

Vlach's "Crisis in America's Churches": Whatever Happened to Theology?: Abandonment of Exposition; Unbiblical Philosophies Create Own Faith System

Second, many Christian churches have abandoned serious Bible exposition and theological teaching. Burge points out that historical exegesis is becoming a "lost art" in the pulpit.

"Rather than explaining the historical setting of a passage, texts become springboards for devotional reflection," he notes. "Biblical passages are taken out of context as the preacher searches for those stories that evoke the responses or attitudes desired." As a result, "The heart of a 'good' sermon is fast becoming the 'emotional work' that can be done in 20 minutes preaching time."

Burge also found that church leaders often find it difficult to find time for serious discussion of theology and the Bible. When asking several youth leaders about whether they addressed solid theological categories or Bible stories, the typical response according to Burge was, "It is hard to find time. But I can say that these kids are truly learning to love God."

Burge sees this attitude as part of the problem.

"That is it in a nutshell," he says. "Christian faith is not being built on the firm foundation of hard-won thoughts, ideas, history, or theology. Spirituality is being built on private emotional attachments."

NOTE: For the biblically illiterate Christianity is a flexible mold which is made to conform to their emotional needs and desires.

The existentialist believes that free will is an absolute and therefore a person is responsible for his other actions. However one chooses determines the kind of moral person he becomes and how he will live. The weakness in this philosophy is that the individual determines what is and is not moral.

Secondly, death is considered as inevitable and leads to no-being, Nothingness, and therefore life and its choices are all one has.

The conclusion is that life ends; it has no validation, justification, or eternal reward. There is no reason why there should be life rather than nothing, and therefore one has to accept life as a raw, given, absurd fact. Thus, action, values, feelings, and relationships have to all be developed in the face of this ultimate absurdity.¹

NOTE: Existential philosophers that college-age students will be bored with but forced to study include Søren Kierkegaard \sir'-uhn keer'-kuh-gard\, Friedrich Nietzsche \freed'-rik nee'-chuh\, Jean-Paul Sartre \zhahn-paul sar'-truh\, and Albert Camus \al-bair' ka-moo\.

¹ Herbert Kohl, *From Archetype to Zeitgeist: Powerful Ideas for Powerful Thinking* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1992), 68.

A third reason for biblical and theological illiteracy today is the tremendous influence unbiblical philosophies and worldviews are having on churchgoers. Liberalism promotes that the Bible is a human construct and not a divine document. In doing so, it continues to assail the traditional Christian views of the inerrancy of the Bible, deity of Christ, reality of Satan, substitutionary atonement, and other key doctrines of the Christian faith. Existentialism and its emphasis on human experience has people looking to themselves, not God or Scripture, for truth. Postmodernism has convinced many that there are no universal truths. According to Barna, "A minority of adult and teen believers contends that absolute moral truth exists." Only 32% of born-again Christians still believe in the existence of absolute moral truth.

Many Christians accept elements of these unbiblical worldviews without even knowing it. Because of this, Barna and Mark Hatch have noted that "we cannot really call the faith of American Christians a Bible-based faith. It is a synthetic, syncretic faith." According to Barna and Hatch, Christians today have accepted and combined so many ideas from other worldviews and religions that they have created their own faith system.

"The average born-again, baptized, churchgoing person has embraced elements of Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, Mormonism, Scientology, Unitarianism and Christian Science—without any idea they have just created their own faith."