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*The Emerging Christian Minority
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*Advice on Being a Millennially Despised Minority
David Novak, University of Toronto*

This address began with Rabbi Novak recalling his experiences while teaching at the University of Virginia, in specific his interaction with Evangelical students who often came to him for advice. Their general experience was that though they had come from environments where their particular form of Christianity was in the majority, they had now entered an environment of hostility towards not only their beliefs, but their very way of being, their "world view as it were." After hearing them out Rabbi Novak would remark, "You sound like Jews." to which they often responded, "We feel like Jews."

It is from this general observation that the remainder of Rabbi Novak's presentation took its form and made its point. That is, that Jews have existed for almost their entire history as a minority in a world hostile not only to their beliefs but their very way of being. While at face value this appears to be nothing but a failure to the minority, Rabbi Novak asserted that this was in fact a blessing to the Jews and could be a blessing to orthodox, catholic Christians, whom he described as a minority within a minority.

To illustrate this point he referenced the recent history of Quebec, which was for most of it's history a theologically and culturally Roman Catholic province. Rabbi Novak stated that this lead to a sort of laxity, a taking for granted the privileged state in which the church existed. In recent times the Roman Church has found itself having to reconsider it's dearly held position in the lives of the Quebecois, and begin the difficult process of rebuilding itself in an area which it once dominated.

Rabbi Novak then spoke of the difficulty inherent in Protestantism having been the majority in the life of this nation, if not legally, then in a de-facto manner. This majority leads to and often results in a religious system not in fact transforming the majority but rather being transformed by it. Which he asserts is the inherent danger in understanding the Jewish people or the church for that matter as a "light to the gentiles" (which he states is an incorrect translation of the Hebrew) but rather a "light for the nations." The distinction according to Rabbi Novak is that whereas the one expects the chosen people to go out into the world and throw the message at the people, the other holds that the people should remain faithful and wait to be illuminated by God before the eyes of all people, and by this illumination draw others to themselves and ultimately to God.

If this is in fact the case, he indicates that being a minority in a largely pagan society is not a bad thing at all for the church, but can rather call the church back to it's roots. The Jewish people and the church which consists of the new children of Abraham should revel and celebrate it's roots and

traditions. It should concentrate less on selling something to society in order to change it, and subsequently be changed by it, and should be who it is, not who it is expected to be.

The thing that held the Evangelical students together, and will hold the Christian/Jewish minority together is a focus on the common life and the lived traditions of the respective religions. That because God did not choose the great and the good of this world, but the low and humble, the Church/Judaism should not seek to be anything other than the chosen minority despised by the world, but beloved of God.

Observations

While I whole heartedly agree that the church should celebrate its traditions and cease with the general corporate, commercial model of growth that has ill served us for so long, I cannot help but wonder if a whole hearted adoption of this methodology will result in a sort of agoraphobic or xenophobic Christianity which is entirely inward facing. I agree that God does “choose the foolish things of this world... the things that are despised... the things that are not.” But I am not convinced that he chooses them because they have made themselves such, but rather because it is the very essence of who they are and always have been. Perhaps it is because I do not think the Constantinian Christianity is a bad thing, as is so often now asserted, or perhaps it is because to make one’s self low in order to achieve greatness or even just success smacks of a Uriah Heap brand of false humility. Whatever the case I am not altogether convinced of the accuracy of this mode of thinking. Rather I think we ought with St. Paul to say as a church: “For I have learned, in whatever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me.”

Realist Engagement in the Midst of Crumbling Empire: Augustinian Thoughts
Paige Hochschild, Mt. St. Mary’s University, Emmitsburg, MD

This presentation began with the following quote from St. Augustine’s work *De Civitatis Dei*: “If the times are evil it is because you are evil.” As strange a quote as this seems, it was plain by the end there was ample reason for this quote to set the tenor of the presentation.

In the above mentioned work Augustine outlines the principal that the church should be the living temple of the God and also a living sacrifice to God. Written in a period of cultural and political decline, a resurgence of paganism had begun, and with it a renewed fervor for public sacrifice. Augustine therefore outlines that the concept of sacrifice is an integral part of religious faith. Sacrifice is an offering of an act, substance, or of the self. However true sacrifice is only those things which are done/offered for purpose of cleaving to God. Sacrifice can only be offered to God and not to any created thing. Christ’s offering of himself to himself as God excludes any other offering. Likewise the Sacrament demonstrates/shows forth the sacrificial duty and nature of the church which consists of the community of the redeemed and because it is the body of Christ is the whole and highest sacrifice and must complete the work of Christ’s sacrifice in itself, through itself.

The Church is a sacrifice in the following ways:

1. Christ is the Church's head and since she is his body and he himself is a sacrifice then she too is a sacrifice. This sacrifice is not dependent upon the outward unity of the church, but rather by the fidelity of the people to their God and therefore their unity with him who is himself the sacrifice.

2. The Church is a sacrifice because it demands eternal worship which is a reflection of internal devotion. The incarnation is entire and demands visible physical worship to express this invisible reality. We are creatures dependent on visibility and therefore need visible worship to comprehend the reality of the Church as body of Christ. The fight for truth is itself a visible self-offering and is the way whereby we unite ourselves to Christ's priesthood.

3. Likewise, because the Church is effective in the world it is a sacrifice. Humility makes the church visible by its opposition to pride. The church must find its security not in itself but in its God. Remember then who and what you are in him. Works of mercy demonstrate this, but only through the offering of them to God's glory.

Finally, we can only be good through the virtues which come through sacrifice, and since we are evil and make the times evil we can make them good by being good, and we are only made good through being united as a sacrifice in Christ's supreme sacrifice. The Church must strive for this visibility in the world so that it may be a visible sacrifice in, to, and for the world.

Observations

Really excellent presentation which aptly connects the reality of Augustine's world and church with the very similar situation we find ourselves in.

Is It Good to Be Persecuted?

William T. Cavanaugh, DePaul University, Chicago, IL

The question must today be asked, "Is it good to be persecuted?" The answer is a resounding "NO." It can however be said that the church is stronger under persecution. Likewise, it can and often is said that if you are being persecuted you must be doing something right!

There exist two general points of view on persecution, at the present. Both of which are substantially flawed, because neither of them can countenance the idea of a tension existing between a Christian being at the same time both a Christian and an American.

The Liberal position is represented by the recently published author Candida Moss, who is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame. The major thrust of her position is that persecution is largely imaginary. It is really only a complex which exists to empower retaliative behavior towards those who differ in opinion. This is most clearly illustrated in the fictitious nature of almost all of the records of early Christian martyrs. These mythological martyrdoms were created to legitimize the existence of the church long after the supposed events. The opposition to Christianity by the Roman empire and its subsequent persecution are only myths, there existed very little actual opposition or persecution. The example of this cited was the martyrdom of St. Polycarp. Ms. Moss asserts that the only things one can know for sure about this event is that there was a man named Polycarp and that he died. Ms. Moss does however accept all legends which consist of Christians demanding to be made martyrs because of their obvious suicidal tendencies. The general

evil of this practice is not however limited to the physical violence incited by real or supposed martyrs, their confessions are themselves a form of rhetorical violence.

The reality is that these people and indeed people today are not engaged in a spiritual battle, but instead a systematic demonizing of those who are understood to be against us. Christians are not, and ought not to be at odds with the world. Rather they ought to conform to it, and avoid all forms of resistance to it. The “real martyrs” were more than likely only political dissidents who were justly being prosecuted for disturbing the peace and unity of the Roman people. The sacrifices being demanded of the Christians were no more dangerous than our “pledge of allegiance.”

In making these assertions she has therefore imposed upon history a thoroughly modern understanding of the separation of religion and politics. In so doing, she has rendered the Romans as mere prosecutors and the Christians as religious zealots and persecutors. Her conclusion is then, that Christians then and now ought not to assert themselves in a pluralistic society, but instead follow the general attitude of the times in which they find themselves.

The Conservative view is illustrated by the Roman Catholic Bishop’s campaign for religious freedom in opposition to the actions recently taken by the Obama administration. Their general thrust is that nothing should be imposed upon the Roman Catholic people that would lead to their having to choose to be either American or Roman Catholic. This view point stems from the flawed notion that America was at some point a Christian nation, until the recent administration took office.

The presenter concluded by making the following points:

1. We must focus on real martyrs around the world and not political issues like gay marriage and contraception.
2. Both of these positions are over blown and extreme and therefore are to be avoided.
3. Liberal democracy and the kingdom of God are not the same thing and cannot ever be so.
4. Christianity reveals the injustice and falsehood of scapegoating and does not blame the victims, but only the victimizers.
5. Give up on all hopes to retain the favor bestowed upon the church in the Constantinian era.
6. We should have to choose between being Christian and American, since the two can never truly be compatible.
7. Worshipping a crucified God combines love and power as distinct from love and violence.

Observations

The first position is clearly sensationalism for sensationalism’s sake. My college Hebrew professor once observed to me that people who make such outlandish statements are only trying to do so in order to catch attention since orthodoxy is not “new” or “original” they often do not believe it either. However a lie once told he went on to say, and told repeatedly thereafter becomes truth to the liar.

The second position I am more sympathetic to. I do not think that the Bishops are wrong to call the people's attention to this matter. If one does not keep alert, then one is found sleeping when the Master comes. Having been raised in Chicago, and being well familiar with the Chicago political system, it was fairly clear to me where the presenter's sympathies lie.

A Tree Planted by Streams of Water: Lessons on Hope from Scripture
Kathryn Schifferdecker, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN

Psalm 1

Christians are to be like a "tree." As referenced in Psalm one, we are to be steady and firm. We are to nurture inward life by the consumption of Scripture. We are to study and pray not only for ourselves but for those who will rest in the shade our branches provide.

Elijah

Hope can be found in the story of Elijah on Mt. Horeb. He has slain the prophets, and yet is a marked man. He flees not only the threat of Jezebel, but also suffering from pastoral burn out he flees the prophetic office and the God who has called him to it. He runs away retracing the steps of the Exodus, till he arrives at Horeb. God however calls Elijah out of his self-imposed isolation, reminding him that he has provided 7000 faithful to help him in his ministry. Likewise we are not alone, and should not run from our vocation in a time of trial. Like Elijah God gives us:

1. Purpose through vocation
2. Food for the journey in Word and Sacrament
3. Many faithful to aid us in our vocation

It is revealed to us that contrary to popular belief "culture" is not an unequivocal good. Rather we are called to proclaim the gospel, and if we do not do so, we cease to be the church.

Job

Though God may destroy, Job still defends himself to God. Do not be afraid to call out to him, and upon him. He still has hope in the face of all opposition, God will yet have mercy if we endure to the end. Not only this, but our vindication will be one in person and face to face.

The lesson to learn in our sufferings is one of humility. While some have understood God's conversation with Job to be accusatory, she understands it to be invitational. God calls Job to leave himself behind, leave behind his grief and be drawn into a world filled with wonder.

The Church must leave behind its grief and be drawn through humility to a similar state of wonder. It must learn to know God by moving past simply hearing, God to seeing him face to face.

After sorrow is over, we must love again. Just as God calls Job to love again and bear children after the pain of losing his own, so God calls us to leave behind shattered ideologies and love again. As with Job, our hope as a church lies in life and with the God who is life.

God is only found where those who seek glory are afraid to look: "The child in a crib, the criminal on a cross, the corpse in a crypt." Seek him in humility and by humility, and you will find and be found by him.

Observations

Really, truly, excellent presentation. Very encouraging and well-illustrated. We would all do well to remember that we are inheritors of the traditions mentioned above and to seek comfort in them. My church history professor at Nashotah once quipped “church history is the balm of the afflicted.” I agree and since the Jewish people are the “Old Testament Church” then their history is our history, and their balm ours.

American Orthodoxy: A Minority that Came of Age
Anton Vrame, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese in America

Eastern Orthodoxy has always been and will likely always be a minority in this nation. Currently it consists of around 800,000 people. Historically this number was often inflated, and this was used by the Orthodox to gain advantage politically.

Events in the Emergence of Orthodoxy

1. 1941 – The first attempt at official legitimacy was made in order to exempt priests and seminarians from the draft. Assertion made that though they are divided by culture and language yet all Orthodox communions are one in faith.
2. 1955 – Recognition was gained by the military in the issuing of “EO” dog tags.
3. 1988 – 48 states have recognized Orthodoxy as one of the “major faith families.”

In this process the church learned how to gain recognition and build upon it to further its influence. It learned to utilize grass roots efforts to move towards the goal desired. It renewed the effective ministry to its own while also gaining resonance by the state and society.

Today Eastern Orthodoxy is completely indifferent to its status as a minority. As the fourth “major faith family” it recognizes that its importance is gained by its theology not its numerical weight. It has learned to be unafraid to use its “famous connections” in politics, Hollywood, etc. to achieve the goals it has set for itself. It has thereby claimed the American story and identity for itself and made it, its own.

Observations

My coverage of this presentation may seem abrupt. It is. This is because it was really nothing more than an exercise in actuarial science. I kept hoping for a resolution, an application of the information, and none was given.

Keeping up the Tradition: Preaching and Pastoring as an Emerging Minority
Robert Hendrickson, St. John's Cathedral, Denver, CO

What should the mission of the church look like in our age? Father Hendrickson presents an example of seemingly unlikely success. His foundational principals come out of community life but revolve around the following tenants:

The missional church should be:

1. A place of mission (as in the old concept of the free churches as opposed to closed society churches)
2. A place centered on the Blessed Sacrament.
3. A place of disciplined prayer (i.e. the Daily Office)
4. A place unafraid to minister to the young as well as the old.
5. A place simultaneously connected with things historical and things current.

For Father Hendrickson this took the form at first of the Community of St. Hilda attached to Christ Church, in New Haven CT. It is a community which he labored to establish for “twenty somthings” and based it upon a long closed conventual community once associated with that particular parish. The community straight away adopted a local inner city parish as it’s base with the goal of laboring among the people there and reviving the life of the parish. They utilized the following:

1. First going door to door in the neighborhood in a systematic manner, not so much to proselytize as to make known their presence in the community. At each place they asked if there were things that people needed to be prayed for that they could offer up in the context of the daily prayer.
2. They then invited the entire geographical community to a dinner with no strings attached.
3. They determined that all the work they did in the community and in the parish would be centered on the Eucharist, to take the common holy things of God to the common holy people of God.

In the subsequent years, not only were the lives of the interns involved (for three year stretches) changed, but the community was changed and the parish also, acting as the new center of it’s life. In it’s first year the community offered 8 positions and had 87 applicants.

Why were so many drawn? What were these young people looking for? In a word, “authenticity.” These people were tired of being pandered to by the church by programs and “relevant” worship. They wanted something substantial, something connected, something traditional. They had been driven from other churches by watered down worship and theology, a generally consumerist culture in the church, and sought a connection to the church catholic. Part of the authenticity was the desire to be challenged by the church, not pampered by it. They wanted to be challenged to think, and theologize. To work for change and be changed. To worship in a transcendent way and be drawn up into transcendancy. Likewise they wanted to be taken seriously, and not told by their elders what they should want from the church. As a result the community was decidedly catholic in it’s theology, life, and worship.

What marked the tipping point for the transformation of the young people was a subtle change in language. They began by referring to me/mine and moved unknowingly to we/our. They agreed to say nothing before they began the day with the words, “O Lord, open thou our lips.” They were given standards by which to live, and were eager to add to them and create a rule to guide them communally and individually.

Father Hendrickson knew something had taken root when one of the interns told him “if I miss the daily office I’m not as good a person, I’ve lost my connection with God who is good, and his goodness revealed in others.” This led to a desire to deepen their spiritual lives, and so regular spiritual direction and sacramental confession was instituted for each, which was the most difficult and rewarding part of the program for them. Likewise they were expected to be regular in their attendance at Sunday Mass and regular in their reception of the sacrament. Their regular attendance drew many of them to become involved in the various ministries of that parish and has produced multiple vocations.

The benefits were not solely spiritual however. The interns were forced to learn how to be together with others and respect other’s space, how to budget their time and also their finances. Both the spiritual and the practical benefits were substantial but the stress involved in achieving them was also substantial. This however demonstrates the value of the change, for comfort does not produce spiritual growth, only challenge and stress. The lesson for the church in general is found in this reality, if it demands nothing of those who come to it, it will get nothing from them. This generation is not interested in revisionism or faddish styles of worship, it is interested in all things being authentic and done well, a matter of quality over quantity. It is willing to invest time to reap a more valuable outcome.

What other lessons are there for the church in this experience?

1. Return to the traditions of the church in:
 - a. Liturgy
 - b. Monasticism/Communal Life
 - c. Church Music
 - d. Reverential language and ceremony
2. Stop seeking packed churches and big budgets, look for something more profound and enduring.
3. Help people to be more authentically Christian, who God wants and is calling them to be, not who we presume they are or should be.
4. Capitalize on our heritage of authentic catholic Christianity.
5. Get attention and involvement by simply being who you are as a church to the best of your ability.

Where is Christ in this mix? To quote James DeKoven in the “adoring of the thing itself.” That is to say Christ (particularly in the sacrament) is the center of worship and adoration, or work and prayer, of self-offering and sacrifice. The thing this generation wants is that “thing itself” Christ himself, “and him crucified.” They seek the growth through the experience of the sacraments, the pilgrim nature of the community, challenge and liturgy.

While most of western Christianity is continuing to throw away the “old” and “out dated” they are picking through the trash can and finding treasure. The church must stop trying to be relevant and so betray itself, but rather must seek to matter in their lives. Be faithful to it’s traditions and welcome others to join in them. Form it’s identity not based upon the culture, but in opposition to it. Seek not to attract the right sort of people, but the right sort of servant for Christ.

Observations

This presentation alone made attending this conference worthwhile!!! I am completely convinced, and have been for a long time, of the rectitude of Fr. Hendrickson's assertions and observations. My own parish (St. Matthias' in Athens) historically had a relationship with the sizable local community college, but this has died out over the years. They are eager to revive it now, and I am convinced that the implementation of some or all of Fr. Hendrickson's methods would be successful. I have given him my contact information and hope to work with him in the future toward such a goal. I believe that his wisdom would make an admirable addition to our diocese and that we should utilize him in whatever way/capacity we can.

The Gospel in "A Secular Age"

Joseph D. Small, University of Dubuque Theological Seminary, Dubuque IA

The Church in our age is diminished from without and within. In order to understand why this is so we must ask ourselves, "What does it mean to live in a secular age?" What does it mean for God to be a choice among many others, rather than "the" choice?

We can no longer take for granted the notion that all morality is derived from belief in God and leads to God. This is reflected clearly in the decline in charitable giving to religious organizations.

Indifference is the great threat to Christianity in our age, not a sort of direct opposition. There is no longer a need for God, but rather there now exists a general assumption of total human self-sufficiency. There now no longer exist any sort of cultural or theological ties to hold people to the church. And even among those who do go, belonging without believing is very common. People no longer have need to the programs which were and are supposed to draw them to the church.

This has led to the following issue. Churches because they have adopted this consumerist, pandering mindset have ceased to be simply "in the world" and are now "of the world." The belief demonstrated by the practice is that it is we, not God who bring about "the kingdom." This has rendered the church itself a mission field, rather than a worker in the mission field.

How then are we to preach to this age?

1. Turn away from marketing and schemes.
2. Stop imitating the exceptional apostolic age in Acts, and start imitating the post-apostolic age of church growth.
3. Live distinctive lives that set people apart as Christians with communally held beliefs.
4. Be exclusive in a way that the pagans are not, you cannot be both you must be one or the other.
5. Recognize that the church is not one offering among many, but the only real offering.
6. Do not be afraid to take in the marginalized and to be marginalized.
7. Do not just mentally assent to God's truth, but live it so as to be changed by it.

8. Be counter-cultural.
9. Preach not only in words, but also in deeds.
10. Go and tell what you have seen and heard, don't keep it to yourself.
11. Live visibly different from the norm of society.

In conclusion, the Church was and must again be confident about who and what it is. It is God who will provide the programs, the people, and the strategies. We have only to be faithful and hopeful.

Observations

A very accurate and succinct observation of the state of and path to the present situation in the Church. Gloomy but tinged with hope and challenge.