



Chronicles of Diversity

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Jerry Bannon

Publisher

Wonder Springs

7950 Seward Park Ave. S.

Seattle, Washington USA

98118

phone: 206.660.0697

email:

bannon@createleaders.org or

chronicles@createleaders.org

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Thesis 6: Transcendence

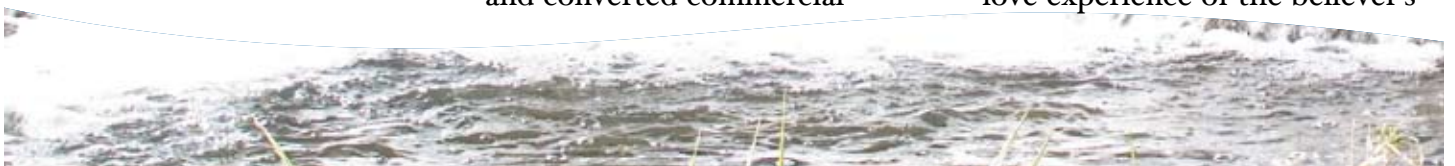
About five hundred years ago a young German man was granted an experience with a transcendent God. That gift changed the world, especially the world of the church forever. Martin Luther prayed to St. Anne to save him from the ravages of the storm and Martin's life was spared. In those days Martin's theology wasn't the best, but out of the gratitude for that saving miracle, Martin Luther became a monk, and then probably the first well known leader of the Reformation.

Just as in the days of young Martin, the church today is not a church of the transcendent God. We live in a very rational world and the church reflects that rationality. Perhaps, the church leads the world into that rationality. Today even the best of the new church buildings are designed like the cinema multiplex rather than a transcendent cathedral. For those meeting in school auditoriums and converted commercial

buildings the problem is much more pronounced.

Thanks be to God that He who came down from heaven still comes down to meet with His people rather than our worship carrying us unto the heavenly. Our liturgy also leaves us short of our desired goal. Whether it comes to us steeped in a thousand years of church tradition or whether it was picked from the chorus CD at 7 AM Sunday morning, the songs and the words may bring a touch of emotion to our being, but little of the transcendent nature of God is illuminated by our unenthusiastic repetitions. Could all of our worship genre could be construed as idolatry? Pity the man who dares alter that security, or sit in our seat near the manger.

Many would say that God reaches out to us through the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. Others would say that God touches his people through the love experience of the believer's



community. However, in our age, just what is the gospel is open to questioning by some, as well as the proper administration of the sacraments, and what is the amount of love that can be expressed among strangers, who only meet and sit passively for an hour or two Sunday morning.

Transcendent

1 a : exceeding usual limits : SURPASSING b : extending or lying beyond the limits of ordinary experience c in Kantian philosophy : being beyond the limits of all possible experience and knowledge

2 : being beyond comprehension

3 : transcending the universe or material existence

I sat this morning looking out my bathroom window. Normally I sit there for a brief time early every morning, but this morning was unusual because I was able to watch the sunrise. There, where normally the very mundane duties of life beckons, I was captivated by the red light reflecting off the clouds, the blue sky, and a half a dozen large birds flying high and south. In that time and place I had the opportunity to view the common grace of God's transcendence.

This goes to prove that contrary to recent history and popular belief it doesn't always rain in Seattle and God still answers prayers. That break from writing not only fulfilled a daily need, but was timed in the fact that I had run out of things to write, and also was the perfect time to see this amazing daily miracle, lost here most of this time of year in mist, clouds, and rain.

Therefore, it is not impossible to experience the transcendence of God in church or anywhere else, it is just that that transcendence comes on God's terms, even though we believe we are in control of our lives and circumstances. I would submit that as a general rule, in church God works through the preaching of the historic gospel and little else of our so called well choreographed worship service. Now not all churches preach the historic Christian gospel, but that is not God's fault. Just as there is solo scriptura and sola scriptura there is solo gospel what the gospel means to me and us and sola gospel what the gospel has meant throughout the historic Christian epoch .

At least in America today the historic gospel of Christianity is available to all and any who desire its life changing transcendence. That truth goes well beyond the church walls, but for many today the God of the gospel, the God of the Bible, and the God of transcendence are not found in church, but in other means of grace. Whether one can be a Christian and not go regularly to church however, rests with God's transcendent nature, not on the churches programs, historic or contemporary. Jesus did not have a lot of good things to say about the Scribes and Pharisees, that general rule fits well with American evangelicalism as well as the rest of Christendom. The point is that the Scribes and Pharisees are always the other guys, never us, you and me. Well, sometimes I'm not too sure about you.

We do live in a time with a similar religion to when Jesus walked the streets of Jerusalem, and when a man name Saul, met the Lord on the road to Damascus. That is also a religious time when a Martin Luther met a transcendent God on his trip home. There is a new emphasis in the church in what is called Creation Science. While my sample of these people is not at all scientific, all that I am aware of, and were Christians at the time, radically changed their lives through a transcendent encounter with God in the field, or in the laboratory of their chosen scientific evolutionary understanding.

What happens in the lives of all these people, except for Jesus, is that their natural world view, was changed into a transcendent world view. Naturalism in the world of scientific investigation can not explain, to those with an opened mind, the wonder of God's Creation. Naturalism in the church again cannot interpret the scope of contemporary historic Christianity. So why does so much of the churches systematic theology in the true sense of the term rest upon the complete abstinence to God's transcendence? Naturalism here is not defined as God in nature, but everything has a natural explanation without the requirement of God. That could also be described as rationalism, humanism, atheism, or foolishness.

We are living in a world of increasing stupendous change. I have heard preachers speak of this as the birth pangs of a new age. They then use that Biblical reference to explain what those changes will do in naturalistic terms, within the genre of their understanding of God. The problem is not with the

understanding of the problem or the times, it is with the application, because the application is by its very nature, natural, not at all transcendent and most of the time deals with morality.

As we view God's creation, we see continually transcendent manifestations of natural law and common grace. I have no problem with lumping both into common law and common grace, but I do have a problem in calling everything in creation common grace. Common law also has the more normal understanding as the principle of judicial law, that arrives in America through English Common Law as adapted from Biblical standards. Natural law comes to us directly from nature as the way creation actually works, sans man's desire to control or understand it.

Natural law was manifest in the last two months of rain and drizzle in Seattle. During that time everyone began to wonder if the sun would ever shine again. Common grace was the opportunity of watching the sun rise this morning. The point is that the two are always linked. To join this to our real world, it stopped raining in Seattle, just as the Seahawks returned from playing the Pittsburgh Steelers and the referees in the Super Bowl and losing. The Steelers stole the show, but at least they needed the help of others. Seriously, even though some Seahawks fans still take the loss very earnestly, the sun is now shining in Seattle for at least the next few days. Transcendent God's common grace is giving local people a gift of a new day of sun, and the optimism to say, "But wait till next year."

We no longer live in a world in which only our natural explanations help us to understand what is unfolding. Losing a Super Bowl in a tiny way, may prepare us a little more for a hurricane Katrina, or an earthquake, or a tsunami, or an Al Qaeda attack. The question remains however, does church in any way prepare us for stupendous change if all her programs are based upon naturalism, or rationalism, or foolishness?

There is however, only so much of natural law and common grace you can experience from your view from your bathroom window. The sunrise over Mt. Adams while camping on the slopes of Mt. St. Helens gives you a memory that will

last a life time. The eruption of Mt. St. Helens is an example of real natural law, being able to later camp on its eastern slope is an example of God's common grace. The view of Mt. Adams at sunrise, again an active volcano on the Pacific Ocean's ring of fire, is again a contrast or a tension between natural law and common grace.

The transcendency of God is already moving toward a new Reformation or other reword that fits your world view. We have seen it expressed in our last two elections for President. The red areas are rural where coping with natural law and common grace must be considered almost daily. In the blue areas, this reality is really just an annoyance, because our blue culture does everything possible to shut out God, especially a transcendent God, from all life. The Bible belt is true because the Bible gives answers for life and freedom, not just a book of myths to be debated or scorned.

The recent election in Canada points to that same conservative balanced natural law common grace world view. Now the red and the blue areas in Canada stand for the opposite view from the United States. Canadians after all must maintain their sovereignty. However, just as in America, political power is shifting from the urban to more rural areas, because God is building a new world view based upon the eternal laws and grace seen in His creation. Rationalism, humanism, atheism and foolishness are slowly becoming incapable of dealing with the problems of life and stupendous change. The church both rural and urban, but especially urban has an opportunity to forgo her naturalistic security and embrace again the transcendent God of natural law common grace, the historic gospel, and justified gratitude, or be sent into exile by stupendous change, which will quickly destroy our lassie faire greed economy.

The Bible is filled with examples of those not taking seriously the call to change your ways, virtually all going unheeded. All other history points in the same direction. But the one that seems most appropriate in our time is the example of insurgency warfare. Viet Nam was such an example, so is the war in Iraq. The Taliban in Afghanistan ran out the Russians using insurgency. The list of almost all armed conflicts since World War II have been of the insurgency type, and most of them have been successful because the established powers, were

unwilling to listen to those seeking freedom from oppression. These wars were normally fought and won from the rural areas isolating the cities, again as exemplified in Cuba. God's grace is the most powerful means of eternal freedom, it will not be defeated.

My goal in life and ministry is to provide that sunrise experience, well beyond the nature of the view from the bathroom window. A new day is dawning, from wherever you may sit. Just how far, or what is required to get someone outside of that bathroom is somewhat an individual gift, but it always points to the transcendence of God, both inside and outside His creation and also His church. Furthermore, I would say that you truly cannot experience the true gratitude of the historic Christian gospel, without some sort of transcendent experience of God. Only God can richly give that to those who value God's freedom over worldly oppression, even in the land of the free and the brave.

God willing, soon I shall be off again to see if I can find not that Shangri La on earth but a real place where you can experience natural law and common grace to the limit of your created transcendent personality. That transcendence combined with a transcendent historic gospel can change the world. Just as it did in the time of Saul of Tarsus, who became the Apostle Paul with a transcendent awareness of God on the road to Damascus, so also Martin Luther on a road in Germany praying for St. Anne to deliver him from the terrible storm in his life. In the case of those two saints, the transcendence of God in those early trial trails, allowed them to walk their narrow path into history as eternal personalities that changed the world.

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