

May 13, 2020

Occasionally, as we proceed, I want to offer you some of my interpretations of the history of religion in this country. They are my opinions not intended to anger you but gently encourage you to think. If they generate a polemical response, I will stop doing it, I intend them to generate a considered response.

I have said before that I believe that Jesus as we experience him in the Gospel stories is far more concerned about what we think than what we do, what comes from the inside is directly related to what happens on the outside and is more deeply rooted in our self-understanding and in how we understand others and how we treat them and how we understand God and Christ.

The conventional Christian/Catholic understanding of sin and grace, for instance, stays mainly on the surface and as a consequence has caused Christians/Catholics as groups to be superficial in how they bring their “faith” to the world that they live in and are responsible for, if we are to take Jesus at his word that the “Kingdom of God” is at hand.

Teaching and preaching became the primary manner of handing on the faith beginning early on but after the 16th century essentially the only way that the faith was handed on with some very important exceptions.

Those exceptions were the rise of religious orders of priests, sisters, and brothers which were created to address specific needs of God’s people such as education of girls, healthcare of the poor, orphanages, hospices, and the like, and these orders were often on the margins of the official churches and initially considered suspect and rebellious.

Non-Catholic Christian’s Sunday worship, which so many want to get back to, became in many instances a thinly veiled attempt to indoctrinate congregants with the political/cultural/moral values of the dominant groups of the nation.

For Catholics the significance of the Mass was that, certainly, but cloaked in an obligation under pain of mortal sin, not an intelligent expression of faith in Christ.

The Vatican and the Popes, neither of which are the Church exclusively, up through the centuries were very skeptical and suspicious of Americans and

the Americanism of the Church in this country but American Catholics wanted nothing more than to be American inside and out.

While both Christian/Catholic churches are diminishing in this country as the 21st century continues to unfold the remnants of Catholicism are beginning to look more like mid 20th century Protestantism aligned with the cultural/moral/political values of the most vocal of the so called American “dominant” group than anything you can find in the Gospel stories of Jesus Christ.

Sunday Mass became, what many of you cannot understand up through the 60’s, about as meaningful and attractive experience as an oil change and just about the energy of an oil change was put into it by a clergy operating with, ahead of its time, totally artificial intelligence.

What made it work so long was not the Mass or Sunday Worship but the community, comradeships, fellowship, and the schools, the athletic teams, summer carnivals, and other social events that developed to give identity in a pluralistic world of identities.

Now many people find their identity not in the cross or the Gospel but in other clearly secular symbols now adopted as sectarian “religious” symbols, various flags and banners and slogans.

All that being said, I believe that God in Christ is lovingly and mercifully and compassionately “working” as always, not necessarily confined to self-identified religions but in the beauty, grace and loveliness of eyes not his own but in those of our neighbors, our children, those we look down on, those we fear, and even in some eyes that we look up to.

