian lead another to holiness, when he isn't himself living a life that pleases God? How can he speak of the sanctity of marriage, when he permits adultery of the heart (Matthew 5:28)? How can he lead families to wholesome lives, when he cannot condemn a lifestyle that perverts God's will? The Hebrews writer said, "Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14, ESV).

The new face of faith, embedded with postmodern thinking, is not Christianity. It is a hodgepodge of religious opinions offered by people who do not know the God of the Bible or are unhappy with church as they know it. The new face of faith is humanly constructed to replace divinely revealed religion. It is as valid a religion as Aaron's golden calf and offers as much hope.

When people desert the revealed will of God for their humanly developed religion, they leave the Rock that stands and make their home on the sand of destruction" (Matthew 7:24-27).

*-Phil Sanders
via Think*

ABOUT THAT HAIRCUT

A teen had just gotten his driving permit. He asked his father if they could discuss his use of the family car. His father took him into his study and said, "I'll make a deal with you. You bring your grades up, study the Bible daily, get your hair cut, and then we'll talk about it."

After about a month, the boy came back and asked if they could discuss his use of the car. They again went into the father's study where the father said, "Son, I've been very proud of you. You have brought your grades up, you've studied the Bible diligently, but you didn't get your hair cut."

The young man replied, "You know, Dad, I've been thinking about that. Samson had long hair, Moses and Noah may have had long hair, and even Jesus is pictured with long hair."

"Yes," his father said, "and everywhere they went, they walked."

CHURCHES OF CHRIST: WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE?

With church buildings located every few blocks and with nearly 1,200 different religious groups recognized by the IRS as tax exempt, one can easily live in a community and not know much about a particular church. In this article we are concerned about the church of Christ. One may have wondered, what is distinct about churches of Christ? What is their historical background? How many congregations and members do they have? Are they a worldwide organization? What is their message? How are they governed? How do they worship? What do they believe about the Bible?

Membership in Churches of Christ: In a book entitled *Where the Saints Meet*, Mac Lynn states that the total number of churches of Christ in the United States and her territories is about 13,410 with a total membership of 1,277,004. In a more recent work entitled *Churches of Christ Around the World*, Dr. Lynn states there are 13,908 congregations with 747,568 members outside of the United States and her territories. This would make a total of 27,318 congregations with a total membership of 2,124,572. At the present time, according to Dr. Lynn, there are 660 American missionaries in 121 nations.

The Spirit of the Movement: As is often the case, men have a tendency to alter the message of God. It started in the Garden of Eden when God said not to eat of the forbidden fruit and man violated this divine injunction. During the Israelites' history, they often changed the worship and mission that God had assigned. Evidence of departure in the New Testament can readily be seen in those who tried to bind ancient ceremonies and rituals upon the people of God. In our day, many churches have become burdened down with traditions of men, failing to fulfill Christ's plan for them.

The solution is to return to the Bible. Amos' question of long ago, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3) points to the necessity of having a standard to resolve differences. The spirit of churches of Christ is to return to the Bible. It is our desire to go back beyond denominationalism to the simplicity and purity of the first century. We believe that the Bible and the Bible only will make Christians as God intended. Unity can be achieved by following the Bible. It is the safe and reasonable approach to take (Galatians 1:6-9; Revelation 22:18-19).

God's Organization: Churches of Christ do not have the trappings of many modern-day organizational bureaucracies. There are no official boards—neither district, regional, nor international. Each congregation is self-ruled and is independent of all other congregations. There are no conventions, annual meetings, official publications, or policy-setting groups. Each congregation is overseen by a group of elders who are selected from among the members and meet the qualifications outlined by Paul (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1). These elders are assisted by deacons, evangelists, teachers, and other Christian servants.

The Worship: Worship in church of Christ is very simple. It tends toward participation as opposed to one being a spectator. Christians meet to sing a cappella, as is authorized by the nine verses in the New Testament that discuss the music the early Christians practiced. The Lord's supper is observed upon the first day of every week, just as was done in the first century (Acts 2:47). Christians further worship by giving as they have been prospered, studying the Bible, and praying.

Terms of Membership: The terms of membership are also outlined in the New Testament. They include faith in God (Hebrews 11:6) and in His Son (John 8:24); repentance of one's sins, as commanded of all men everywhere (Acts 17:30); confession of belief that Jesus is the Son of God (Matthew 10:32); finally one must be baptized to enter into God's family. Peter said, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of your sins" (Acts 2:38).

We encourage you to visit the church of Christ in your community and again experience the joy and simplicity as we attempt to go back to the Bible.

-Jerry Jenkins

THE WORLD WILL GIVE YOU UP

A youth said to the preacher, "Now that I'm a Christian, have I got to give up the world?" The minister replied, "Don't worry about giving up the world; if you live faithfully the Christian life, the world will give you up pretty quick; they will not want you around."