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Christianity and the Demise of America

By Charles Sullivan

10/01/05 "ICH" -- -- Let me state at the outset that the following observations and criticisms do not apply to real Christians, or to all churches. The Riverside Church in New York, for instance, has a long history of radical activism on the side of social justice. Unfortunately, these churches comprise, I believe, a small minority of the whole. I have no desire to offend those of you who have taken courageous stands against injustice and war—those of you who have thrown your bodies onto the levers and controls of the machine and tried to make it stop. You have my utmost respect and my sincere gratitude. It is to the make believe Christians and the vast majority of churches that I address the following comments.

As a child I was forced to regularly attend church and Sunday school. This represents my parent's early attempts to Christianize me to and make me respectable to the mainstream of society. Even then I resisted being forced to accept something that I did not believe in. I behaved so badly that my Sunday school teacher told my parents not to bring me back. My efforts to get myself exiled from the church paid handsome dividends. Thus ended my brief encounter with Christianity in particular and with organized religion in general. The rest of my family has remained regular church goers. I have gone in another direction. The result is that we share radically different political ideologies. Thus we find ourselves in radically different places.

During the journey from childhood to manhood, I have often contemplated the role of Christianity in the path that America was taking. Let me state clearly that in my humble opinion organized religion has nothing to do with real Christianity—I mean the actual teachings of Christ. Through a spectacular failure of courage and a will to be accepted into the mainstream of corporate America, the example of Jesus Christ has been trivialized and blasphemed by its chief practitioners. The church has allowed itself to become so prostituted that it bears little resemblance to the radical teachings of Christ of Nazareth. It has allowed itself not only to be marginalized by corporate America—it has become an apologist, an enabler, for the corporate state and all it represents.

One would think that any Christian would willingly concede the point that Jesus Christ did not devote any energy to advancing the corrupt agenda of the rich and powerful. Indeed, Christ devoted his life to serving the poor, the oppressed, and the disenfranchised. Christ despised the obscene accumulation and unequal distribution of wealth. This of course put him in opposition to those in power, which eventually led to his crucifixion. It is the very same forces that put Dr. Martin Luther King in formal opposition to more contemporary power brokers, with the result that he was killed by an assassin's bullet. It takes more than bullets to kill a man. It takes more than nails and bullets to bury truth. In both cases, those in power killed the messenger; but the message continues to resonate loud and clear; and it is more relevant than ever in these most dangerous of times.

Had the church not abdicated its moral responsibility of enacting the philosophy of Christ, the history of America would be very different; and our place in the world would also be changed. If the church believed in and taught the factual doctrines of Christ it would be a very radical institution, a far cry from the bastion of conservatism that we see today. It would actively organize against war. It would fill the streets with passionate people who demonstrate against the evils of war. It would take a strong stand against overt aggression, materialism, obscene wealth, imperialism, corporate crime, colonialism, and the unequal distribution of wealth. It would minister its massive resources to end poverty. It would denounce presidents who espouse Christian values; but who act like the anti-Christ. Rather than prop up false idols like George Bush and the so called 'Christian Right,' it would denounce them as the blasphemers they are. It would demand truth and accountability. It would require both moral and physical effort from its members. It would require opposition to the power brokers in government. It would demand of them that they fight tyranny, as Dr. King did, and put themselves in harm's way. It might even require that some of them be crucified or assassinated. That is demanding a lot of them. But we all know what happened to Christ; and many of us witnessed the assassination of Dr. King. Thus it seems to me that being a Christian—a real Christian—would mean giving up one's comfort and confronting injustice wherever you find it. It requires taking a moral stand and doing something about injustice.

Real Christians would not tolerate presidents who make war on defenseless people based upon lies and innuendo. Bush and his imperialist polices should be openly and powerfully denounced from every pulpit in every church in the United States, every day. But they are not. In fact, just the opposite occurs. Bush and his minions are cheered on by the apostates, the dogs of war and poverty. Rather than acting as a counter friction to the machine, the church acts like a cheer leader for grotesque acts of atrocity against the world. By allying itself with fraudulent ideologues like the 'Christian Right,' the church has itself become the anti-Christ. Being Christian, it seems to me, requires asking of oneself in times of crises, 'What would Christ

do?’ But this is a question that makes those who call themselves Christians uncomfortable. It is the kind of question that demands everything of them. It is the kind of question that makes it hard to look at oneself in the mirror.

I am not advocating that those who call themselves Christians go forth and get themselves killed. But I do want them to stop aiding and abetting the enemy. What I am advocating is that they examine their professed faith and compare it to the radical actions of Christ. They must force themselves to see the blatant disconnect between what they say and what they do. All of us are hypocrites to various degrees. Certainly, I am painfully aware of my own shortcomings. But it is hard to imagine that America could have become the depraved, violent cancer that it is today had the church done a better job promoting the teachings of its professed spiritual leader. For so many to call themselves Christian, while advocating violence, is laughable. It is certainly absurd. To be a Christian requires enormous self sacrifice in service to the poor. It requires commitment to non violent solutions. And so it necessarily demands fierce opposition to the vast majority of U. S. policies. Like anyone with a sense of social justice, Christians would find themselves constantly swimming against the current of popular American culture. It is not easy. It is wearisome work. It demands everything of you. The current is as swift and dangerous as it is deep. It requires courage to take the leap.

Because of Christianity’s stunning failure to take a strong and controversial stance against war, millions of innocent people have been terrorized by the government of the United States. Poverty flourishes around the globe while the church cozies up to the rich and powerful; and often accumulates obscene wealth, tax free. How would Christ react to this?

The situation has so degenerated that pompous asses posing as Christians like Pat Robertson can openly call for the assassination of popular, democratically elected leaders such as Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, and Aristeed in Haiti—men who have acted on behalf of their people with compassion and charity. Their loyalty is to the poor, not to the multi-national corporations who would ravage and pillage the world and divide the profits among themselves. Isn’t it a strange irony that Chavez and Aristeed is more Christ like than most who call themselves Christian? Jerry Falwell is another name that comes readily to mind in this connection. When these fools speak and spew words of hatred and death, they should be immediately and powerfully denounced from every pulpit in the land. They should be held accountable and exposed as the dangerous frauds they are. They should be excommunicated and denounced as heretics. But we do not see this happening. Another absurdity, another mediocrity, is allowed to stand until it becomes a part of the culture.

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