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Symbiotic economics: Have some materialism soup!

This week's article begins as a designed allegory, not a good allegory, or not a bad allegory, just a so-so allegory, mediocre at best and downhill from there on out. As such you can make it deeper than it was meant to be, or just a stupid sort of story. Since music and religion died in America, things have just been going that way, dumbed down beyond political correctness, which really serves no purpose other than another day of a somewhat challenging life, in a world that doesn't seem to care one way or the other.

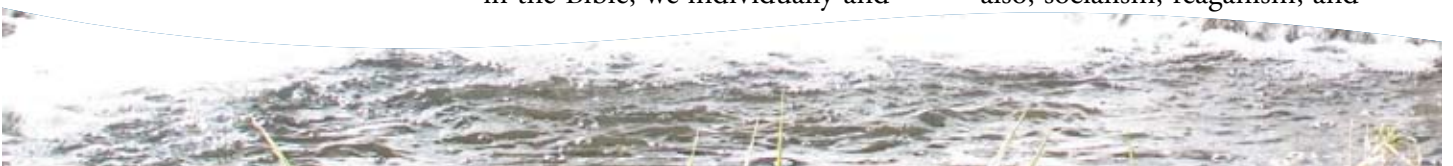
In the classic movie "Oliver" the orphan Oliver has the audacity to ask for some more swill, porridge, or soup to fill his empty stomach. In the 20th century, western culture has been fed a tempting materialism soup, and over time we have become accustomed to the stuff. After all with just a little salt, pepper and a few other spices of life, it really isn't all that bad. But just as Esau in the Bible, we individually and

collectively, have given up any birthright we may have inherited for just another generous helping of the stuff swill.

Proper exposition of the Jacob - Esau passage is well beyond what we want to use in this message, but just as with Oliver, we are all hungry in this world, and if materialism's soup is all we have to eat, why not have another bowl, the dude that runs the orphanage says we will grow to find it irresistible. And to be perfectly honest that is all he has to offer anyway.

*"So just how do you make
materialism soup?"*

I'm glad you ask. First of all you need the veggies. In classic cajun cooking it is known as the trinity, onion, celery, and green pepper, sweated not sautéed. In French cooking it is called mirepoix, onion, celery, and carrots, again sweated not sautéed. The ingredients in materialism soup are three also, socialism, reaganism, and



evangelicalism. Again just sweated, by no means do you want to brown these veggies, it will truly change the flavor and it might not slide down as easily.

After you saute the materialism vegetables you need to add a lot of water, a few soup bones to add a little flavor, but very little meat itself, that is saved for the leadership elite that runs the orphanage, and a little flour to thicken it up a little, but not enough to give you gas, because again gas is not all that appetizing. Besides on the side we get stale bread, the fresh stuff is first offered to those who are in charge.

In order to make this materialism soup at all, we need to first chop up the vegetables. The knife we will use is dull, just like the butter knife our grandmas had, that will only slice warm butter, or prepared margarine. The ingredients must be added in order to get the proper flavor in the sweat, as it slides off the plastic cutting board before it drops over the edge into the pot.

The first ingredient in materialism soup is socialism, as in the early part of the 20th century. Not only in the former Soviet Union, but around the world, especially in Europe and the United States it was thought that big government and governmentally administered social programs would bring about utopia here on earth. Socialism did ease some of the social ills caused by the robber barons of the late 19th and very early 20th century. You know the ones that created the orphanage that the movie "Oliver" was based upon. However, later in the century, we found out that without incentives, people just didn't produce enough to keep the kettle boiling away, therefore we needed to add another vegetable to our pot. However, before we leave the socialism mincing we should note that the socialism concept is still thought of as the best ingredient in the soup, by those we now call liberals, but were once considered conservatives.

After World War II, the limitations of socialism began to be noticed. It provided stuff, but materialism by its very definition requires stuff, and more stuff. Especially when our whole concept of good soup is based upon the philosophy of naturalism (nothing exists that can not be explained in totally natural terms) we need to get some more ingredients into the broth, even with the flour and the bones, things are getting a little weak. In economic terms they called it stagnation.

Beginning in about 1980 we entered into a new economic era in America and about the same time in Great Britain. Socialism was out, this by the design of new conservatives who were formally liberals. We called this new ingredient Reaganomics or reaganism in our soup recipe. This new soup ingredient in the United Kingdom and the United States was new free market programs based upon the Austrian school of economics, whose most famous exponent was F. A. Hayek. In America we rushed to build a military industrial complex like none the world had ever seen, in the name of defeating that evil Soviet empire, which eventually collapsed under its own socialistic inertia and corruption. In addition to defeating boring socialism, with enough deficit creation of capital it would eventually trickle down through out society. A rising tide floats all ships. Well, except those who's ship has a hole in it, or don't have even a life raft, or more to the point, live too far from the economic oceans to know what tide you are talking about.

"What's an economic tide anyway, does it touch the real world, or is it just another case of flippant political spin?"

The tax and spend liberals were replaced with the no tax and spend conservatives. In terms of meat in the porridge, big government infrastructure project beef bones, were replaced with special interest corporate pork bones. Except for those who never thought they saw a free market they didn't like, many people consider this another pendulum swing to self interest, just a further slide of the mortal sins of greed, lust, and pride.

Enter our final ingredient in our materialism soup, evangelicalism. What the world really needs is a friendly God. The big home boy in the sky. The dude that makes my materialism soup much more tasty. Sliced and diced he can be the friend you need when all the rest of the materialistic world has past you by for just another helping of tepid soup. With a relationship with Jesus all your troubles will disappear. Come and seek him for he wants to help you get all you want in this world.

As a real news insert into this tale, in an email from Prison Fellowship forwarded to me last week, Pastor Bill Hybels of Willow Creek Community Church has discovered this amazing truth that seeker sensitive Christians don't grow in their faith. In the case of Willow Creek these "earth-shaking" and "ground-breaking" (quotations theirs) results were found in a comprehensive study of Willow Creek and similar congregations. (Thank God, Willow Creek is not located in Seattle or some

other major fault line city, or we could have some real stupendous change on our hands.) Whatever the source of the natural revelation, you must give Pastor Hybels and Willow Creek credit, they confessed their mistake. Before, when evangelicalism meant the true gospel of Christ, mistakes were known as sins.

Back to the story. Today's evangelical Christianity has taken the greatest good news story in history, and turned it into just another ingredient in materialism soup. Evangelicalism's leaders can now play with power in the materialism game with the heavy hitters of the world. These power soupers (sic) are political liberals and conservatives no matter how they may currently be defined. Evangelism has moved across the tracks and can now lobby with the big boys of this world, and be finally chopped for the gumbo.

Fire up the pot, simmer for a hundred years or so, and make materialism soup, not soup de jour, but the soup de century.

End of story, now for a little evangelical application?

Let's put all this into the context that we have been following these last few weeks. Churches that teach God in naturalistic ways, have found that the God that created the Universe and sent His Son, Jesus Christ to redeem fallen mankind through His death on the cross and His resurrection three days later, that God hasn't blessed evangelicalism in the manner the powerful souper leadership had envisioned.

One is reminded of Exodus 32 in the Bible where the Golden Calf just came out of the fire in the worship led by Aaron, while Moses was on Mt. Sinai getting the "Ten Good Suggestions." Aaron, after all, had just had a great worship service to God, he had a crowd, they were enthusiastic, and signs and wonders were present. This worship however, was not done in the way that God had prescribed and it was only through the intercession of Moses (filling the ministry of a type of Christ) that the whole congregation was not destroyed.

That intercession however, wasn't present in time to save Aaron's sons shortly thereafter, when they offered profane fire in worship (Leviticus 10) and they were destroyed by God. Moses told Aaron the word of the LORD, "By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; And before all the people I must be glorified."

Post Christian evangelicalism regards these Old Testament teachings as not being part of their canon of scripture, we are under grace is their anathema. Get out that butter knife grandma. However, without understanding the true aspects of God's transcendent holy law, it is flat out impossible to fully understand the concept of God's transcendent grace.

Out of all those macerated worldly veggies, it is most interesting in an intercessory way, how difficult modern Christians find the concept of their adoption as children of God. Their eyes glass over and they seem to spin like in an old fashioned slot machine, once the spinning stops, essentially the words, "I am not worthy." comes out of their mouths. Yes, yes sir, and Yep! Then they ask the question, "Wow that is good news, now what must I do to keep this all going?"

This reality statement is natural human behavior and is enforced by evangelical doctrines and programs. It is caused by cheap law, cheap grace, and a mentality that asks what would Jesus do, rather than states as an absolute what Jesus did. In context it refers to a relationship with non transcendent doing Jesus, versus a transcendent saving brotherhood with eternal Jesus, God come in human flesh. This doing for Jesus, is a different Jesus than the Jesus of the Bible, as shocking as that is to present day evangelical Christians. From the greatest story and drama ever, the allegory now centers around me and what I think is true, a true ingredient for materialism soup and personal narcissism.

"Why would one want to become a Christian with all the moral baggage evangelicalism lays on you, when these Christians are just as mentally deficient and self centered as the rest of the world? Actually they seem less good and less holy than I think I am."

However, using the concept of wearing your acrostic CAP (Condemnation, Adoption, Praise) or Calvin's guild, grace, and gratitude, eventually the graceful wonder of it all sort of sinks transcendentally into your inner eternal personality. Then comes the response, "Wow, what can I do? I must do something good, just because this is such good news!"

This is God's Transcendent Grace which should be understood by every Christian through sound discipleship training, or catechesis for the real hard core. However, Transcendent Grace really doesn't fit within today's church. Transcendent Grace makes pew sitters, or prosperous multipurpose seat sitters uncomfortable. It also makes pastors uncomfortable, because as the

shepherd of a flock of sheep they know that this transcendence makes the sheep uncomfortable and stressed sheep have a tendency to run away, and then who is going to pay the mortgage both on the church building and on their home. No lamb or mutton bones to add to the soup pot is not a good thing.

Eventually, these radically saved people move on. (Thank God?) Through suggestion, impatience, with God's leading, they will become missionaries to the jungles of South America, church planters in Russia, China, or maybe a few hundred miles away. There they learn the truth that the God they know is real, because God builds their work, even though it may not be apparent by worldly standards as measured back home. Then comes the reality, sending churches don't support missions work. This is not a new situation, Hudson Taylor in China learned that lesson well. So unless you build a worldly marketing organization, or the Lord gives you a prosperous church in the new location, the Lord's work must be altered to fit within the swill of today's material world.

Now the point of this soup message is not to get into details of why missions are not properly funded, the question is why doesn't the evangelical church have room for transcendent Christians?

The fact is that, just as Willow Creek has learned, programs don't make disciples of Jesus Christ, they make converts to Jesus friendly programs. That is the nature of human sin. Profane fire also doesn't seek God in the way He commands either. So what work can we do to build the church? So what work can we do to build the church? So what work can we do to build the church?

Jesus Christ build's His church and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it. (Matthew 16:18) It is too bad that He doesn't get more cooperation from today's visible congregations, but they are too busy dispensing the worldly soup of materialism, that they don't have time for the true gospel in the context of both God's transcendent law and His transcendent grace. The whole liturgy on Sunday is built around that dead orthodoxy.

That dead orthodoxy is based upon the concept that we have always done it that way, whether that way can trace it's roots back 500 years, 1000 years, since John Kennedy was President, or what we saw last week on television. Dead orthodoxy builds mausoleums to worldly religion, self centered sin, dead

music, pedantic exposition, temporal relativism, and we could go on, and on.

Living stones is the concept introduced in the Bible in 1 Peter 2. This is a quite different concept than sheep, especially building a sheepfold where the sheep are fed. I realize that you can use sheep bones to make worldly soup, and once discarded they may become the dry bones, of Ezekiel 37, but the point is that people are not sheep and neither were they designed to be orphans cast into this world to scrounge whatever porridge the world may decide to dispense.

This further means that transcendent Christians are not shuffled off to Buffalo, or China, or Russia, or the jungles of South America unless they truly are called there. Dead mausoleum stones don't need any support, living stones require living support, no matter where they may be placed, because even though they may upset the dead orthodoxy, they are also God's agents for continual renewal or resurrection, just other terms for eternal life.

This brings us to the concept of Praise or Gratitude. Paul says that the gospel is the power of God for salvation. In Romans 1:16 and elsewhere in the New Testament you find the link between the gospel and God's power. That is not the power to start and run programs, that is the power to change dead stones into living stones, stupid sheep into adopted children of God, and tepid shepherds into Godly leaders.

Luther and the reformers believed in the Priesthood of all believers. Furthermore, they might question if post modern evangelicals are even Christians? However, within churches God calls people, not because of what they can do for God, but because they are willing to understand what God has done for them. That separates the many called from the few chosen.

It is the power of the gospel is what changes dead orthodoxy into living worship. This is where a loving father descends and forgives the sins of His children and offers unconditionally the answers to all of life's important questions, encouraging us to not be just what we can be by our own initiative, but all He has prepared for us to accomplish not only in this life, but the life to come.

I realize I was blessed by an encouraging natural father, and most children are not gifted with that natural inheritance. However, that natural handicap contrasted with the gift I sometimes take for granted, can be turned into a transcendent blessing that must be given away, to

more fully understand. This is just some of the great things you may be encouraged to do for God's glory alone.

The essence of praise or gratitude is not what you can do for God, whatever and wherever, praise is being daily changed a little more into the image of Christ. Slowly you begin the translation into the unique eternal personality God created you to be. This always starts with what God trained you to be in the first place and moves you gracefully forward and upward from there. That means being a missionary, if that is what you really want to be within your life, but not if you use the mission field to do something for God and they won't let you do that in church. This is where training, vocation, and calling begin to sort themselves out.

The transcendent power of the gospel, does not make good people better, it translates bad people into eternal transcendence. In other words, it changes dead bones into real living eternal personalities, death to life. That is accomplished as through God's grace as we learn to die to self interest, and live in and for our eternal destiny. That makes all the difference in the world, and it is the only hope in a world that wants everyone to eat their materialism soup for every meal.

Soli deo gloria.