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Spiritual Migration: “The Common Good”

Matthew 7:3-5 the primary concern for many churches

Matthew 6:10

Hebrews 12:1-2

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The primary concern for many churches is our churches. We see how they're wrinkling and shrinking, how they're aging and experiencing numerical decline. We want to save the church from going the way of the phone booth, cassette tape, or the landline.

And yet, did Jesus not say, “Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but if you lose your life, for my sake, you will find it.” Jesus words can make us wonder: could our desire to save our precious religious institutions and traditions actually hasten their demise? Could it be that the Spirit of God is calling us to stop trying to save the Church, and instead join God in saving the world? Could it not be, that the only way for the Church to save its soul is by pouring out itself for the world?

Did we not hear out the mouth of a teenager from Sweden just this past week that our prosperity system has become a suicidal system for our world! For we have acted as though the resources we consume are infinite and the wastes we deposit are invisible. Just as our bodies consume food and produce waste, so we consume trees and produce smoke, consume clean air and produce smog, consume clean water and produce sewage and toxic waste, consume rock and produce radiation, consume oil and coal and produce gases that turn our planet into an overheating oven in which storms boil and oceans rise and deserts spread and forests wither. Our prosperity system has become an excrement factory. (Brian McLaren)

When the economy experiences a recession or a crash, next to nobody questions whether the system itself is sound and sustainable. The only question is how to get it growing again.

Our consumptive, suicidal system depends on two things:

1. An endless supply of greed or unfulfilled desire. The cascade of unfulfilled desire spreads, creating a fevered competition to acquire more and more stuff. And, our suicidal system also depend on
2. An endless supply of cheap fossil fuel.

Incremental change will not be enough. What we will need is a great spiritual migration to a new way of life, supported by a new kind of Christian faith.

What is needed is a powerful spiritual movement that will migrate away from trivial arguments: organs or pianos, or guitars and drums? Suits and ties, or blue jeans and sneakers?

Instead we need to join God in God's holy work, God's primary mission: saving the earth and its inhabitants from human evil and folly.

Instead, as Diane Butler Bass puts it, "Christianity has been an elevator religion, focused on getting people up, up, and away from this troubled earth to heaven, where God and the angels sit in cloudy bliss, having left behind the problems of earth. By keeping us looking up and away, elevator Christianity has kept us from noticing or taking seriously what is happening around us – growing economic inequality, deteriorating environmental quality, expanding militarization and weaponization." In other words, "Christianity is seen arguing about our beliefs and singing songs about evacuating to heaven while the earth burns." (Brian McLaren)

Now is the time for Christianity to move from a religion

organized for personal salvation and self-preservation to a religion organizing for the common good and the salvation of all.

For the Church to move forward we must agree what is wrong, and what needs to be done about it, and then get going. This will look like action steps and projects, demands, and even refusals to comply.

We must move beyond polarized and paralyzed partisan affiliation: liberal vs. conservative, Democratic leaning vs. Republican leaning. Why, because the binary culture-war mind-set is part of the problem. We need to stop pulling apart and start pulling together, converging and collaborating to build a more just, generous, peaceful, regenerative, and joyful world.

In addition, could it be that liberals and conservatives are two wings of the wrong bird – the extractive industrial economy that threatens us. Each is known for providing solutions within the box of the suicidal system and neither seems capable of thinking outside the box. Both wings need to be challenged to rethink the system as a whole, and bring their distinctive emphases together, collaboratively.

Let's face it bipolar identities quickly degenerate into stereotypes that are neither accurate, nor helpful.

The truth is Christianity is only one generation away from extinction. Yet, it is also true that Christianity is also only one generation away from conversion and rebirth – if only we would seize the moment. What might it take – the opponents gradually dying out, and the growing generation familiarized with new ways of doing and being from their very beginning. Therefore, we must center our children's curriculum not on old understandings with new methods such as videos instead of

flannel or chalk boards. Rather, we must be sure our children and youth get taught more than an evacuation Gospel and an elevator theology. Are we training a new generation of young Christian leaders who will lead a very different church of the future? The future will depend on leaders and followers who are personally dedicated to God as the liberating Spirit of justice, joy, and peace embodied in Jesus rather than God as a dominating, exclusive, distant, and violent Supreme Being.

C.S. Lewis puts the dilemma we now face in Christianity this way, "It may be hard for an egg to turn into a bird; it would be a jolly sight harder for it to learn to fly while remaining an egg. We are like eggs at present. And we cannot go on indefinitely being just an ordinary, ...egg. We must be hatched or go bad."

How will this change happen? Through:

- Intrapersonal change which consists of a reorientation of heart and mind driven not by self-interest, but by deep and abiding moral conviction.
- Interpersonal change where we cross racial, religious, ethnic, class, or political boundaries to build friendships where people envision the common good where all are safe, free, and able to thrive. Knowing one another makes interpersonal change and reconciliation possible, structural change possible.
- Institutional change where reconciled people work together for the common good, challenge political, economic, religious, and social structures that harm people.
- And, then there is cultural change

God's Word to us this morning and every day from herein is "to let us let go of the weight that so easily entangles us, and look to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. Study how he

did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed – the exhilarating finish in and with God – he put up with anything along the way: cross, shame, whatever... When you find yourself flagging in your faith, go over that story again and again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he plowed through. That will shoot adrenaline into your souls! (various translations of Hebrews 12:1-3) Maybe we too be followers of Jesus by heeding God's Word to us, and being the Word in human flesh!