

No Painted Eloquence

or the Modest Newsletter Written Almost Entirely by Direct People

Redefining the Church

by Dana Burkinshaw

In his widely acclaimed book, *The Purpose Driven Church*, author Rick Warren suggests that since unbelievers are not looking for truth, something else needs to be offered. Warren says, “While most unbelievers are not looking for truth, they *are* looking for relief” (p. 226). Therefore, he teaches pastors to teach only what people see as benefiting their needs. He claims that Jesus used the approach of meeting their “felt needs” (p. 227), and “Jesus was a life-application preacher” (p. 230).

It is not surprising that Warren sees things the way he does. He was steeped in Robert Schuller’s “Be Happy Attitudes.”

An examination of the gospels, however, disproves Warren’s theory. For example, in John 6 Jesus confronted the crowd with the harsh reality of blood atonement. The result was that the crowd left and refused to follow Jesus. The Savior does not appear to have been overly concerned with the felt needs of His audience. He came to bear witness to the truth regardless of how irrelevant it seemed to His hearers.

What sinner ever saw a “need” for a crucified Messiah without first having been confronted with his sin and the need for atonement? Churches that exist to maximize the size and efficiency of the visible church are forced to change the gospel because the gospel is a narrow gate with few entering.

In the efficient, market driven church, people come in because the church is appealing to them; and they get motivated and committed because of the excitement and unity that exists around the church’s mission statement. People are asked to make commitments to the church and promise to support the church’s programs. People enjoy being part of a committed community, unified, working together and achieving measurable results. The ability to make that happen is the key to the success of the religious corporation.

The defining mission statement, according to Warren, must be stated in terms of results (p. 107). Programs that are not contributing to the stated mission are either altered or eliminated. If the outcome is not being achieved, then the hindrances must be identified and removed. Warren says, “A narrow mission is a clear mission” (p. 100). Warren also says, “Make it measurable” (p. 101). The mission statement is reconstructed to comply with these criteria. Of course, the only outcome that can be measured very accurately is the number of people joining the church. A mission statement is cast in these terms.

Warren demands unity of every member (p. 167). People who do not support the church’s revised mission are warned and disciplined. If long standing members resist the changes, they are to be removed from fellowship. Thus, we see the incredible prospect of solid Christian people who are not accused of sin or heresy being removed from churches.

Authors Glen Martin and Gary McIntosh have clambered aboard Warren’s Church Growth bandwagon. In their book, *The Issachar Factor*, they maintain that the church’s worship service must be significantly amended in deference to the clientele that the church is attempting to reach. After all, they say, “People in our culture know nothing of the Bible, don’t take church seriously, and are anti-moral” (p. 38).

If we give them only what they want, is that likely to change when they come to our church? Transforming the church's worship service into an "outreach event" is not merely the adoption of newer, more relevant techniques of evangelism. It amounts to nothing less than redefining the very essence of the church presented in the New Testament. The focus of the church shifts from feeding the sheep to entertaining the goats.

Being Gay
by Todd Mitchell

He folded his umbrella as he entered the dank little shelter to wait for his bus. Had others noticed his entrance they might have thought him a bit of the deluge itself. An air of melancholy clung to the big, bespectacled man, who despite his size was almost invisible in his plodding ordinariness. He sat down and began to read a very plain-looking book, earning glances from the other two men in the shelter.

Suddenly a young man dashed in from the rain, soaked to the bone. Though he skidded to a stop he seemed to be still in motion, so enthusiastic was this newcomer. He greeted them all with a grinning exuberance.

"What a wonderful morning!" he said, a bit too loudly, as if demanding that one and all acknowledge his cloying cheer.

The dowdy fellow with the boring-looking book remained absorbed in his reading. One of the other two, a nattily dressed fellow with a flamboyant pink bow tie, pursed his lips primly and went back to his morning paper. The remaining gentleman, wearing a business suit with the relaxed confidence of an executive, broke the silence.

"Wish I could say the same. What makes you so cheerful on such a dreary morning?"

"I, sir, am a gay man," the happy young man responded, obviously delighted at being asked. He surveyed the inhabitants of the shelter with a practiced eye, gauging their response to this revelation. He noted that the flamboyant fellow looked up suddenly, appearing to take a sudden interest in the conversation, while the executive appeared to recoil slightly.

"Aha," the executive said uncomfortably, "I see. Well, to each his own, I suppose." The flamboyant one was grinning wickedly.

"Now, hold on," said the young man, with a supplicating gesture, "It isn't like that at all. I mean, it isn't what you think. When I say I am a gay man, I don't mean I'm, well, really *gay*. I mean it in the historic sense. I mean that I am habitually in a gay mood."

"I should say so! I certainly am," said the flamboyant one, giving him a wink. The executive was dabbing at his forehead with a handkerchief, a pained expression on his face.

The young fellow's cheer flickered as he struggled to maintain his composure. He said urgently, "No, no! You don't understand. I am *not* that kind of gay man. I am a historic gay man! You know, as in happy, merry, feeling keenly alive and exuberant!"

"Look," said the executive in consternation, "we're all very glad that you have found happiness as a gay man, but it sounds as if you are trying a bit too hard to convince yourself of it. You should be more secure in your identity, son."

Now visibly exasperated, the young man waved his hands and exclaimed, "You still don't get it! I am *not* the kind of gay man you are thinking of! I am not homosexual at all! I am *historically gay*! Don't you get it?"

“Come on!” the flamboyant one said scornfully, “You need to stand up for yourself. Be proud of it, boy! Why all these gymnastics with words to deny who you really are?” The executive looked as if he might bolt out of the shelter at any moment.

“Listen to me!” the young man pleaded, “I am simply *happy*! That's all I meant by using the word 'gay' in its historical sense.”

Collecting himself, the executive said, “Well, why didn't you just say so, instead of confusing us with this 'historic gay man' business?”

“Because labels are important!” The young man slumped, then straightened with a hint of his original cheerful countenance. “Some of my friends and I are on a crusade to reassert the original sense of the word, 'gay.' That is what we are, and we are proud of it!”

The flamboyant fellow responded tartly, “If labels are so important, why do you use one improperly? The word 'gay' means something! You can't just hijack the word!”

“But *I'm* not hijacking it, I am just reclaiming it from those who have hijacked it in recent history!” The young fellow's exuberant grin was back in place now, as if he delighted in just this sort of dispute.

“I'm afraid that's a bit of wishful thinking, son,” said the executive. “You have to be culturally aware, and frankly, I think you are. Surely this is not the first time you have had to explain what you mean when you say you are a 'gay man,' whether you preface it with 'historical' or not.”

The young man admitted, “Actually, yes, it happens every time. But that gives me an opportunity to share my position!”

At this, the bus arrived, to the visible relief of the executive. The flamboyant fellow promptly boarded the bus and agitatedly opened his paper again. The executive followed, studiously burying his nose in his trade journal. The dowdy fellow closed his book and followed the young man onto the bus, taking his seat beside him. They rode in silence for a while.

Finally, the big man turned to the professed Historic Gay Man and asked quietly, “What is your goal?” He looked at the young man inquisitively.

“What?” the young man startled, asked, “What do you mean?”

“What is your goal?” he repeated. “You are on a crusade to reassert the long-forgotten sense of an emotionally-charged word – a word that gets people excited, some for one reason, some for another. What is your goal?”

“Well,” the fellow hesitated, “I think that the historic sense of the word 'gay' means something important, and it describes an approach to life in which I believe strongly. Labels are important, aren't they?”

“Yes, labels are important,” mused the man, gazing off into space as if remembering something from long ago. Looking back at the young man, he said gently, “But you haven't answered my question.”

The young man hesitated for a moment. His interlocutor looked up as the bus slowed. He said, “I'm afraid this is my stop. I wish you the best, my friend. You know, I was once very much like you.”

The young man looked at him in surprise. “You were?” he asked.

The melancholy eyes again looked into the distance for a moment as he seemed to recall a distant memory, and for a fleeting instant he looked much younger. The young man's eyes fell on the plain-looking book on his lap. The spine of the cloth-bound volume bore the golden letters *Impish Impiety: The Fundamentalist Movement and American Pop Culture – Pseudonymous4*

Press. The man's eyes turned back to him as the bus came to a stop. "Oh yes," he said gently, with a pensive smile, "I was indeed. Farewell, my friend. I leave you to answer the question on your own."

The Author to the Critical Peruser

by *Thomas Traherne*

The naked Truth in many faces shewn,
Whose inward Beauties very few hav known,
A Simple Light, transparent Words, a Strain
That lowly creeps, yet maketh Mountains plain,
Brings down the highest Mysteries to sense
And keeps them there; that is Our Excellence:
At that we aim; to th' end thy Soul might see
With open Eys thy Great *Felicity*,
Its Objects view, and trace the glorious Way
Wherby thou may'st thy Highest Bliss enjoy.

No curling Metaphors that gild the Sence,
Nor Pictures here, nor painted Eloquence;
No florid Streams of Superficial Gems,
But real Crowns and Thrones and Diadems!
That Gold on Gold should hiding shining ly
may well be reckon'd baser Heraldry.

An easy Stile drawn from a native vein,
a clearer Stream than that which Poets feign,
Whose bottom may, how deep so'ere, be seen,
Is that which I think fit to win Esteem:
Els we could speak *Zamzummim* words, and tell
A Tale in tongues that sound like *Babel-Hell*;
In Meteors speak, in blazing Prodigies,
Things that amaze, but will not make us wise.

On Shining Banks we could nigh *Tagus* walk;
In flow'ry Meads of rich *Pactolus* talk;
Bring in the Druids, and the *Sybill's* view;
See what the Rites are which the *Indians* do;
Derive along the channel of our Quill
The Streams that flow from high *Parnassus* hill;
Ransack all Nature's Rooms, and add the things
Which *Persian* Courts enrich; to make Us Kings:
To make us Kings indeed! Not verbal Ones,
But reall Kings, exalted unto Thrones;
and more than Golden Thrones! 'Tis this I do,
Letting Poëtick Strains and Shadows go.

I cannot imitat their vulgar Sence
Who Cloaths admire, not the Man they fence
Against the Cold; and while they wonder at
His Rings, his precious Stones, his Gold and Plate;
The middle piece, his Body and his Mind,
They over-look; no Beauty in them find:
God's Works they slight, their *own* they magnify,
His they contemn, or careless pass them by;

Their woven Silks and wel-made Suits they prize,
Valu their Gems, but not their useful Eys:
Their precious Hands, their Tongues and Lips divine,
Their polisht Flesh where whitest Lillies join
With blushing Roses and with saphire Veins,
The Bones, the Joints, and that which els remains
Within that curious Fabrick, *Life* and Strength,
I'th' wel-compacted bredth and depth and length
Of various Limbs, that living Engins be
Of glorious worth; God's Work they will not see:
Nor yet the *Soul*, in whose concealed Face,
Which comprehendeth all unbounded Space,
GOD may be seen; tho she can understand
The Length of Ages and the Tracts of Land
That from the *Zodiac* do extended ly
Unto the *Poles*, and view *Eternity*.

Ev'n thus do idle Fancies, toys, and Words,
(Like gilded Scabbards hiding rusty Swords)
Take vulgar Souls; who gaze on rich Attire
But God's diviner Works do ne'r admire.

Some Notes for Women and Children

by *Katrina Zartman*

Zamzummim = a race of giants, cf. Deut 2²⁰

Tagus = river in west central Spain & central Portugal; flowing 566 miles SW to the Atlantic
Mead = *Poetic* meadow

Pactolus = In ancient Lydia, a river whose gold was a traditional source of King Croesus' wealth.

Parnassus = mountain north of the Gulf of Corinth in central Greece, anciently regarded as sacred to Apollo & the Muses; 8062 ft. 2. Domain of poetry or of literature. 3. A collection of poems or other literary works.

The Mystical Way

by Joel Zartman

When Daniel Clendenin went out to Moscow (not Idaho) to teach Christianity, he ran into something very interesting. Clendenin is an evangelical, trained pretty much as you or I have been trained, I would think, and he taught abroad, as you or I might teach if we had any ability for teaching or if the situation got desperate enough to actually require that people like you or I teach. What he did at Moscow State University (in Russia now) was to take *Mere Christianity* to them, because, you must admit, the argument is pretty well followed out in that book. What he found is that they balked at the idea of approaching Christianity through reasoned arguments.

Clendenin tells this story in a book written to introduce the average evangelical to the ways of Eastern Orthodoxy. It is not a bad book, and has come out in a second edition along with a volume of readings from Eastern Theologians edited by Clendenin. If you want an introduction to Eastern Theology that is quick and hits all the main points, get *Eastern Orthodox Theology: A Western Perspective*. I don't think it would hurt for a pastor to have this and the reader at least as a reference, because the Eastern way appears, at first, to most, the same way Mysticism appears at first to most. If you want a reasoned argument against Mysticism you can read Sinclair Ferguson's response to the contemplative view of spirituality in *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification* and you will get the general idea. I took a class on Sanctification, leaned toward the contemplative view, and enjoyed a little bit of the less reasoned responses that Mysticism provokes (although I followed the Reformed view, and might modify that paper today).

The reason Clendenin has for telling his story is to illustrate the difference in the approach toward religion between the West and the East. Clendenin's book sells Eastern Orthodoxy short (not in a way that makes the book useless though, for it is useful as a starting point) in that he seems to explain the differences to the point where they aren't as distinct. Part of this is because Eastern Theology is Christian and there should be a way of understanding it that is quite distinct from the way we understand Islam or something like that. I will venture to observe, out of utter ignorance of particulars but from the intuition that certain principles give me, that most false religions are going to have a certain familiarity, being built by creatures such as ourselves. We argue so much against their absurdity (and we should do that), when perhaps we ought to argue also against the fact that they make sense and exclude the glorious, incomprehensible, and patently alien dogma that the true Faith requires us to accept in order to be saved.

Clendenin's book is good, and the Reader even better, but if you want to understand Eastern Theology set forth in all its glory, from one who wants to accentuate the differences in order to maintain a position, you should get Vladimir Lossky's *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. Lossky, unlike Clendenin, views Eastern Theology from within. He believes that Eastern Orthodoxy *is* Christianity. Because of this, he labors to demonstrate the coherence of all the points which distinguish Eastern Theology from Western Theology. But what he adds to it that makes the fellow admirable above all is to root all these distinctions in the apophatic attitude while showing the visible trail of this idea through time. Tradition is important for Eastern Orthodoxy, for it demonstrates the authority of an idea by attaching it to a source. Lossky is convinced that Eastern Theology is the position that must be maintained by any who stand with Cappadocian Orthodoxy.

At the head of the streams of mysticism, one usually finds a fellow that wrote under the pseudonyms of Dionysius the Aeropagite. This venerable and humble author wrote a very small

treatise which he called *The Mystical Theology*. If you read the introductions to the great works of Christian spirituality that you should be reading (as opposed to all the modern works that cannot compare) you will notice sooner or later that Pseudo-Dionysius is mentioned. He is very influential. It is no accident, either, that Lossky's great work and Dionysius' great work have overlapping titles. It is Lossky's argument that the Cappadocian attitude toward the Trinity, which was the definitive formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity, is the apophatic attitude that Pseudo-Dionysius explains. In Eastern Orthodoxy, the meaning of the term "theology" is very narrow. It means only the central mystery of the Christian faith; it deals only with the Trinity. Theology, in this very narrow sense, is about speaking precisely about the Godhead, as revealed, not as understood. The reason for the precise language is not so that we understand the Godhead better, but to keep our understanding from encroaching upon that which is revealed. Let me make this a little more alien by quoting Lossky. In this quotation, "the former" is the West, "the latter" is the East:

If in the former approach faith seeks understanding in order to transpose revelation onto the place of philosophy, in the latter approach understanding seeks the realities of faith, in order to be transformed by becoming more and more open to the mysteries of revelation. Since the dogma of the Trinity is the keystone of the arch of all theological thought and belongs to the region which the Greek fathers called θεολογία par excellence, it is understandable that a divergence should have a decisive importance.

I say this is alien because we are accustomed to understanding theology as faith in search of understanding. Lossky, following a very Cappadocian attitude, wants none of this when it comes to the Trinity (his argument against the *filioque* is amazing. Now, I have to find out why we insist on it!). The attitude of unknowing is the apophatic attitude.

In Eastern Theology, as Lossky explains following Pseudo-Dionysius, the Godhead is incomprehensible because the Godhead has no part in the created order. God is wholly other, and because of this, he is incomprehensible for there is nothing we have in common. There is no possibility of analogy. Lossky, that remarkable theologian, explains the significance of this from creation *ex nihilo*. The created order comes out of nothing, for before it there was only God. God is discontinuous with creation, for the creation did not come as an extension of the eternal and blessed Trinity, having come *ex nihilo*.

Lossky is well aware of the ramifications of the apophatic attitude and he explains them. He is very good at explaining some very subtle theological distinctions, all the while keeping the whole together by reminding the reader of the central argument he is making. He explains the difference between the essence and the energies of God (which we know as God's attributes), he explains the dispute of the *filioque*, the use of icons, the Eastern understanding of grace, and *theosis*, the deification of believers. Eastern Orthodoxy is shown, by Lossky, to be all of one piece and rooted in a tradition that is the discernible outworking of Cappadocian theology.

There is, of course, a Western mystical tradition. I came upon it by reading Tozer. What it has done for me is to give me a great deal of dissatisfaction with modern prevailing notions of what theology is and how it should be done. Theology, if you read the modern tomes we read in seminaries, is often an arid thing, done without much real recourse to devotion. Compare Tozer's book on *The Knowledge of the Holy* and Millard Erickson's section on the attributes of God and you will see what I'm trying to point out. Combine what you get there with the observations about Eastern Theology and you will see why it seems so interesting to me. A recovery of genuine piety, in our day, is going to have to learn from the piety of the past. This means we need to understand Mysticism better and also the system of theology that claims to be predicated on it.