

Sheep Like Us:

A Letter to a Friend

September 16, 2009

Dear Mel,

We have much in common, not only in terms of our evolving relationship with “*the church*,” but personal spirituality as well. Recently I met with a long-time friend and was surprised by his disparaging comments on institutional religion, espy since he makes his living by way of it.

I suppose that in a sense we are fools – because we are *captives to honesty* in a environment where untruth has become a profession. The evidence for this (and many other astonishing truths) was made manifest by Ted Haggard, whose position compelled a internal shift from truth teller to deceiver-in-chief, even while being followed up the holy mount by the 30 million members of the Nat’l Assn of Evangelicals.

Ted learned the hard way that the promises of evangelical Christianity simply do not work. Even so, his honest followers voted as he said, and prayed, gave, and volunteered as he directed, all with the hope of someday attaining that nearly unapproachable paramount degree of spirituality and godly discernment in which Ted and his inner circle bathed daily – so they presumed.

Jesus referred to such people as sheep, which (as my Aussie son-in-law reminds me) are the stupidest animals on earth. We are so profoundly aware of our limitations and weaknesses that when a Haggard appears we see it as our ticket to a dynamism that has always been *just beyond our reach*, saying, “If Hagg can do it so can we – because he says so!” There it is; *there is the culprit!* – a circular reasoning whose subject is so irresistible to the essence of human composition that it easily blinds, stuns and then entraps sheep like us.

In place of Haggard, substitute Bakker, Swaggart, Joel Olsteen, et al. – or any other fallen creature who says to him/herself, “*Yes, I’m a fraud. And yes I have gained wealth because of it. BUT there are people out there, like sheep without a shepherd, that need me – and I am genuinely helping them.*”

Haggard had to make the decision: “*Which is the greatest wrong (he asked himself) – to go on “performing” for these millions of poor souls, thereby enriching their lives with limited meaning and hope – or to go public, and admit to being a drug user, a homosexual – and a ‘mys-leader’ – thereby dashing the hopes of those who look to me, the pinnacle of spiritual discernment, for both ideal and idyll?*”

Thus, the most dishonest one of all finds him/herself at the helm of the Nat’l Assn of TruthTellers (aka Evangelicals). And we, the multitude of the Honest, never know what hit us. We scatter like ants in search of a morsel, another Haggard, to bring us meaning. We do this – and this is repeatedly done to us – because we are all Homo sapiens, forced into such vulnerable clothing for reasons beyond our understanding, garbed with Confessions, Creeds, and petty doctrines that have everything to do with the creativity of a sapient being *securely enclosed* by time-bound cultural parameters – and nothing to with a beautiful Creator.

These days remind me of what life must have been like when Jesus came. I’m afraid we humans, in the name of Christ, have managed to completely restore all that Jesus came to destroy. We, *whom he instructed to worship in spirit and truth*, have once again managed to enslaved ourselves – we dumb sheep.

I suspect, however, that the *sheer realization of such a dark tragedy* often becomes the vehicle for ‘authentic salvation.’ Might the freedom of God require that Homo s. (sapiens/sheep) first get their hands (and minds) around the numbing cold bars of religious imprisonment? If so, such a traumatic experience may, in fact, be integral to *the gospel according to real time* – for sheep like us.

Yours. Truly.



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