

The Culture Problem

By

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For most of my life, I've heard people rail about the failings of our culture and been subject to the dire warnings that came along with these diatribes. And for most of my life I agreed with them. I noticed recently that my level of agreement with the soldiers of the culture war has been eroding. In some areas, it's completely gone.

This erosion is, in my estimation, the result of several problems I have with the underlying notions from which their overall perspective proceeds. The most fundamental of which is the concept that the West ever has been conceptually 'christian'. Their logic creates a comparison between an ideal state and contrasts that with the current state. The problem with their logic is that it assumes the ideal state actually ever existed. In this case, it assumes the United States was at its founding 'christian'. There are too many facts that get in the way of this assumption.

This isn't meant to say that the Founding Fathers weren't good men. They were. The problem is that their principles didn't translate their 'christian' ideals into law. This is evidenced by the fact that, at the conclusion of our founding: slavery was still legal, women were still at best second class, the Native Americans were still viewed as sub-human, and the zealous production and consumption of alcohol was viewed as a virtue and not a liability. None of this leads to the conclusion that in 1776 this nation was fundamentally Christian. In all candor, it lends credence to the idea that this nation was at best flawed. We have made strides over the intervening centuries to be sure, but the ideal state cited by many in the culture war in my view never really existed. If the ideal state never existed, then their comparisons just don't hold water.

Absent an ideal state to compare against, the 'then' and 'now' comparisons become poor analogies. They become apples and grizzly bears comparisons that make no sense at all. Any first year debate student would be flogged vigorously for comparing 1776 morality, philosophy, ideology, or theology with the current state, and rightly so. If the ideal state is a fantasy, then comparing now against it is pointless, it would make as much sense to compare now with India in the 6th century.

The next serious issue I have is with their fundamental philosophy. In addition to being ultimately exceptionally negative and pessimistic, it flows from a mechanistic and mechanical theological place. It views the faith as a building, and the various elements they war to preserve as bricks within the building. This perspective is not the holistic life giving agrarian perspective we find espoused by Jesus. The difference may seem trivial, but Jesus goes out of his way in several places to say he wasn't building a new edifice, but rather freeing us from the prison of the existing edifice. The metaphors, and parables of Jesus are more often than not holistic, and agrarian, 'The Kingdom of God is like a vine', 'A sower' went out to sow seed'.

My point being this: Christianity isn't a building and the components of our faith are not bricks that need preservation. Buildings made of bricks are inflexible and capable of collapse if undermined. The bride of Christ is nothing of the sort. Bricks also make walls and walls divide those inside from those outside. Jesus didn't come to create divisions, but rather to erase them, as the apostle Paul stated, "In Christ there is neither

Jew nor Greek...” The Bride of Christ is so much bigger than our bricks, buildings, and battlements that we build to contain her.

That isn't meant to say that we don't have a serious moral dilemma in the present state, we do. The culture warriors believe that the problem is best resolved by conventional political, judicial, and societal pressure. Their philosophy smacks of desperation and it reeks of arrogant foolishness. They believe that with the right law being passed, the right justices on the bench, the right groups putting pressure and the problem will be obviated. Judge them from their results, what have they achieved, nothing, zero, zip, nada on the positive side of the ledger. On the negative side of the ledger they have managed to squander what precious little credibility the church had left. They managed to reinforce the stereotypes relating to Christians and Christianity with their arrogance, their ignorance, and their boorish behavior. And they have made the work of the kingdom harder for all those who dare to try it.

The solution to the dilemma we face with our culture comes from understanding it properly. The problem posed by our culture has moral implications to it, but it is not a moral problem per say. The problem posed by our culture is one of the heart. Jesus said, “Where your heart is, there your treasure will be.” Right now the heart of our culture is focused on sinful things, lustful things, and carnal things. No amount of legislation, judicial pronouncements, or societal bullying is going to pull our culture from the object of its affection.

What is needed is for people of faith to smoke what they're selling. If we want people to change, we must live in the manner we want others to. If no other compelling reason exists than to set the right example. More specifically a large percentage of our cultural ills would evaporate if people of faith simply lived as the claim they do. What would happen to the divorce rate, the abortion rate, or the rate at which pornography is purchased if the Christian community simply stopped participating in it? Would our societal ills be as daunting if Christians weren't active participants in them?

The answer of course is obvious; our cultural problems would be far less serious if blood bought believers weren't bound up in the problem. The solution is simple, but infinitely difficult. We need to resolve as a community to give up our graven idols and affectations that are part of our culture and be drawn into relationship with God. The process is akin to transferring a plant from one place to another or grafting a vine into another plant. It takes careful deliberation, tender patient resolve, and submission on the part of the plant to succeed. The absence of any or all of these things means failure.

Also, from a macro perspective, if the faith community lived out their faith in a demonstrable way, if they walked their talk in genuine terms, it would set an example that nothing else could match. A life of faith lived out of loving devotion needs no defense, no political action committee, no 501C3, and no charitable foundation. It's the life we were sent her to earth to experience. It's the life Jesus died to give us. We should at the very least give that life a try.

Imagine a world in which the Christians actually lived out the example of Christ. They loved as he loved. They were compassionate as he was compassionate. They were tender as he was tender. Their focus was truly on God. They lived in peaceful harmony with their neighbor wherever they found him or her. That is a compelling vision isn't it. Can you imagine that our culture wouldn't be seduced by that vision? Can you envision a scenario where people wouldn't want that life? I can't. The only thing separating us

from that vision is our desire. If we desired this vision, it could happen. If we wanted it as much as we wanted the substance of our lusts, it would be a reality.

We have to be seduced by it. We have to lust after it. We have to make it the urgent desire of our heart, mind, and soul. So let us begin.