

– Foreword –

The Diluted Church is a very important book for our generation. It addresses a number of fundamental errors in thinking and practice that have become embedded in the fabric of Christianity in America. If the Church had not strayed so far from its Gospel moorings, a book like this would be unnecessary. However, so many Fundamentalist, Evangelical and Charismatic leaders have taken their cues from sources other than Scripture that we have before us a legion of religious agendas saturated with confusion and peppered with falsehood.

In all the current clamor to “reclaim our culture” and “bring America back to God,” have we not forgotten a very important perspective? Peter noted, “For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?” (1 Pet. 4:17; cf. 1 Cor.5:9-13). How dare we expend precious energies and resources toward putting band-aids on a corrupt culture, when the visible Church is admittedly in such disarray? It is easy for preachers to point their fingers towards those on the streets and become red in the face as they parade the litany of evils present in society. It is much more difficult for church leaders to deal with the serious problems going on among those who sit in comfortable pews and stand behind pulpits. In this regard, D.M. Lloyd-Jones astutely observed:

I have no hesitation again in asserting that the failure of the Church to have a greater impact upon the lives of men and women in the world today is due entirely to the fact that her own life is not in order. To me there is nothing more tragic or short-sighted or lacking in insight than the assumption, made by so many, that the Church herself is all right and all she has to do is to evangelize the world outside. Every revival proves clearly that people who are outside the Church always become attracted when the Church herself begins to function truly as the Christian Church . . . So we must start with ourselves . . . (*Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, Vol.1, p.54).

How can we devote valuable time and talent to “re-establishing the Judeo-Christian heritage in our culture” when the Church itself is in such a mess? *The Diluted Church* helps us to face this question squarely in light of God’s Word.

Many have come to acknowledge that the Church has lost its edge because of its attachment to and accommodation with American affluence. “At ease in Zion” seems to be a very appropriate phrase to summarize Christianity in the United States. The historian Thomas C. Reeves isolates some of the key characteristics that mark church-going folks:

But most of us, it seems clear, expend the great bulk of our time and energies fulfilling the American dream. We are consumed by our jobs . . . and are locked into an endless pursuit of the power, cash, status, and pleasure that promise “personal fulfillment” and happiness. Probably few clergy address this issue (there is the budget to meet and the new parish hall to be built), and, as Robert Wuthnow puts it, “we therefore go about our lives pretty much the same as those who have no faith at all” . . .

Christianity in modern America is, in large part, innocuous. It tends to be easy, upbeat, convenient, and compatible. It does not require self-sacrifice, discipline, humility, an otherworldly outlook, a zeal for souls, a fear as well as love of God. There is little guilt and no punishment, and the payoff in heaven is virtually certain. The faith has been overwhelmed by the culture, producing what may be called cultural Christianity . . . [that is] when the faith is dominated by a culture to the point that it loses much or most of its authenticity . . . What we now have might be best labeled Consumer Christianity . . . Millions of Americans today feel free to buy as much of the full Christian faith as seems desirable. The cost is low and customer satisfaction seems guaranteed . . . America is not – not yet, anyway – a thoroughly secular society. But its Christianity, in large part, has been watered down and is at ease with basic secular premises about personal conduct and the meaning of life. Such a religion has an uncertain future for it has absorbed ideas and attitudes that may well lead to its demise. Authentic Christianity and the world are by definition at odds, (*The Empty Church: Does Organized Religion Matter Anymore?*, The Free Press, 1996, pp. 66,67).

This is not a pretty picture. Where can we find a Christ-exalting alternative to this anemic situation? Again, *The Diluted Church* provides a solid Biblical framework that calls us to pursue what is necessary for authentic Gospel faith to flourish.

The pressure is mounting for the Church to trust in chariots and horses such as trivial gimmicks, politics, and militarism in order to accomplish certain alleged spiritual ends. To just trust the Holy Spirit to bless and prosper the Word of God is too iffy and does not usually produce quick, visible results. Eric Hoffer has pointed out the propensity of various causes to

employ power-tactics.

There is hardly an example of a mass movement achieving vast proportions and a durable organization solely by persuasion . . . It was the temporal sword that made Christianity a world religion. Conquest and conversion went hand in hand . . . Where Christianity failed to gain or retain the backing of state power, it achieved neither a wide nor a permanent hold . . . It also seems that, where a mass movement can either persuade or coerce, it usually chooses the latter. Persuasion is clumsy and its results uncertain (*The True Believer*, Mentor, 1964, pp. 100, 101).

When the Church becomes more driven by cultural forces than by the Lord's Word, the Gospel is always watered down. The Church rests contentedly within the general morality of a civil religion, minus Jesus. Instead of being counter-cultural, the Church is acculturated. The God of the Bible is conveniently merged with all the other gods of America, so that no one is offended. Can we be satisfied with such a culturally-defined deity?

In a recent column, commentator Nicholas Van Hoffman wrote about the Mush God who caters to all tastes. He stated that President Carter, who normally identifies with the more jealous God of evangelical Christianity, reaffirmed his faith in the great non-denominational Mush God at the recent White House Prayer Breakfast. Hoffman describes the Mush God as follows:

“The Mush God has been known to appear to millionaires on golf courses, to politicians at ribbon-cutting services and to clergymen speaking the invocation on national television at either the Democratic or Republican conventions. The Mush God's presence is felt during Brotherhood Week and when Rotarians

come together. He is the vapid deity President Carter was referring to when suggesting peace might come to the Middle East because the Egyptian president and Israeli prime minister both worship the great mushy one. The Mush God has no theology to speak of, being a Cream of Wheat divinity. The Mush God has no particular credo, no tenets of faith, nothing that would make it difficult for believer and non-believer alike to lower one's head when the temporary chairman tells us that Reverend, Rabbi, Father, Mufti or So-and-So will lead us in an innocuous prayer, for this god of public occasions is not a jealous god. You can even invoke him to start a hookers' convention and he/she or it won't be offended. God of the Rotary, God of the Optimists Club, Protector of the Buddy System, the Mush God is the Lord of secular ritual, of the necessary but hypocritical forms and formalities that hush the divisive and derisive. The Mush God is a serviceable god whose laws are chiseled on tablets but written on sand, amenable to amendment, qualification and erasure. This is a god that will compromise with you, make allowances and declare all wars holy, all peace sacrosanct (from *Sources & Resources*, 1978).

The Diluted Church calls us to forsake the culturally-rooted Mush God and to love and follow the Living God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. I pray that this book will be used by the Lord to awaken many to seek first the Kingdom of God, and to flee from the numerous agendas backed by many church leaders that ultimately rely upon the arm of the flesh.

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