

antithesis



a manifesto for the emerging christian counterculture

As we enter the twenty-first century, in 2001, thoughtful Christians stand in awe of the tragedy looming all around us. The *real* cultural crisis, that is:

today's Christian culture is destroying Christianity.

By today's Christian culture we mean the vast network of people — ministries, businesses, bookstores, magazines, musicians, TV & radio programs and the like — who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ today.

While individual differences certainly exist among them, a constant pattern is easily detected:

the culture it represents is indistinguishable from the world it seeks "to save." It is *worldly* at its very core.

Today's Christian culture so resembles the world, that standing *contra mundum* — against the world, in opposition to its culture — would amount to standing against *itself*.

Yet that is the state of things. And, what is most tragic, it has borne a multitude of misled, deluded "disciples" who are **scripturally illiterate** and **spiritually dull**.

How has this happened?

It is really quite simple:

in an effort to be influential, Christians have been trying to buy their own legitimacy from the surrounding culture by compromising the Christian world and life view.

Rather than sustaining a moral and intellectual **antithesis** to that culture, they have bought into it—almost completely. The result is a cascade of compromise on almost every front:

- compromising Scripture's unique authority;
- compromising the biblical gospel;
- compromising the call to Christian discipleship;
- compromising the nature of true spirituality;
- compromising the New Testament order of fellowship;
- compromising the ethics of the Kingdom of God.

(Ironically, this has not been lost on the surrounding culture. Christians sought to influence in the first place.)

So what must be done about it?

As Christians, we must turn from this posture of compromise and affirm the distinctive Christian world and life view set forth in Scripture.

At its core Christianity is a countercultural, revolutionary movement.

As such, "Christian culture" ought to stand against the corrupt culture of the world as "salt and light" (Matt 5:13-16). This will only be accomplished when today's Christian culture — so-called "Christian" ministries, businesses, bookstores, magazines, musicians, TV & radio programs and the like — begins to engage the truth seriously, practice the truth without compromise, and demonstrate the truth in real terms.

We must engage the truth seriously

We must bring a clear, well-defined, content-rich Christian message back into the orbit of our Christian culture, placing an emphasis on what is true as over against what is not true.

The key here is antithesis. If a statement is true, its opposite is not true. We must act upon, witness, and proclaim this fact: what is contrary to God's revealed propositional truth is not true, whether it is couched in New Age terms or traditional Christian terms with altogether new meanings. All the areas of our life, especially as we participate in Christian fellowship, must be affected.

The early church allowed itself to be condemned, both by the secular and religious authorities. They said, "*We must preach, we must witness publicly; we must obey God rather than man.*" They did not succumb to pressure — to *accommodate* their message to please the culture around them. No, they practiced **antithesis**. How else would they maintain a credible witness?

We must practice the truth without compromise

This is the time to show a generation which thinks that the concept of truth is unthinkable that *we do take truth seriously*. This will only happen if Christians are living out what they confess to believe with integrity — what the Apostle John called, **walking in the truth**. ^{2 John 4}

This means that our fellowships must foster direct, open, honest, transparent dealings with God and with each other — the confessing of real, personal sins; the acknowledgement of weaknesses and temptations; the carrying forward of each others burdens — to promote the purity of our lives and fellowships.

We must demonstrate the truth in real terms

Our fellowships must be real communities: places in which others see our life together as something of beauty; something reflecting the beauty God intended for humanity at the beginning. Too many of our churches are really teaching stations and activity generators. The "sharing of life" in community has had little place.

We must maintain scriptural integrity, standing against those teachings and practices that undermine them. But if others cannot see something beautiful in our human relationships, if they do not see that upon the basis of what Christ has done our Christian communities have been transformed into **centers of radiating Gospel light**, then we are not living up to our calling.

We must demonstrate love. The world has a right to judge whether we are Christians or not on the basis of how we manifest *substantive* love to each other as Christians — and to all people, because they are created in God's image, deserving dignity and honor.

Our Manifesto

If Christians take these factors into account, then we may hope for the stirring of a **revolution** in our day. And, should our Lord delay His return, the century before us may be marked as a time when radical Christian proclamation went forth yet again — in the power of the Holy Spirit — turning the world upside down, forever altering the cultural landscape.

This is our manifesto, our burden, our prayer.

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