

The Faithful Pastor in a Faithless World

Service to pastors, and to other Christians, on how to deal with heresies, false philosophies, and counterfeit religions, has often depended on an illustration about counterfeit money.

If you wish to be able to detect counterfeit bills, so the advice goes, do not study counterfeits, study the genuine currency and you will be able to see the difference instantly. So too, in order to unmask false religious ideas, study the Bible.

To a certain extent this is good advice. A genuine twenty dollar bill is distinguished by its paper and its superb engraving. Any deviation marks a counterfeit.

So too with heresies and false philosophies: if we know the Scripture, then any deviation is counterfeit.

However, while this advice is good to a certain extent, and while in theory it is quite sufficient, it is insufficient in many actual situations. In particular, it is insufficient for most laymen and for many busy pastors who do not keep every detail of the Bible constantly in mind.

For example, a teller in a bank, who is daily conscious of the details of a genuine bill, its color, its number, the face, the tiny lines, may easily see what is wrong with a new counterfeit. But most of us who do not handle so much money fail to notice what is wrong.

Therefore when a batch of counterfeit bills floods a city, the banks will warn the people to look at some one particular detail. The upper left hand corner has a broken line, or the face is smudged, or some other defect is pointed out.

This information will not help us to detect other counterfeits, and is therefore inadequate for all situations, but it is precisely what is needed in this one situation right now.

So too with counterfeit religions. Of course we want to know the whole Bible; and indeed we could never detect any heresy without the Bible. Nevertheless, when Mormon missionaries or Jehovah's Witnesses flood a neighborhood, we want to know something particular about Mormonism or Jehovah's Witnesses.

For this reason, I would like at this time to list some of the counterfeits that are prevalent. I shall not talk of Mormonism or Jehovah's Witnesses, but of more pervasive and more serious attacks on Christianity. There are several batches of counterfeit bills in circulation, and no community in the United States is free from them. No doubt you have met them all, but if I may list them again, we shall all be more alert and better prepared to do battle for the Lord.

The first false philosophy and counterfeit religion in this list is communism. By communism I do not mean merely the subversion of our government by the paid agents of Soviet Russia or Red China. By some argument I cannot follow the courts of our land have made it illegal to call a man a communist unless he is the agent of a foreign power. He may believe and advocate a communistic society, yet we are not to call him a communist.

In reverse this would be similar to the situation that would arise if a Russian court decreed that only Americans can be called Christians. British people, German People, French People, who held the same belief could not be called Christians. But of course the Soviet courts are not that stupid.

However, since I do not wish to confine my remarks to paid agents of a foreign power, perhaps I should use terms like marxist, socialist, collectivist, or totalitarian.

At first sight this may seem to be more a matter of politics than of religion. In reality it is as much a matter of religion as of politics. The idea that government should control all our activities is based on two related notions. First, the totalitarians hold that the so-called rights of man are nothing but privileges granted by the state. The second collectivist notion is that the state is not subject to any law of God. Whatever the state can accomplish by physical force is ipso facto right.

Whether this theory is called Russian communism, or Hitler's National Socialism, or Mussolini's Fascism, or even Franco's Romish dictatorship, it always involves religious oppression and persecution.

In the United States the Supreme Court is determined to remove any reference to God from the public schools. As implemented by New York authorities, it has become illegal to offer even voluntary prayer between the hours of nine and three. This may be politics, but it is the politics of the civil advisers of King Darius when they got him to prohibit all prayer to God for thirty days.

The theory of communism contains serious flaws in economics; its views on prices and labor, profit and enterprise, taxation and business are all bad; their beloved theory of civilization, called Historical Materialism, is philosophically indefensible. Some of these matters I am discussing at length in a book I hope to publish later on. At this moment I just wish to point out the anti-Christian nature of an all powerful government, i.e. it must be anti-God.

Now, there is a second false philosophy, a second counterfeit religion, that pervades our society. Perhaps it is not really a second; it may be regarded as the scientific foundation of the political religions I have just discussed. Communists, particularly the paid agents of subversion, create riots and disturbances. These make the headline in the newspapers. More sedate and respectable are those philosophers who advocated Naturalism or Humanism. Yet the difference between the two groups is not very deep. The former are men of political action; the latter are the theoreticians under whose

advice the former act.

The people I have in mind are those who argue that science has made belief in God impossible. Miracles of course never happened, and Christianity is as much a superstition as Hinduism.

I am afraid that faithful pastors and devout laymen underestimate the seriousness, the pervasiveness, the effectiveness of this movement in philosophy. Most people do not read their difficult, technical books. But their ideas are popularized by others and filter down through magazines, radio, and television. The result is clear enough. Our society has become secular. Conversation about God and Christ is rare. Many college students have never read a single book of the Bible. In a class of thirty last semester only one recognized a quotation from the Bible, and I have discovered that one in thirty is a good average.

Now, I should like to examine with you tonight this philosophy of naturalistic atheism and to propose a more Christian view of the nature of science. The undertaking, however, would be too technical and intolerably long; therefore it must be omitted.

Now, there is a third very influential view that circulates in the churches today. It is not precisely communistic or even political, though just about all of its advocates are left-wingers. Nor is it too greatly interested in technical science. On the contrary, we may say of it what the Apostle Paul said of the Athenians, "in all things I perceive that ye are very religious." This third view is the philosophy of existentialism; and because of its great and immediate impact on religious thought, I wish to treat it a little more thoroughly. To begin with, let us get the fundamental principles of existentialism clearly in mind. Everything else depends on it.

[Begin Ref. Episc. speech half way down p2 onto p.9]

[See Unpublished 109. Reformed Episcopal Seminary Graduation Speech. DJD, Jan 10, 2015]

This is indeed intellectual insanity, and it results in practical and moral insanity. So many people underestimate what is academic and philosophical. Only after evil doctrines produce evil conduct do most people notice what is happening. Well, the evil effects of counterfeit religions are all around us. They are easy to see.

To illustrate I shall begin with some[thing] I read this spring.

[from dedicated ??????? speech (?? given) p. 34

Like Jean Paul Sarte in France, existentialist students in America also are far to the left politically.

Professor J. Glenn Gray of Colorado College wrote an article entitled, Salvation on the Campus, Why Existentialism is Capturing the Students. The article views Existentialism with favor. Its left wing politics is seen in the reference to Mario Savio, who led the riots at the University of California. The article quotes with approval such comments as these: “What Savio was demanding, when he urged in a peak of passion that students throw their bodies on the administrative machine and bring it to a grinding halt, was something like an Existential acte gratuite, a gesture of self-identifications.

Savio is not known to have been a communist prior to the riots, but there is no doubt that he accepted communist leadership in wrecking the University.

A report from the U.S. Senate Internal Security Committee on Aug 26, 1965, traces out the hour-by-hour development of the Berkeley disorders and places full responsibility on off-campus Communist leadership.

One witness before the Senate Committee on May 17-18, 1965 was Charles E. Moore, an officer of the International Association of Chiefs of Police. He had spent four weeks in Berkeley examining the organizational details of the rioting. Here is his conclusion: “The demonstrations at the University of California are a classic example of the technique used by the Communists and radical demonstrators for a number of causes. They had their advisers and their machine-printed placards, they had their own communications system, their own food ???der. They were instructed in lying down, and becoming limp, and linking their arms so there would be difficulty removing them. They tried to foment hysteria by crying that the police were using tear gas, which they did not use. Even before the arrests started there were cries of 'police brutality.’”

Dr. Stephen Possony, director of the Hoover Institute at Stanford University, told the committee the radical leaders on the Berkeley campus numbered at the very highest 300 persons. Yet these 300 wrecked the entire university structure of 27,000 students.

Some of the 300 leaders were second generation communists, dedicated to the overthrow of the American government. Robert Siegrist, an independent radio commentator from Madison Wisconsin, named Eugene Deninis Jr, son of the late chairman of the Communist Party. Another was Michael Eisenscher, son of a chairman of the Communist Party in Michigan. Another second generation communist was Bettina Aptheker, daughter of Herbert Aptheker, national director of the American Institute of Marxist Studies and chief strategic officer for the communists in this country.

The existential dupes of these communist conspirators were trying to live authentically. In all they present a pitiable sight. One pair of parents had given permission to their son to live off campus and cook for himself. When he came home for Christmas, he looked like a bum, his clothes were filthy, he was wearing a mandarin beard, his hair had not been cut for three months, he had a case of trench

mouth and athletes foot.

Why do students act this way? Perhaps we answer that they want to be different. This means, however, that they want to be important. They find themselves unable to fit into the routine of ordinary life. And perhaps they fail to fit in because they suspect that the ordinary life of their parents is not only mediocre but futile and meaningless.

In this judgment on their parents and on our society I believe they are in the main correct. They see certain moral customs prevailing, or at least verbally commended, when these customs have no foundation in the actual beliefs of their parents. For their parents, God is dead; for themselves God is dead and they know it. Hence to attract attention and to give themselves the illusion that their life has some meaning, they go berserk in all kinds of absurd conduct.

They are pitiable creatures, and yet one feels a sad admiration for them. In an earlier age they would have made good Christian martyrs.

But now they are atheists and they have nothing to live for except the bizarre, the ridiculous, and the stupid. The forms of their absurdity must change because they acknowledge no fixed eternal principles. It would be in keeping with their mental processes if tomorrow they would all shave their heads bald. Bald Beatles – this would be a new value indeed!

This is the insanity, this is the stupidity, this is the left wing politics that has disturbed university life and has captured a great many students. Some are more insane than others. Some are less. But the degree cannot be controlled so long as logic is repudiated and immediate experience is made supreme.

But for all the vivid experience of marijuana, for all the excitement of a riot at Berkeley's University, for all the pitiful intensity of student's commitments, nihilism cannot make life worth living. Of what value is a value that I can make and unmake at will? Of what value is a value that I can replace with its contradictory? Furthermore, life is not just marijuana and riots. Life is also drudgery, pain, sickness, and death. It is good that existentialism has called attention to pain and death. But there is a question about death that existentialism has not and cannot face. Remember Hamlet:

... To die, to sleep;

The sleep perchance to dream, ay, there's the rub; for in that sleep of death what dreams may come when we have shuffled off this mortal coil, must give us pause.

Existentialism and neo-orthodoxy may assert that there are neither dreams in, nor an awakening from, the sleep of death. But how can we tell. Will you live after death simply because you freely decide to believe so, and will I escape a future life simply because I make a different decision?

What we need is authoritative information, a fixed truth, a truth that is true for everybody. A symbol of something unknowable and unintelligible will not serve. Parables, myths, and fables are a mockery. What we need is divinely revealed information. And this is what the bible gives us. A man, Jesus, died, and in three days he rose from the grave, showing himself to be the son of God and the Lord of Glory.

To the frustrated and confused Beatniks of our day, absurd but not utterly unintelligent, the faithful pastor must preach the gospel of Christ. Maybe there are few Beatniks in our neighborhood. But there are many clean-shaven, neatly dressed, respectable people who have been influenced by left wing politics, by Historical Materialism, by secular scientism, by atheistic existentialism. Some have absorbed more, some less. To all these we must show the contrast between counterfeit religion and the gospel of Christ. To all these we must faithfully proclaim that if they shall confess with their mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in their hear that God raised him from the dead, they shall be saved.