

The Changing Face of Ministry



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We know our culture has changed drastically

To name a few of the changes...

Multi-culturalism, identity politics, sexual revolution, bioethical changes, economic disparity, record debt, distrust of institutions, dysfunction at all levels...

...and religiously we've gone from Protestant America to Judeo-Christian America to ?



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The changed context for ministry:

Five Popular Beliefs about Jesus

1. “The vast majority of Americans believe Jesus was a real person.
 2. Younger generations are increasingly less likely to believe Jesus was God.
 3. Americans are divided on whether Jesus was sinless.
 4. Most Americans say they have made a commitment to Jesus Christ.
 5. People are conflicted between ‘Jesus’ and ‘good deeds’ as the way to heaven.”
- “Americans’ dedication to Jesus is, in most cases, a mile wide and an inch deep.” – Barna Trends 2017



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The changed context for ministry:

The Morality of Self-Fulfillment

The best way to find yourself is by looking within yourself. 91% of U.S. adults agree. 76% of practicing Christians agree.

People should not criticize someone else's life choices. 89% and 76% agree.

To be fulfilled in life, you should pursue the things you desire most. 86% and 72% agree.

The highest goal of life is to enjoy it as much as possible. 84% and 67% agree.

While we wring our hands about secularism spreading through culture, a majority of churchgoing Christians have embraced corrupt, me-centered theology.” – Barna Trends 2017



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A context out of control:

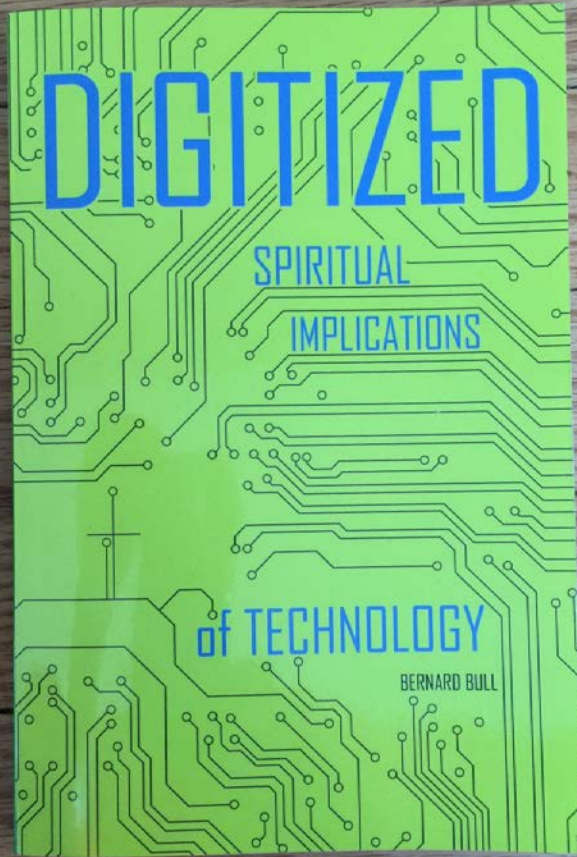
Accelerations of Change

“The twenty-first century will be equivalent to 20,000 years of progress at today’s rate of progress.” – Ray Kurzweil of Google

“The rate of technological change is now accelerating so fast that it has risen above the average rate at which most people can absorb all these changes. Many of us can’t keep pace anymore. ‘And this is causing us cultural angst.’” – Thomas Friedman, *Thank You for Being Late*



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The results of changed and changing context:

“Cultural Angst”

Legacy businesses are flailing

Government is dysfunctional

Institutional church is in decline

“Everyone’s in the dark looking for the switch. When you’re in the middle of history the meaning of things is usually unclear... In real time most things are obscure....‘Only slowly did it dawn upon us that the whole world structure and order that we had inherited from the nineteenth century was gone.’” – Peggy Noonan



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Nostalgic?

“Our frustration is driven in part by a **failure of diagnosis—a failure of self-knowledge, which in turn is rooted in a wide-spread nostalgia for midcentury America.** This nostalgia distorts our understanding of where we are and how we got here, thereby blinding us to some defining features of the present.... That nostalgia therefore makes it difficult not only to see a path out of our economic and social challenges but also to see a way past our divisions and to recover some genuine unity amid our raucous, fractured diversity.”

- Yuval Levin, *The Fractured Republic*, 2016: 185-186



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The Changing Face of Ministry:

Faith in Jesus Christ!

always has been...but now more clearly than ever
for ourselves personally and pastorally
for our congregations
to our communities



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A theological look

Recall:

The best way to find yourself is by looking within yourself. 91% of U.S. adults agree. 76% of practicing Christians agree.

People should not criticize someone else's life choices. 89% and 76% agree.

To be fulfilled in life, you should pursue the things you desire most. 86% and 72% agree.

The highest goal of life is to enjoy it as much as possible. 84% and 67% agree.



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Jesus explains what's going on

“What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person” (Mark 7:20-23).

“I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh” (Romans 7:18).



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man
turned
in on
himself

heather
choate
davis

understanding sin in
21st-century america



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Some symptoms of “Man Turned in on Himself”

Promiscuity, consumerism, obesity, narcissism, apathy, greed.

Chaos: Each being god leads to chaos. “Chaos ‘bounces back’ to the modern man in the form of increasing anxiety and depression.”

Distrust: “Our self-centeredness turns our fellow man into our competition.” Therefore, distrust.

Affinity in virtual communities: “We therefore create ‘safe’ and undemanding simulations of community for ourselves through technology.” – Choate Davis, 44





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Where's God in this self-worshipping culture?

From God's side: **"The wrath of God is being revealed** from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth" – Romans 1:18

"The law works the wrath of God, kills, reviles, accuses, judges, and condemns everything that is not in Christ (Romans 4:15)." – Heidelberg Disputation, Thesis 23

God's "alien" work prepares for His "proper" work. "Before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith" – Galatians 3:23-24



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How to lead from God's alien to proper work, rethinking how we use Law and Gospel

Christian America is gone. Christian language is not understood. Today you can't go straight to the bottom line, that we're sinners and Jesus is our Savior.

“As a result of our obliviousness to sin, ‘Christianity now has to preach the **diagnosis**—in itself very bad news—before it can win a hearing for the cure.’” – C.S. Lewis in Choate-Davis

Cf. a conversation with Rev. Micah Glenn on “Word and Work: An Intersection”



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An example: Chemnitz diagnoses anger

1. “First feelings, when out of the misery provoked by some injury, a hot anger boils up in the heart and the blood.” “The first emotion cannot be stopped or avoided, but see to it that this does not continue on to become sin.” (Four kinds of sin: emotion, gesture, words, deeds)
2. “The mind plans and devises evil and burns with desire for revenge.”
3. “The third level is hatred, long standing anger.”
4. “Jealousy, dissension, quarreling, contentions and other outward actions.”

Identify these and their effects in your pastoral care. Then work the given emotion back to our corrupt heart.



Conclusion: “Wretched man that I am!”

“Enter not into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you” (Psalm 143:2).

“I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:23-24).

“The climactic outcome of the whole movement: God’s love in Christ is a creative act that brings believers into being. **When all our human possibilities have been exhausted and we have been reduced to nothing, the one who creates out of nothing does his ‘proper work.’**” – Gerhard Forde, 22



Ministry: Into *Fear of God* and Faith

Ministry continually walks people from primal emotions, which merit fearful judgment, to the fear that is awe and reverence for God's proper work in Jesus. This fear trusts the promises (fides qua and quae).

The spectrum of fear in the Bible: Terror at judgment for our corrupted hearts TO the fear of God that is awe and reverence for forgiveness in Christ.

This Christian walk is a continual back-and-forth. Hence weekly worship should be a heartfelt necessity.



Ministry: Into Fear of God and *Faith*

Contrast faith for Americans and biblical faith.

“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that **Christ** died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that **he** was buried, that **he** was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that **he** appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then **he** appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:3-6). **Biblical faith is Man Turned Outside of Himself to the crucified and risen Jesus. He is the Face of faith-filled ministry!**

“...if you hold fast to the word” (1 Corinthians 15:2). “Faith lays hold of God’s grace in Christ, and through it a person is justified.” – Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, III, 41



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Caution: We too are Narcissus!

Our sinful nature still wants to turn in on ourselves, even on our believing Christian selves.

CORRECTIVE: “The works of the righteous would be mortal sins were they not **feared** as mortal sins by the righteous themselves out of **pious fear of God**” – Heidelberg Disputation, Thesis 7

“Arrogance cannot be avoided nor can true hope be present, unless the judgment of damnation is **feared** in every work” – Heidelberg Disputation, Thesis 11

What of our Christian works? “Rusty hatchets”



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How does the face of Jesus show in fear and faith-filled ministry?

Reflect: WHERE DOES THE WORSHIP OF GOD TAKE PLACE?

“In the Second Table not even one word calls attention to the solitary life; but concerning our duties toward our fellowman in society in our common life together, not one or two or three precepts are used, but the entire Second Table...” – Martin Chemnitz

“Therefore we should learn that the works of the Second Table are truly the worship of God....., when our works are guided by the fear of God and by faith.” – Philipp Melanchthon



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The face of Jesus in fear and faith-filled ministry

If we fear and love God, nothing is left except to go and help others. “We should fear and love God so that we...”

“While Christ lives in us through faith, he now moves us to do good works through that living faith in his works. For the works that he does are for us the fulfillment, given through faith, of God’s commands. When we look at them, we are moved to imitate them.” – From the Proof of Thesis 27.

“Don’t tell me what a friend I have in Jesus until I see what a friend I have in you.”



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I discovered later, and I'm still discovering right up to this moment, that it is only by living completely in this world that one learns to have faith. One must completely abandon any attempt to make something of oneself, whether it be a saint, or a converted sinner, or a churchman (a so-called priestly type!), a righteous man or an unrighteous one, a sick man or a healthy one. By this-worldliness I mean living unreservedly in life's duties, problems, successes and failures, experiences and perplexities. In so doing we throw ourselves completely into the arms of God, taking seriously, not our own sufferings, but those of God in the world – watching with Christ in Gethsemane. That, I think, is faith; that is metanoia. And that is how one comes a man and a Christian.

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*



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“Perpetual inward mission to the church,” to Narcissus

“The achievement of Luther was to translate Paul’s missionary theology of grace into an **urgent and perpetual inward mission directed to the church, but especially to the heart of each believer**. Luther recaptured both the incongruity of grace in Paul and its origin in the event of Jesus Christ; **the challenge was to make this significant in communities of believers long socialized in the Christian tradition....** Paul’s theology of gift is re-preached to effect the perpetual conversion of believers who need to learn over and over again to receive the gift of God and to banish the false opinion that their works will merit salvation. **The gospel constitutes a mission to the self and a daily return to baptism, since the old nature persists in its tendency to arrogant self-sufficiency and must be countered by reminders that Christ has already given all.** – John Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 571-572



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The role of your congregation: Individualism and its effects

“**Individualism** involves the corrosion of people’s sense of themselves as defined by a variety of strong affiliations and **unchosen bonds** and its replacement by a **sense that all connections are matters of individual choice and preference**. It breaks up clusters of people into more isolated individuals held together by more casual affinities and more utilitarian relationships—each best understood in relation to the needs and wants of the individual. Politically **such individualism tends to weaken mediating power centers that stand between the individual and the nation as a whole—**



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Individualism and Its Effects

—from families to local communities (including local governments), **religious institutions**, fraternal bodies, civil-society organizations, labor groups, and the small and medium-sized businesses that make up much of the private economy. In their place, it strengthens individuals, on the one hand, and a central government, on the other, since such a government is most able to treat individuals equally by treating them all impersonally. For this reason, a **hyper-individualist culture is likely to be governed by a hyper-centralized government**, and each is likely to exacerbate the worst inclinations of the other.”

- Yuval Levin, *The Fractured Republic*, 2016; 99-100



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Well positioned for challenging times!

“The ultimate soul-forming institutions in a free society are frequently religious institutions. Traditional religion offers a direct challenge to the ethic of the age of fracture. Religious commitments command us to a mixture of responsibility, sympathy, lawfulness, and righteousness that align our wants with our duties. They help form us to be free.”

– Yuval Levin, 204

“Putting them (soul-forming institutions) within the reach of as many of our fellow citizens as possible must be among our highest and most pressing civic callings.” – Levin, 205



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The face of Jesus in fear and faith: The Love of the Cross

“God’s love does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it. Human love comes into being through that which is pleasing to it” – Heidelberg Disputation, Thesis 28.

“This is the love of the cross, born of the cross, which turns in the direction where it does not find good, which it may enjoy, but where it may confer good upon the evil and needy person”
– From the Proof to Thesis 28



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In Closing...

How old were you on 9-11?

“Dejection is a sign of sickness, and the same thing is true spiritually. Dejection spiritually is wrong, and we are always to blame for it” – Oswald Chambers

“God is repelled by sorrow of spirit; He hates sorrowful teaching and sorrowful thoughts and words, and He takes pleasure in happiness. For He came to refresh us, not to sadden us.” – Luther in Mattes, CJ Summer, 2018; 73

It's a great time to be the Church...of our Lord Jesus Christ!



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