

GOT TRANSCENDENCE?

Sometimes small children have insights beyond their years. I recently read about some 8-year-olds that were giving their explanation of God. One child offered the following observations: "Jesus is God's Son. He used to do all the hard work like walking on water and performing miracles and trying to teach the people who didn't want to learn about God.

They finally got tired of Him preaching to them and they crucified Him. But He was good and kind like His Father and He told His Father they didn't know what they were doing and to forgive them and God said O.K.! His Dad (God) appreciated all His hard work on earth so now He could stay in heaven.

Now Jesus helps His Dad out by listening to prayers and seeing things which are important for God to take care of and which ones He can take care of Himself without having to bother God. Now you can pray anytime you want and they're sure to help you because they got it worked out so one of them is on duty all the time."

This young child had a simple assumption. God's out there and in charge of what happens here on earth. Yet a problem occurs someplace along our life's experience... we can lose the sense of God's being in charge... the sense of what we grown-ups call transcendence.

I'm not a big fan of National Public Radio, but I do listen regularly to the Prairie Home Companion. The creator of this wonderful excursion into Midwest small-town life is Garrison Keillor. He has a knack of capturing my childhood remembrances of small-town life in North Dakota as he tells stories of the fictitious (though very real) Lake Wobegon. Keillor is not just a country bumpkin, he is a brilliant storyteller. He has a knack for capturing essential realities in word-pictures.

Keillor recently noted that if you can't go to church and, for at least for a moment, be given transcendence ...if you can't go to church and briefly move from this life to the next: then why should anyone go to church. Just a brief moment of transcendence causes you to leave that church changed person.

Whether you are in Lake Wobegon or some huge metropolis like New York or Dallas-Ft. Worth... Keillor's observation is challenging because our world does not lack for a hunger of vibrant spirituality. If it is true that contemporary spirituality may be described as being seeker oriented, then we who care deeply about our Christian faith need to take heed.

Be careful though - seeking comes in many forms. You'll see seeking in a shopping mall where crystals sell for big bucks and guarantee the alignment of energy fields that impact your life. You'll see a search for transcendence at rave parties where technomusic, bright lights and the drug Ecstasy try to (for a moment) "move beyond this life to the next."

If you think the current wave of X-treme sports are just the result of too much leisure time and too many Miller Lites you're mistaken. X-treme sports not only speak of addiction to adrenaline, but a quest to push beyond the mundane into the "Zone."

The search to move beyond ourselves increases as the world presses into our lives. In this current struggle, Keillor's call for that refreshing transcendent moment is bone chilling!

What spiritual realities do people encounter when they step into your church? Do they experience a Christian sub-culture only understandable to those who learned the secret language? Do they encounter an exercise in the current wave of attempts to avoid offending the "non-believing seeker?" The reality is, we live in a spiritually starved age and that hunger is only increased when our churches offer weak substitutes for the transforming power of Jesus Christ.

Whether people are builders, boomers, busters, Gen. X, Gen. Y, Millenials or any other "tribal" designation we would like to fit them into... people are not going to be satisfied with anything less than transcendence. So when people enter your church next Sunday will they encounter slick professionalism, tradition masquerading as the "old-time Gospel" or will they encounter a powerful response to Keillor's quest for a brief moment of transcendence that causes you to leave that church a changed person.

The spiritual quest of our age does not require a greater understanding of relevant methodology; it requires Christians whose hunger for God matches that of those who have not yet been found by the Shepherd of our souls! The lyrics of the worship group Sonic Flood typifies this hunger for God.

"I want to know You, I want to see Your face, I want to know You more!
I want to touch You, I want to hear Your voice, I want to know You more!

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Check it out. . .

I recently did a Prez Report on St. Patrick. A new book on St. Patrick and Celtic evangelism is worth checking out. The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity can reach the West... Again by George G. Hunter III Abingdon Press ISBN # 0-687-08585-3

A great web-site on researching current ethical issues is sponsored by the
Center for Applied Ethics located at Wheaton College
www.christianethics.org