Faith formation in a secular world:
Living the way of Jesus in a World of Complex Issues

Our Secular Culture: The influence of culture on today’s youth...

Brentwood Hills Church of Christ fall, 2018
Introduction and Overview of Series

• Passion: Sharing Good News of Jesus
• Commitment: Jesus is the Way, Truth, and Life...
• Dilemma: With a few exceptions, the church is struggling to connect, especially with “Z’s”
• Setting: Post-Christian, Postmodern, Post-Truth...
• Challenges:
  • How do we navigate pluralistic culture?
  • How can we keep our families in the church?
  • How should we respond (as the body of Christ) to the new questions and ethical conundrums of our culture?
  • How do we bear faithful witness to Jesus Christ?
Our Secular Culture

• Summer research – Who are these people (students)?
• We can no longer assume our students know...
• What do we have to offer?
• Statistics are frightening...
  • Greatest growth in identifiable group – “Nones”
  • In particular, youth walking away...
  • Definitive research – not so much “I am spiritual, but not religious.” It is now “I am not spiritual nor religious.”
An “Ahha” Moment in Cultural Research

• Charles Taylor: *A Secular Age* (2007)

• Great influence on writers such as James K.A. Smith, Michael Gorman, Andrew Root, and Robert Bellah (*Habits of the Heart*)

• Taylor introduces idea of “Immanent Frame”
  • A closed world structure.
  • Language house, social imaginary
  • Everyone determines own “nova effect”
    • Authenticity
    • Expressive individualism
    • No ontological reality – negates transcendence – I make myself
Secular vs Spiritual?

- Long argued against secular/sacred divide – but too general...
- Taylor argues there are 3 kinds of “secular”
- Secular 1: Sacred vs Secular Planes (Renaissance)
- Secular 2: Religious vs A-religious Spaces – the human will is now the driving power of reality
  - Still sacred realities – located almost completely in institutions made by human willing (ideologies) [classic secular vs spiritual]
- Secular 3: Negation of Transcendence – divine action is not possible. Naturalism wins. Modern social imaginary precludes transcendence...
“What, then, must we do?”

• The Human Experience:
  • Jane Elliot *Using Narrative in Social Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches.*
  • Two narratives in which we live:
    • 1\textsuperscript{st} order – personal and unique
    • 2\textsuperscript{nd} order – collective, attempting to provide meaning
    • We choose our 2\textsuperscript{nd} order story based on what it offers.
    • Body metabolizes energy – we are economists of our energy – we give it to the narrative that offers the highest return.
    • The nova effect becomes toxic – we are whatever we want.
    • “And everyone did what was right in their own sight…”
  • The role of “Faith.”
Identifying “the Better Story.”

• We are trying to bring our young people back to our Secular 2 institutions of faith (full-blown dualism).
• Not “authentic” – experiential element is lacking
• Next week we will unpack this more fully – “Living the ways of Jesus in a non-transcendent Immanent Frame.”
• What story will allow you to develop into the best version of yourself?
• We cannot give what we do not have.
Review and Homework (really!?)

• We are losing the cultural battle for the hearts of our youth...

• Fascinating studies speaking of the growing problem of depression and unhappiness.

• Today’s youth have more than any generation in history, yet are grading out as the most depressed and unhappy...

• Questions of identity and purpose are rampant and remain unanswered.

• Assignment: How important are the teachings of Jesus to you? How often do you meditate on and attempt to train into the life of Jesus. Keep a log on your time and expenditures
A Spiritual Cardiogram

• Where do you spend your greatest emotional energies?
• What are you most concerned about – what do you worry about the most?
• On what do you spend your money and time? Where do you make financial sacrifices?
• Where does your mind go for “healing” or recreation? When your mind goes into default – where does it go?
• Are you spending any energies that allow for the transformation of your mind – embracing the ways of Jesus?
  • Love of enemies rather than their destruction
  • Unconditional forgiveness instead of retaliation
  • Readiness to suffer for the sake and well-being of others, peacemaking