



"The true leader serves. Serves people. Serves their best interests, and in doing so will not always be popular, may not always impress. But because true leaders are motivated by loving concern than a desire for personal glory, they are willing to pay the price."
—Eugene B. Habeckerin

13-May-05

The West's Religion Problem

Church of the Great [God](#) is headquartered in Charlotte, North Carolina, and as such, it is considered to be located in America's Bible Belt. Polls like those conducted by George Barna show repeatedly that the most religious Americans live in the South, and we have the churches on just about every corner to prove it. Many of our roads are named something like "Salem Church Road" and "Ebenezer Church Road." Some of our towns boast names like "St. Matthews," "Smyrna," "Chapel Hill," "Corinth," and "[Trinity](#)." South Carolina still has blue laws that restrict buying and selling on Sundays to certain items and times. And don't even think about buying an "adult beverage" on Sundays in certain locales!

On a broader level, the United States is considered by the rest of [the world](#) to be a religious nation. Church attendance across America dwarfs that in other Western, industrialized nations. Most of our citizens consider the U.S. to be a "Christian nation," and point out as evidence our founding documents, the Pledge of Allegiance, the Congressional chaplains, the Ten Commandments on the doors of the Supreme Court, and many other biblical or religious

inscriptions, ceremonies, and traditions. Even the current administration's foreign policy is thought by many to be Fundamentalist Christian!

Even more broadly, religion played a key role in the development of Western civilization. Along with Classical Greek and Roman ideas, Judeo-Christian values and the unifying presence of the Catholic Church (and later the Protestant churches) molded the West's cultures, philosophies, sciences, governments, and traditions into the dominant force on earth. Like a religion itself, Western thought and culture has been exported worldwide by colonizing and trading nations, absorbing or at least changing its rivals in many perhaps irreversible ways.

Nevertheless, the West presently has a deep problem with religion. Some might describe it as a love-hate relationship, in that the powers that be—as well as the sheep that follow them—admire religion for its ability to unite, inspire, and motivate, but despise it for its perennial tendency to demand morality, equity, and accountability. In other words, as secular as the West has become, it sees religion as useful, but on its own terms. Because of this, in the present climate, religion as a force for encouraging moral conduct is practically powerless.

In his May 11, 2005, editorial titled "America's Basic Problem Is a Pastor Problem," Dr. Chuck Baldwin, pastor of Crossroads Baptist Church in Pensacola, Florida, makes a similar point. Holding up biblical heroes of [faith](#) as well as intrepid churchmen of history as examples, he complains that most church pastors in the U.S. are more interested in position and pay than in boldly proclaiming the truth of God. He is convinced that, if America is to turn from its present humanistic hedonism, godly leadership will have to return to its pulpits. Such a proposition is hard to disagree with.

There are many signs that churches in America and Western Europe are in a sad state of repair. The Catholic Church in America has the reputation of being a bastion of rebellion and liberal theology. For instance, American Catholic women are more likely to get an abortion than the national average, despite the fact that the Catholic Church itself is staunchly pro-life. American Catholics' visible angst over the election of conservative Cardinal Ratzinger as Pope Benedict XVI only underlines its wayward inclination.

Mainline Protestant churches are little better, if not worse. For example, the Anglican/Episcopal churches in both Britain and America are in steep decline in terms of attendance and new converts. They are leading proponents of many liberal issues, acceptance of homosexuality being the most noteworthy. Their most outspoken theologians say and write the most controversial things, questioning the deity of Christ, the resurrection, Jesus' miracles, and the general authority of Scripture at just about every turn. In fact, what is truly Christian about them is disintegrating at an astounding rate!

Astoundingly, many Fundamentalist churches are little better. While they generally acknowledge the veracity and authority of the Bible—and for the most part preach traditional Christian doctrines—a growing majority of them are more interested in becoming [mega-churches](#) rather than forces for positive societal change. A quick look at a list of "pastoral helps" and "church growth" literature provides dozens of reasons for understanding that today's churches are businesses that must grow or die. Too many pastors study business models for ideas about church growth rather than biblical models for ideas about Christian growth.

The problem, then, is not that religion is absent from modern life but that it is feeble, emasculated, and distracted. There are plenty of churches, but they have little impact on their congregants. By compromising with God's Word, they have abdicated their position as the moral conscience of society. Even if they desired to "Cry aloud, [and] spare not" ([Isaiah 58:1](#)), who would listen? How much credibility do they have left after allowing decades of self-indulgence to transpire with hardly a challenge? The Bible tells us, "A righteous man who falters before the wicked is like a murky spring and a polluted well" ([Proverbs 25:26](#)).

A primary but long-term solution to the West's religion problem is righteousness in its ministers, who stand up to ungodliness and who preach righteousness to their congregations. As Paul urges Timothy: "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all [longsuffering](#) and teaching. . . . But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry" ([II Timothy 4: 2, 5](#)). It does not need to be a mass-movement, backed by millions of dollars

or accompanied by a slick marketing campaign. All it takes is a growing number of ministers who quietly and consistently uphold God's standards of righteousness within their congregations. God will supply the rest.

"Then [[Jesus](#)] said to His disciples, 'The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest'" ([Matthew 9:37-38](#)).

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Purpose-Driven Churches \(Part 1\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

God holds mankind responsible for knowing about Him and His divine attributes. Moral and spiritual deterioration begins when one does not live up to what he knows to be right. Deep within every human being is a consciousness of God based upon the public revelation of creation as well as the spirit of man—a basic conscience as a guide—not limited to converted people. Conscience, unfortunately, is always subject to education combined with what we choose to believe. The United States is plunging into a cesspool of immorality despite a so-called 'new-paradigm church,' 'emerging church' or 'outcome based religion' which is based on Satan's Gnostic education, stealing the name 'Christian,' while systematically rejecting God's truth. The truth is unacceptable to human nature. Unity cannot be achieved because of the problems of sin that drives all to seek their own way. The whole world, by rejecting the knowledge of God, is spurning God's gift of unity. It has been that way from the beginning when Adam and Eve didn't believe God enough to submit to Him. The human heart is incredibly sick; we desperately need a savior.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Elisha and the Shunammite Woman, Part II: Serving God's Children](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Comparing God's true ministers to false ministers—and seeing their fruit—reveals how the church must be revived spiritually. And "sneezing" plays a major role!

If you would like to subscribe to the C.G.G. Weekly newsletter, please visit our [Email Subscriptions page](#).
