

IN RESPONSE - THE THERAPEUTIC, MANAGERIAL MODEL

by Dennis Prutow

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Where do we stand as a church? Is the church of Jesus Christ the brokerage house for truth? Is she, as Paul tells us, "the pillar and support of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15)? Or has she abdicated that role for market driven therapeutically pleasing centers of activity? Is our *success* therefore seen as the world measures it or as God establishes it? Let's take a look.

I begin by turning to the *Wall Street Journal*. The February 3, 1995 issue features an article by Don Eberly critiquing modern approaches to cultural malaise.

To restore civil society, we need to go back to an earlier way of thinking about social problems. The debate throughout earlier American history was about the deeper nature of things: man and his obligations. But in the 20th century, this has all been pushed aside by modernity...

The 20th century has traded in moral man for economic and psychological man, subjecting him at every turn to either economic inducements or therapeutic treatments. If we are to recover as a society, the 21st century will have to recover a vision of man bearing inherent moral value and moral agency.

The weakening of civil society is traceable to cultural and philosophical movements...rooted in the replacement of a culture founded on belief in God with a culture that saw value only in things we can perceive with our senses.

The result is today's earth bound, secular, utilitarian value system...

A country in which there is no transcendent foundation for law, politics, economics and society is a disordered and potentially dangerous place. If utilitarianism, not religious and ethical values, guides our conduct, then might makes right.

In the policy and management sciences, this philosophy produced a wholly mechanistic and material view of man... The result is moral relativism and cultural nihilism (page A12).

Our culture is no longer rooted in the Bible and in the transcendent holy God of

the Bible. We therefore laud those who are good managers. We look to psychology to give us the *ultimate* answers.

The church of Jesus Christ is not far behind. Success within the church is now measured against the managerial and psychological model of the world. Dr. David Wells explains this phenomenon in his book *No Place for Truth*. "Thus it is that the pastor seeks to embody what modernity admires and to redefine what pastoral ministry now means in light of this culture's two most admired types, the manager and the psychologist" (page 101).

To put it bluntly, what Don Eberly eloquently argues is causing the decline of modern culture large portions of the evangelical church have assimilated as their working capital. As David Wells then tells us, "[I]f one understands modernity, it is not difficult to imagine that what is vaunted as the Spirit's work may have causes that are rather more natural" (page 174).

One vital aspect of the psychological and managerial models is that of image building. We see this quite readily in politics. Again, the church is not far behind. Image *is* all important. Seeing a church built in a community does involve public image. Of this there can be no doubt. But how that image is built is also of no small significance. In a second book, *God in the Wastelands*, Dr. David Wells speaks to this subject.

After the 1950's, personal identity became increasingly disengaged from beliefs about character and basic human nature and was instead associated with *consciousness*--that is to say, with something a good deal more shifting and elusive. This process evolved further during the 1970's, when personal identity became increasingly associated not with the narrative of one's inner life but with the projection of one's public *image*. Indeed, in the popular perception, image and inner life were disengaged from each other entirely. Great emphasis was placed on the skillful presentation of one's "image." Erving Goffman speaks of modern people as

having become performers who stage their own characters and accomplishments, an art that often requires one to transcend the need to tell the truth in order to practice "the techniques of management impression" (pages 98-99).

I have seen this process of image making first hand in Christian organizations. The image may or may not accord with reality.

What is at stake? Truth. What is the church to be? She is to be "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). As Joshua had stones taken from the Jordan River and piled up as a monument to God's redemption, the church of Jesus Christ is a pillar set in the earth by God as a monument to God's truth. The difference between the two is simple.

You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:5).

What means does God use to draw men and women out of the world, free them from the tyranny of the devil, and build them up? The weapon is truth. The "word of truth" is the "gospel" (Colossians 1:5). "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). "Sanctify them in the truth, Thy word is truth" (John 17:17).

The church of Jesus Christ is therefore, first and foremost, a broker of truth. Pastors and preachers must be brokers of truth. David Wells spends much time in his book, *God in the Wastelands*, discussing this point.

We gather the importance of this perspective from the words of Paul. "Therefore I testify to you this day, that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God" (Acts 20:26-27). Are we brokers of truth who declare the whole counsel of God, ones who are innocent of the blood of all men, or are we too partaking of the psychologizing and managerializing of the church and perpetuating the downfall of our culture?

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IN RESPONSE - PART ONE: IS THE CHURCH IMPORTANT?

by Dennis Prutow

With the proliferation of parachurch organizations and ministries, Christian schools and colleges, and Christian television programming, the organized church seems less and less palatable and less and less needed. In the following articles, I will attempt to respond to some of the most common criticisms leveled against the church and those who place priority upon attendance at established times of worship on the first day of the week. The questions and discussion comes from a class with college students and a study with young married couples. The students gave me ten common reasons the church is not important. I simply began to go through them to answer the alleged claims against the church.

Reason One: "I learn all I need to learn without church." Answer: Ephesians 4:15-16.

As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and *held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body* for the building up of itself in love (italics mine).

Proper growth depends upon our doing our part in the visible body of Christ. Radical individualism is therefore unbiblical. Without our participation and proper working, we do not grow in Christ and we contribute to the deforming of the body, the church.

Reason Two: "The true body is really invisible." Answer: Romans 1:7, "To all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Corinthians 1:2, "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours." Galatians 1:1-2, "And all the brethren who are with me, to the churches of Galatia."

Ephesians 1:1, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are at Ephesus, and who are faithful in Christ Jesus." Philippians 1:1, "Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons." Colossians 1:1-2, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father."

In each of these cases, Paul writes to a defined group of real people making up a very visible body of believers in a particular city or area. This body is *not* invisible. These churches are *not* invisible.

There is an invisible aspect to the body of Christ. We do not know certainly and infallibly everyone who is invisibly united to Christ by the Holy Spirit. Also, because the body is scattered across the globe, we cannot see all of the body at once. In addition, much of the body is hidden from our earthly view because it is in heaven. However, the principle nature of the body is its visibility. This is a significant part of its witness.

Reason Three: "I *am* a Christian, I *am* part of the body." Answer: 1 Corinthians 12:12-21,

For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. And if they were all one member, where would the body be?

But now there are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."

Acts 2:41-42,

So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

As just stated, rabid independency is unbiblical. Christianity involves being tied together in a visible body. Each part of the body needs the other parts. We do ourselves ultimate disservice when we cut ourselves off from the body. We may never say we do not need others in the body.

The biblical scenario is quite simple. Conversion involves placement in a visible church. Those who received the words of Peter were baptized. Thus they entered the fellowship of the Jerusalem church. The sacraments have an important place in the visible church. Within the pale of that visible body, these converts sat under the teaching of the apostles, partook of fellowship, prayer, and the Lord's Supper in the context of fellowship meals. To say we are part of the invisible body but refuse to associate with the visible church is radically unbiblical.

Reason Four: "The Bible does not say we should go to church. Jesus did not go to church." Answer: Luke 4:16, Exodus 20:8-11, Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 16:2. Luke 4:16 tells us regarding Jesus, "And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read." It was Jesus' custom to go to the public meetings of the synagogue. His parents trained Him in this. When He embarked upon His ministry He continued the practice. We cannot gainsay this truth without denying the life and ministry of our Lord [Continued].

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IN RESPONSE - PART TWO: IS THE CHURCH IMPORTANT?

by Dennis Prutow

We continue to answer the objection the Bible does not say we should attend church by pointing to Exodus 20:8-11, Acts 20:7, and 1 Corinthians 16:2.

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and made it holy (Exodus 20:8-11).

The command of God to the Old Testament saints was to set aside one day a week for rest and worship. Jesus did this. He kept the whole law perfectly. Controversy arose because the Pharisees did not know the true meaning of the Sabbath. More on that later. Christ was “tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). Beyond doubt, Jesus Christ did not sin against the Fourth Commandment.

What about the apostles? Acts 20:7 relates an incident in the ministry of Paul.

And on the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to depart the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight.

The early church met on the first day of the week. According to this new custom, Paul exhorts the Corinthians,

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. On the first day of every week let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come. And when I arrive, whomever you may approve, I shall send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 16:1-3).

The Galatians churches and the church in Corinth met on the first day of every week as the New American Standard puts it. Offerings for other Christians in need were a part of their worship. Why did the Christians meet on the first day of

the week rather than on the seventh? The answer is simple. They celebrated the resurrection of Christ.

Exodus 20:8-11 tells us God’s people are to remember their creation and God their Creator as they assemble for worship. When the Fourth Commandment is repeated in Deuteronomy 5:12-15, the emphasis is slightly different.

Observe the sabbath day to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. ‘Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant or your ox or your donkey or any of your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you, so that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. ‘And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to observe the sabbath day.’

God exhorts Israel to remember her redemption, her deliverance from slavery. God also calls us to remember our deliverance from slavery to sin by the death and resurrection of Christ. We gather on the First day of the week to do so. The examples of Jesus and the apostles show us the Fourth Commandment is still binding; the day of worship is changed.

Reason Five: “I go to college chapel; I’m involved in Bible studies and ministry teams.” Answer: Matthew 28:19-20 and Acts 2:42-42; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25 and 1 Corinthians 5:1-2.

Let’s examine the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20 to see *what* Jesus tells us to do and *how* He tells us to do it.

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

First of all, Jesus commands us to make disciples. This is our task. This is our mission. This is Jesus’ commission. The

message does not stop here. Jesus tells us what steps are necessary in the disciple making process. We are to make disciples, baptizing them and teaching them. Note the two steps. How did the early church carry out this commission? Acts 2:41-42 tells us very clearly.

So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Those who heard the gospel from the lips of Peter and responded were baptized. Why? Can we imagine the apostles doing anything against the command of Christ? We frequently sail past this part of the disciple making process without a thought. Those who responded to the message of Peter were added to the visible body of believers *by way of baptism*. Discipleship began at this point. The baptized believers then sat under the teaching of the apostles in the fellowship of the church in Jerusalem. Discipleship involves baptism; discipleship involves the teaching ministry of the church.

I add a word about the Lord’s Supper from 1 Corinthians 11:23-25.

For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, “This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” In the same way He took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.”

God commands Christians to celebrate the Lord’s Supper. College chapels and Bible studies are good, but there is no proper place for the sacraments in them. Both baptism and the Lord’s Supper are vital to discipleship. Christ would not have commanded them if they were not important. We must not ignore them. The discussion continues in the next lesson.

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IN RESPONSE - RE-MORALIZING AMERICA

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"Re-Moralizing America" is the title of an article by Gertrude Himmelfarb in the February 7, *Wall Street Journal*, page A20. Himmelfarb authored *The De-Moralizing of Society: From Victorian Virtues to Modern Values*. She writes,

In 19th-century Britain, Victorians spoke the language of morality because they believed in the reality of virtues--virtues as the guiding principles of public as well as private affairs. In this sense there was a basic consensus on social affairs.

With interest in moral reformation, Himmelfarb continues,

The first step in such moral reformation is the redefinition of the problem. "Social pathology" is the language of sociology and psychology. "Moral pathology is the language of theology....

Himmelfarb recognizes the need for that which every Christian should pray.

I'm not sure moral reformation is possible without the inspiration of religious reformation. And while there is a small religious revival going on in America, I'm not at all confident it will assume the proportions of the Wesleyan revival, which initiated the great moral reformation that culminated in Victorian England.¹

The church of Jesus Christ should be praying and working for reformation.

A similar call is made in "The unmaking of civic culture" by John Leo, *U. S. News and World Report*, February 13, 1995, page 24.

Starting in the 1960's the nation's sense of itself has been deeply influenced by the rapid spread of therapies, encounter groups, self-help, the language of self-esteem and personal growth and an array of New Age notions, some of them quasi religious based on the primacy of the self.

This has created a vast Orphanized culture obsessed with feelings and

subjective, private experiences. In some ways, this culture of therapy has positioned itself as the antidote for America's fragmentation and the decline of civic culture. It pushes young people into monitoring their own psyches and away from environments where they might learn civic and political skills. And it tends to kill any chance for political debate by framing values as mere matters of personal taste. You like vanilla. I like butter pecan.

It's important to reverse this process....

How is the process going to be reversed when a large part of evangelical Christendom is *catching up with* the world and promoting the introspective, relativistic, therapeutic model catapulting our culture into the abyss?

The Great Awakening of the 18th century, rooted as it was in the Calvinism of the Reformation and the Puritanism of the 17th century, is the religious revival/moral reformation to which Gertrude Himmelfarb refers. Unfortunately, this type of religious revival/moral reformation is rejected by newer evangelicals and many of Reformed persuasion.

There is on one hand an improper equating of revival with revivalism and its attendant manipulative arminianism. All revival and all those associated with it are viewed with doctrinal suspicion. We throw the baby of revival out with the bath-water of revivalism. The result can be cold orthodoxy, doctrine without life.

On the other hand, any emotionally laden appeal given in the context of a religious meeting is viewed as the work of the Holy Spirit. The emotions might very well be the function of euphoria produced by the hormone adrenaline. This feeling of euphoria is labeled the work of the Spirit. The result can be a particular lifestyle without solid doctrine.

Our therapeutically driven psychologically based church society is particularly vulnerable in either case. In the first case there is a rejection of revival as revivalism. The pastor may then turn to the roles of manager and psychologist to fulfill the *spirit* of his calling. In the second case there is an embracing of revivalism without revival. Because of inherent

subjectivism, managerial and psychological techniques may reflect the *spirit* of the church. The outcome is the same in either case. With the rejection of true religious revival, there is no lasting moral reformation. The answer is a proper understanding of Holy Spirit sent revival which brings moral change in its wake.

This is the import of Jonathan Edwards' great work, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*. John E. Smith writes the introduction to this volume in the 1959 Yale Edition of the *Works of Jonathan Edwards*. He tells us, "The properly religious aspect of man's life is always in danger of being obscured because of our tendency to identify it with something other than itself" (page 44). The struggle remains between intellectualizing the gospel and emotional fanaticism. As Smith asserts regarding *Religious Affections*, "[W]e are in a better position than any age since Edwards to understand the profundity of his contribution to theological thinking" (page 44).

Edwards' approach was double barreled.

A position seeking to recover immediate experience in religion and subject it at the same time to clearly announced tests is exactly what our present circumstances require. It is a subtle position, one likely to be misunderstood, because it aims to combine what a one-sided way of thinking always sunders" (page 48).

"The double-edged character of Edwards' doctrine gives it peculiar relevance for the current situation..." (page 49). While secularists wave the flag signaling the need for moral renewal and even suggest the need for its roots in religious awakening, the church moves down the easy road of learning management styles and psychological techniques. Rather, she desperately needs to resolve the tension between intellectualism and enthusiasm in favor of Edwardsian double edged Spirit driven revival leading to religious reformation and moral renewal.

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¹ For the Wesleyan movement's roots in the Calvinistic ministry of George Whitefield, see Arnold Dalimore's critical two volume biography of Whitefield. For the difference between genuine revival and modern revivalism, see Iain Murray's study, *Revival and Revivalism*.