



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Articles

LIVING WITHOUT CONSTANTINE

David Anguish

As I recall, the first time I saw a reference to "Constantinianism" was in the book by Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, *Resident Aliens: A Provocative Christian Assessment of Culture and Ministry for People Who Know Something Is Wrong*. To mark Constantinianism's beginning in the West, the authors used 313 AD, the time when Emperor Constantine, in what is usually called the Edict of Milan, officially became more tolerant of Christianity. What Rome began to tolerate, they eventually promoted as good for the Empire. What they promoted, they eventually made legal. The more modern idea of a "Christian nation" has its roots in the last step.

Hauerwas and Willimon used 1963 to mark the end of Constantinianism in the United States. That year, the Fox Theater in Greenville, South Carolina, where one of them lived, first opened on Sunday. The author and six others "made a pact to enter the front door of [their] church, to be seen, then quietly slip out the back door and join John Wayne at the Fox" (*Resident Aliens*, 15).

In *Resident Aliens*, they make three important points. First, "the Constantinian world view" served "to prop up the 'Christian' culture and mold its young." Second, our culture no longer does that. Third, and most important, the loss of the cultural prop "is not a death to lament, [but] an opportunity to celebrate" (*Resident Aliens*, 18).

How can that be? They answer,

Now our churches are free to embrace our roots, . . . [becoming] a faith community that does not ask the world to do what it can only do for itself. What we once knew theologically, we now know experientially: . . . Christians are not naturally *born* in places like Greenville or anywhere else. Christians are intentionally *made* by an adventuresome church, which has again learned to ask the right questions to which Christ alone supplies the right answers (*Resident Aliens*, 18-19).

Sometimes, people of faith refuse to admit the obvious and what it means. Some act like nothing's changed while others grudgingly acknowledge a change but cling to the view that things will reverse soon. If their reasons were grounded in seeing the church do for itself what only it can do, we would readily agree. Unfortunately, some seem determined that the way to turn things around is to win the right political battles. In other words, they want Constantinianism restored more than they want the church to be salt and light in the world. The

going-to-church habit proceeds apace with little apparent urgency for finding ways to be more active in making disciples.

Where living without "Constantine" is concerned, it would seem some restoration of the New Testament way is in order.

March 31, 2013
www.davidanguish.com