



THE BEREHA PAGE

“Examining . . . to see if these things are so” ~ Acts 17.11

Honest before God

“While readily using the Bible for comfort, instruction, and praise, Christians may seldom if ever look to it as a resource to voice their pain, grief, and anger. This suggests an attitude toward prayer and piety that seriously underestimates the role of lament and protest in biblical faith, that no longer hears the voice of Rachel in both Old and New Testaments, and that diminishes Christian life and ministry by silencing honest lament.” ~ Kathleen D. Billman and Daniel L. Migliore, *Rachel's Cry: Prayer of Lament and Rebirth of Hope* (United Church Press, 1999), 23

Preacher Proficiency

“We excuse other men for not having a technical knowledge of the Bible. We do not expect all men to know the details of medicine, law, banking, railroading. But the preacher cannot be excused from an accurate apprehension of the New Testament. This is the book that he undertakes to expound. It is his specialty, and this he must know whatever else he does or does not know. Excuses for neglecting the New Testament are only excuses after all.” ~ A. T. Robertson, *The Minister and His Greek New Testament*, pb. ed. (Baker Book House, 1977), 19

Giving an Answer to the World that Now Is

David Anguish

In a 2014 *First Things* article in anticipation of 2017's 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation's inception, historians Thomas Howard and Mark Noll noted the need

to take stock of the massive demographic shift in Protestantism from the North Atlantic to the Global South. Shortly before 1917, an estimated 11 percent of the world's Protestant Christians lived outside Europe or the United States; today [2014] that number stands at an astounding 73 percent and is growing.¹

It would be good to report that the shift they reference resulted solely from a sustained evangelistic effort by Protestants in the Global South while adherent numbers in the North Atlantic region at least remained constant. But the reality is that Protestant numbers have declined in the North as other worldviews have gained influence. Notable among them are syncretism and secularism.

An indicator of syncretism's growth is found in an NPR report that aired about the same time as the article by Howard and Noll. For a story on a growing trend of appointing interfaith chaplains on college campuses, Monique Parsons visited an evening gathering on the campus of the University of Southern California that included students who had come for “interfaith council.” They included “Muslim students, Catholics, a Sikh, an agnostic and a few that are hard to pin down.” One, a religion major and lifelong Methodist, reported that he had done a Torah study his freshman year, did atheist club, and had done “a Muslim halaqa, which is a kind of teaching.” He was one of a growing number of students who identified themselves with “hybridized identities . . . a Zen Christian, . . . a Hin-Jew, . . . a Jew-Bu.”²

Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon are among those who have addressed the increased influence of a secular outlook. In their book, *Resident Aliens*, the ongoing relevance of which is suggested by the release of an expanded 25th Anniversary edition in 2014, they note the demise of

Notable Flaw

"We have an unscientific attitude toward science, a religious attitude toward science. There is no scientific proof that only scientific proofs are good proofs; no way to prove by the scientific method that the scientific method is the only valid method. ~ Peter Kreeft, *Making Sense Out of Suffering* (Servant Books, 1986) 93

To Know Truth

"Without a thorough and deeply rooted understanding of the biblical view of truth as revealed, objective, absolute, universal, eternally engaging, antithetical and exclusive, unified and systematic, and as end in itself, the Christian response to postmodernism will be muted by the surrounding culture or will make illicit compromise with the truth-impoorished spirit of the age." ~ Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Postmodernism* (InterVarsity Press, 2000), 81-82

"Teaching ... All Things"

"One recurring problem when revivalist patterns of evangelism are followed, whether in single churches or in the 'mass evangelism' of citywide campaigns, is that they allow so little time for instruction." ~ James I. Packer, "What Is Evangelism?" *Focus on Evangelism: Readings for Thinking It Through*, ed. George Hunter (Discipleship Resources, 1978), 19

Crucial Question

"Regarding the next generation, we do well to remember that the answer to the question, 'Will our children have faith?' lies in another question: 'Will our faith have children?'" ~ Michael R. Weed, "Consecrated Pragmatism: Trends in Modern Worship," *Christian Studies* 19 (2003): 13

"Constantinianism," the "world view" wherein the state and surrounding culture "prop up the 'Christian' culture and mold its young." That our culture no longer does that is now axiomatic. What many are still coming to terms with is that the loss of this cultural prop "is not a death to lament. It is an opportunity to celebrate." The church has been freed to do what it was always called to do in the understanding that

Christians are not naturally *born* in places like Greenville [one of the author's hometown] 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.³

Responses to the cultural changes have varied. Some grudgingly admit the world is different, but hold out hope a reversal will come soon. Some seem convinced the solution will come from winning the right political battles, a course that leads one to wonder if they also think modern Constantines are necessary for the church's survival. We welcome support for godly values where we find it, but should recall that, historically, the alliance with Constantine was the *result*, not the *cause* of the church fulfilling its calling.

A better strategy is suggested by the last part of the *Resident Aliens* quotation cited above. We must hear the questions our culture asks or implies and respond with the appropriate answers only Christ gives. This will require us to look outside the box of answers we mastered and utilized in the world that used to be. But we need not despair; the first disciples faced a similar world, responded with appropriate answers, and left those answers for us to learn and use.

The question is, will we do the fresh study of the text necessary to identify and appropriately apply their answers to the world that now is?

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Notes

¹ Thomas Albert Howard & Mark A. Noll, "The Reformation at Five Hundred," *First Things*, Nov. 2014: 47-48. Read the article [here](#).

² Monique Parsons, "Interfaith Chaplains Revitalize An Old Role On College Campuses," October 16, 2014, "Heard on All Things Considered," NPR, <https://www.npr.org/2014/10/16/356728066/interfaith-chaplains-revitalize-an-old-role-on-college-campuses>. Accessed August 16, 2023.

³ Stanley Hauerwas & William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony*, expanded ed. (Abingdon Press, 2014), 18-19.

For a brief survey of the immediate and long-term impact of Constantine's 4th century grant of toleration and legal status to the church, see Michael R. Weed & Jeffrey Peterson, eds., *Things That Matter: A Guide to the Christian Faith*, 3rd ed. (Christian Studies Press, 2000), 71-89.

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