

View

A Publication of the Folsom Point church of Christ, 900 E. Natoma, Folsom, CA

February 17, 2008

Pagan Christianity?

“God has not been silent when it comes to the principles that govern the practice of His church.”

I didn't say that; a man named Frank Viola says it in his preface to a book entitled, “Pagan Christianity?,” published by Tyndale House. He's written it with the well-known religious pollster, George Barna, and it's a fascinating look at where denominational churches have gone wrong. Below are some excerpts from Viola's comments.

“The [error of the] Pharisees and Sadducees teach us this oft-ignored lesson: It is harmful to dilute the authority of God's word either by addition or subtraction. We break the Scripture just as much by burying it under a mountain of human tradition as by ignoring its principles.

“God has not been silent when it comes to the principles that govern the practice of His church. Let me explain by posing a question: Where do we find our practices for the Christian life? Where is our model for understanding what a Christian is in the first place? Is it not in the life of Jesus Christ as portrayed in the New Testament? Or do we borrow from somewhere else? Perhaps a great philosopher?

“...In the New Testament, we have the genesis of the church. I believe the first-century church was the church in its purest form, before it was tainted or corrupted...

“...THE CHURCH IN ITS CONTEMPORARY, INSTITUTIONAL FORM HAS NEITHER A BIBLICAL NOR A HISTORICAL RIGHT TO FUNCTION AS IT DOES...”

“The church in the first century was an or-

ganic entity. It was a living, breathing organism that expressed itself far differently from the institutional church today. And that expression revealed Jesus Christ on this planet through His every-member functioning body. In this book, we intend to show how that organism was devoid of so many things that we embrace today...

“...the practices of the first-century church... were solidly grounded in the timeless principles and teachings of the New Testament. By contrast, a great number of the practices in many contemporary churches are in conflict with those biblical principles and teachings. When we dig deeper, we are compelled to ask: Where did the practices of the contemporary church come from? The answer is disturbing: Most of them were borrowed from pagan culture...

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“So we would argue that on theological grounds, historical grounds and pragmatic grounds, the first century church best represents the dream of God...the beloved community that He intends to create and re-create in every chapter of the human story...

“...if the church is following the life of God who indwells it, it will never produce those non-scriptural practices that this book address. Such practices are foreign elements that God’s people picked up from their pagan neighbors as far back as the fourth century...and that is why the church is in the state it is in today, hampered by endless divisions, power struggles, passivity, and lack of transformation among God’s people.

“...Our reason for writing is simple: We are seeking to remove a great deal of debris in order to make room for the Lord Jesus Christ to be the fully functioning head of His church...

“We are also making an outrageous proposal: that the church in its contemporary, institutional form has neither a biblical nor a historical right to function as it does...” (Pagan Christianity? Pp. xvii-xx).

Well, that’s interesting. What a novel idea — to go back to the New Testament for authority for what you do. When you scan the table of contents, you can’t help but be intrigued: “Have we really been doing it by the book?” “The Pastor.” “Sunday Morning Costumes.” “Ministers of Music.” “Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.” Etc.

There’s some less than stellar points made in this book. For example, they treat the eldership and preaching by a regular, paid preacher as something that was added on by men. But they do not support their assertions through scripture as much as by noting that these things seem to them to be historical add-ons. They should read Paul’s letters to Timothy and Titus and I Corinthians 9. And, one gets the impression that George and Frank need a solid study of “authority” to put some balance in their position.

Having said that, I’m always pleased when anyone begins to understand that for a church to be right, it must be doing things that are authorized, a point we continually make here at Folsom Point.

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The church of Christ

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Services

Sunday Morning Assembly
9:30 AM
Sunday Evening: 5:00 PM
Wednesday Bible Study
7:30 PM

Classes for all ages.

Private classes arranged
at your convenience.

For more information,

visit our web site at:

www.folsomchurch.com

Webmaster: Richard Harvey

Agenda

The Lord's Day, February 17, 2008

9:30 AM: Worship: Singing, Lord's Supper, Preaching

Sermon: The Story

● Preaching: David Posey

5:00 PM: Lord's Supper, Singing, Preaching

● Sermon: Romans, David Posey

5:30 PM: Bible Classes for ages 18 mos., & up

Auditorium: What Jesus Wants to Know (Barrett Cain)

Room 11-12: The Parables (David Byrd)

Room 8: Seed-Sowers (Dennis Wade & Cameron Carrozza)

Wednesday, February 20, 2008

10 AM "Jesus on Relationships": Auditorium, 10 AM

7:30 PM, Bible classes for ages 18 mos. and up,

Auditorium: The Sayings of Jesus (Rich Mowrer)

Room 11-12: Parenting by the Book (David Posey & Dennis Wade)

Notes

Most sermons are available in MP3 format on our website (www.folsomchurch.com) or on CD (see a deacon).

The "Organized" Church

Dear sir:

1. Is it right to speak of the local church as an organization?
2. Is it right to use these terms when speaking of the local church: a. "Unscripturally organized" b. "Scripturally organized" c. "Scripturally organized"?
3. Is the church an "unorganized organization" when it begins to meet and function: later becoming an "organized organization" when it appoints elders and deacons?

Reply:

The local church may be called an "organization" under the fair and obviously basic meaning of the word. (See Webster's Unabridged Dictionary) Certainly there are many types and phases of "organization"—and the church will not fit all phases of the definition—BUT THEN, NEITHER WILL ANY NUMBER OF ADMITTED ORGANIZATIONS FIT ALL PHASES OF DEFINITION.

The local church sends as a unit, (Phil. 4:15) receives as a unit, (Acts 11:30) hears and speaks as a unit, (Matt. 18:17)—all of which demands a collective entity. The local church has overseers (1 Pet. 5:2) (who receive on behalf of the group, Acts 11:30). Those who set this function aside and allow collective actions to be determined by "business meetings" have not changed the aspect of "organization"; they have only altered its form of operation. And the local church has servants (Rom. 16:1) and messengers (Phil. 2:25). All this, and more, shows that saints who function as one in a local church comprise an "organization." This is simple application of a legitimate term to completely scriptural functions.

"Scripturally unorganized" is a play on words, and would have to be examined in context in order to

make an intelligent appraisal. I suspect it is self-contradicting when applied to a functioning church; and probably originated in a misconception of the term "organized" as applied to a local church.

When a plurality of saints begin to function as a unit—to act collectively—some kind of "organizing" has already taken place. It may be very loose, and subject to change from time to time, but it is there. As soon as scripturally qualified men are available, the "setting in order the things that are wanting" (Titus 1:5) should take place. This is the result of spiritual growth, and it occurs just as a youth, upon maturity, is expected to take on adult responsibilities and "think as a man." (See 1 Cor. 13:11) The local church existed before, and by divine approval (Acts 14:23), but it was not fully developed. I fear we have allowed a mechanical and somewhat artificial definition of "organization" to blind us to plain common sense.

The local church is not something "apart" from the saints; but is the saints in a certain relationship with one another. By agreement they pool resources and function as one in certain endeavors. These functions, requiring oversight, messengers, servants, a common treasury, etc., make up the basic ingredients of "organization" and it is only in this sense that I apply the term to the church.

Robert F. Turner

Plain Talk, vol. 1, no. 12, p. 7— January, 1965