

Does the church live?

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By Jerry Bannon

Is the church that was founded almost 2000 years ago still alive? That is the question that faces the body of Christians as we begin a new millennia. Have we indeed become a body of Christians (autonomous and semi-autonomous individuals) or do we reflect the body of Christ (personalities within a community of believers). As a body of Christians, we do indeed reflect a picture of society and the culture that is really no different than the icon they (the world cultures) have created in their own image. As the body of Christ we must move ahead into a new millennia, incorporating the values upon which the church was founded 2000 years ago. Many of the theological roots of the early church were transplanted into western culture some 500 years ago during the reformation. Now it is time for God to transplant the church again. Not back in time, to her birth or to her reformation, but forward into the virgin soil of a new millennia, to become a virgin bride without spot or wrinkle.

Now come with me on a little journey. A short trip to a potentially new perspective that gets beyond the question, "What's wrong with the church?" To perhaps a means for constructive change. If I did this, and they did that, we could cooperate in this and that, who knows.

Hopefully, this tract will help you look at the church, society and your role in them in a new light. It is not offered as an absolute, as defined below, but more as a tentative observation, within the truth of God's absolute revelation incorporated in the pages of the Bible. In that regard, it is intended to make you think of where you fit and is that view consistent with your other views. Perhaps, none of this seems to apply to you at all. Has God left you all alone? If not, what is more important, what is more Biblical, or do you care at all?

If this tract had been assembled at any other time in the preceding nineteen centuries of church history, much of church leadership would have some understanding of the underlying principles and depending on the time and circumstances, the laity might be cognizant of the implications also. However, in our present day, the state of the church is such that most cannot contend for the faith in any systematic way other than, "Have you met Jesus? This is what he has done for me." Consequently, since we are about to enter into a new information millennia, before we go any farther it is appropriate that we define our terms. To do so, I got out my Bible Dictionary and my old college Webster's to help me with some real definitions. To keep things simple, and so that I can understand what I am trying to illustrate, I've added in parentheses the definition as I understand it and as it will be used in this tract. So bear with me through this task. At the end are some definitions about Christ's return and are quoted from the source indicated. [Page numbers in brackets.]

Culture: the act of developing intellectual and moral facilities especially by education; enlightenment and excellence of taste acquired by intellectual and aesthetic training; a particular stage of advancement in civilization. (*How society interprets what it believes.*)

Sin: an offense against God, a vitiated state of human nature in which the self is estranged from God.

Propitiation: The divine side of the work of Christ on the cross. Christ's atoning death for the world's sin altered the whole position of the human race in its relationship to God the father, for God recognizes what Christ accomplished in behalf of the world whether men enter into the its blessing or not.

Justification: a divine act whereby an infinitely Holy God judicially declares believing sinners to be righteous and acceptable before him because Christ has borne the sinner's sin on the cross and he has become our righteousness.

Metaphysics: a division of philosophy that includes ontology and cosmology; philosophy made up of ontology and epistemology. (*What and why you believe. Your absolutes, cosmology, ontology and eschatology.*)

Absolute: free from imperfection, free from mixture, having no restriction, exception or qualification, free from arbitrary standards of measurement. (*Truth*)

Epistemology: the study or a theory of the nature and grounds of knowledge, especially with reference to its limits and validity.

Cosmology: a branch of metaphysics that deals with the universe as an orderly system, a branch of astronomy that deals with the origin, structure, and space-time relationships of the universe. (*How things began.*)

Ontology: a branch of metaphysics relating to the nature and relationships of being, a particular theory about the nature of being or the kinds of existence. (*How things are.*)

Eschatology: a belief about or in the end of the world or the last things, as the second coming of Christ, resurrection, Judgement, the new age. (*How things will end.*)

Church Eschatology: Views of the Millennium, from *Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine*, by H Wayne House, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1992.

Historic Premillennialism [133] Premillennialists hold that the return of Christ will be preceded by certain, signs, then followed by a period of peace and righteousness in which Christ will reign on earth in person as King. Historic premillennialists understand the return of Christ and the Rapture as one and the same event. They see unity. Therefore they stand apart from the dispensational premillennialist who sees these as two events separated by the seven-year Tribulation. Premillennialism was the dominate eschatological interpretation in the first three centuries of the Church. Early fathers Papias, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and others held this view.

Dispensational Premillennialism [134] Adherents of this school are represented by those who generally hold the concept of two-stages in the coming of Christ. He will come *for* his church (Rapture) and then *with* his church (revelation). The two events are separated by a seven-year Tribulation. There is a consistent distinction between Israel and the church throughout history.

Postmillennialism [135] Postmillennialists believe that the kingdom of God is now extended through teaching, preaching, evangelization, and missionary activities. The world is to be Christianized, and the result will be a long period of peace and prosperity called the Millennium. This will be followed by Christ's return. This position is seemingly gaining more adherents in contemporary circles, such as the Christian Reconstruction Institute for Christian Studies. The leading proponent of traditional postmillennium was Loraine Boettner. See his book, *The Millennium* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1957).

Amillennialism [136] The Bible predicts a continuous parallel growth of good and evil in the world between the first coming of Christ and the second coming of Christ. The

kingdom of God is now present in the world through his Word, his Spirit and his church.
The position has also been called realized millennialism.

In the church today we are especially captive to our eschatological views and how they influence all our planning for our life and ministry. Also a western cultural bias and our future hopes, dominate our lives to a higher degree than we give them credit.

Are you ready to start our journey. All right, just use your God given imagination to try to picture the following. We are going to heaven, but without a redeemed body. We still view things on earth and in the world with our now limited insight, but we are journeying outside the created universe of time, space, and matter. Since we are so limited, we can only focus on the concept of time. Time as God sees it. Specifically, the two thousand years of history of culture and the church in a broad overview. I personally think there must be a better analogy, but I can't think of one right now. Talking about going to heaven even in a limited way, one could dream up visions and seek them as an end, instead of Christ and his work. There is too much of that happening now. So just use your imagination to look at society without the time constraint and our journey will be a lot safer.

Now to state it somewhat differently, the premise for our trip is that God is ultimately in control of everything, and we want to see if we can get a different perspective on our society, the church and our culture, outside the constraints of time. Do you think that might be worthwhile? Well, Praise the Lord, I thought you would agree. That is why I invited you along. What prestigious university did you graduate from anyway?

Still another way to state it is, 2000 years ago God sent the Apostle Paul to Greece and the west. According to the promise that God gave to Abraham, God was going to bless all nations because of Abraham's faith. So why didn't he send Paul to the east and those gentiles, instead of the west. If you go far enough east, you will eventually end up in the west, so the direction you start shouldn't make any difference should it?

Man, you and I sure think alike, that blessing that Noah gave Shem and Japheth in Genesis Chapter nine could be it. But at the Tower of Babel, God could have sent the descendants of Japheth to the east and south instead of the north and west. What I really would like to talk to someone about when we get to heaven is, could it be that God knew that the man-centered culture of the west, if you like the descendants of Japheth, would succeed in taking the gospel to the whole world faster, than by sending it first to the east. As the western civilization conquered the new world, priests and preachers would take the gospel, while the explorers, exploited and conquered. God could sure hide his power in a trip like that. Maybe Paul was actually speaking as God when he said in 1 Corinthians 9:22b, I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.

Now for the ultimate question for our trip! Once western culture has succeeded in its mission of taking the gospel to the whole world, what next? Dispensationalists would say, then the rapture of the church. But throughout church history and even the world today that is a minority view of the return of Christ, could they be wrong? But even if they are right, would it be direct cause and effect. Pow! Or could God allow western society to self destruct before, the Great Tribulation or his second coming, which ever premillennial eschatology you might select. Many secular books are now being written by distinguished authors about the rough road ahead, for society and the economy. Could they be right? Do any of the other Christian eschatologies offer any help? Could God, through this time of suffering bring back all believers to a more God-centered universal culture, centered on the finished work of a Jewish carpenter some 2000 years ago. If this could be possibly true, how should we then live our lives? What changes should we make?

Could the charge Paul gave to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:1-5 be literally prophetic of this time: I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead, at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort and with long-suffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers;

and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

Wow! Some trip! There is a building over there, kind of looks like a one room school from North Dakota or somewhere. Doesn't it?

Forty-nine, Fifty! Fifty seats. And only two vacant, clear up front. I guess I shouldn't have talked so long. I wonder why fifty seats? Why not one of our small groups of ten or so. Or why not a whole congregation of several thousand,. I wonder what the Bible has to say about that?

Well, there is an overhead, I wonder what type of praise and worship choruses we will be singing.

What a bummer no choruses, Just this tall, dark and handsome man walking to the front quietly singing, *A Mighty Fortress is our God* .

He doesn't look like any picture I've ever seen of Martin Luther, or John Calvin for that matter. I wonder if that woman swooning behind you is right, she says it's the apostle Paul in his new body. Can't be, he is way too tall and handsome. Look at the guy over in the far right, Yea, the one who can't sit in his seat and is shouting Glorrrry! Glorrrry!, I think he is also shouting that it is Jesus. And that guy next to him is saying it must be the devil. What a pair. I wonder how they got seats so close together.

I sure thought we would be up there a lot longer than that. The tall, dark and handsome stranger just never did identify himself, at least that I heard, didn't say anything else either, just showed those three slides on the overhead, gave us this handout and left the room and now we are back here where we started. Did you see or hear anything else.

Thank God, maybe that is all the vision of heaven we can take now. What is in this handout? Oh! Its a copy of the transparencies from the overhead projector, I wonder what they mean. Could it be something heavenly from heaven. Just joking! Probably something heavy for home.

That is a good idea, lets go make some copies and pass them out to fifty of our friends. I don't know why I said that! It just came to mind, I guess from the classroom.

Come to think of it, I do not personally know fifty people well enough either, maybe it is just us living in the age of the autonomous individual. Check it out with the few friends you do have, along with anything the Bible has to say about the community of fifties and I will meet you back here in a week.

Yea! It has been a pleasure for me too. God Bless! See you in a week.

Culture

How society interprets what it believes.

**Original and personal
Sin
veils our view.**

Culture

How society interprets what it believes.

Cultural Interpretation	Western	Middle Eastern	Eastern
Center	Man	God	Spirit of Force
Examples	American Individualism, Pragmatism	Islam, Judaism 1st Century Christianity	Buddhism Hinduism
Metaphysics			
Absolutes	Man's Reason	God's Will	The Force
Cosmology	Eternal evolutionary past	Literal creation by God	Evolutionary or no beginning
Ontology	Evolution to a higher natural order	God controls and/or leads man	Works toward the spirit
Eschatology	Golden age of man's evolution	God will one day rule	Individual oneness with the force

Metaphysical Transparency 2

Church Culture?

How society interprets church beliefs.

Cultural Interpretation	Western	Middle Eastern	Eastern
Center	God, Church & Man	God	Spirit & Holiness
Examples	Roman Catholicism Arminianism Calvinism	1st Century Christianity	Pentecostalism Fundamentalism
Metaphysics			
Absolutes	Bible & reason	Bible only	Bible and/or Rhema Word
Cosmology	Doesn't matter	Literal creation by God	Literal creation by God
Ontology	Church, state & man work with God	God controls and/or leads man	Seek Jesus personal holiness and the Spirit
Eschatology	Postmillennialism Amillennialism	Historic Premillennialism	Dispensational Premillennialism, Postmillennialism
Metaphysical Transparency 3			

Questions for study:

The Bible as a book declares itself as the absolute authority as to how a personal creator God has spoken to mankind within its pages. This principle is known in theology as the principle of Sola Scriptura (Scripture Alone). The Bible further clearly indicates that man is a sinner and to be restored to personal fellowship with God, man must accept the finished work of Christ, his coming to earth as fully God and fully man, living a sin-less life, offered and dying on the cross as propitiation for man's sin before a Holy God. That sacrifice being accepted, he was raised from the dead that those who believe by faith alone in his work some 2000 years ago, are justified by the Grace of God alone and are adopted as sons and daughters of God into a hope of eternal life. To only God's Glory.

With that in mind and in terms of the three transparencies:

Where in the world and the culture is the church?

Where in the world, the culture and the church are you, or can you find yourself at all?

Another way to state the second law of Thermodynamics is that everything gets all mixed up. If from the transparencies, you assume the truth of only three basic cultural models and life, list some apparent contradictions and how the God who created it all could make changes from outside this creation. What culture model allows for this potential and do of the other models allow for this?

What changes can you and fifty of your closest friends, brothers and sisters do to change any of the above?

And now abide, faith , hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13:13), If anything from this tract could be possibly be true, how can this verse be applied?

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