

CAN WE MARKET THE GOSPEL?

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On December 2 we enter the season of Advent, and another church year. We prepare our hearts for the coming of the Lord.

*Lift up your heads, ye mighty gates!
Behold, the King of Glory waits*

This “King of Glory” is coming and we must prepare to meet Him and welcome Him into our midst, into our hearts. It is, of course, necessary for us to prepare because our hearts are, by nature, cold and unresponsive to the things of God. God must humble us by the Law so that we see our sin, and therefore our need for a Savior. The Spirit of God prepares us through repentance. Without repentance we cannot receive the King. Without repentance we cannot even recognize the King! He is hidden from the wise and strong of this world, and revealed to the foolish and weak. “He fills the hungry with good things and the rich He sends away empty” (Luke 1:53)

Let us consider this dynamic because it is the very nature of the Gospel to sift the world in this strange way, separating the proud, arrogant and self-sufficient (rich) from the poor, needy sinners (hungry). How does it happen that the rich cannot see Him and receive Him as King? How is it that the poor do see Him and recognize Him? The very humility of the King makes all the difference. The proud do not recognize or honor Him because they neither expect nor desire to bow before a humble man. They want to be impressed with worldly power and honor and glory. The humble recognize Him because He is one of them. He “speaks their language.”

Thus, God sends His Son to earth through a poor young Jewish girl who gives birth to the King in a lowly stable in Bethlehem. It is a most unlikely place for the King of Kings to be born. Who could possibly recognize Him in such a humble garb? Who could possibly know that the child lying in a manger was the Son of God, co-eternal and co-equal with the Father? Yet, this manner of His coming was exactly the way the Father willed Him to come! Why did the Father send the Son incognito? Did He not know that the external “packaging” would be unattractive and offensive to the rich and powerful of the earth? Could He not have removed this external “offensive” form in order to present the Savior in a more appealing light?

He certainly *could* have done anything He wanted, but He chose not to. He wanted His Son to be clothed in humility, and that is the way Jesus remained throughout His earthly life. He grew up in the obscure village of Nazareth in the region of Galilee. He was raised and lived in poverty, having no place to lay His head. He finally offered up His life on the shameful cross. In every way “He had no form or beauty that we should desire Him” (Is 53:2). It was this outward form of humility that caused the builders to reject Him.

God presented the Christ to the world in just this way to confound the wisdom of the wise and the strength of the strong. Those who became followers of Christ trusted the Word and not their sight or intellect. In this way God “hid these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to the babies” (Matt 11:25). Only the “foolish” can understand that “the foolishness of God is wiser than men.” Only the “weak” can comprehend that the “weakness of God is stronger than men.” That is why St. Paul gloried in his weakness, and insisted upon preaching nothing but Christ crucified (1 Cor 2:2). That is the garb in which God robed the King of Glory. That is the “package” in which God delivered the Gospel to the world. The Gospel came to us through a lowly woman in a lowly stable in a humble village called “the least of the thousands in Judea.”

Yet, there are those today – and many of them – who sincerely believe that the Gospel of Christ can be effectively “marketed” to the world. They seem to believe that if we dress the Gospel up in a package more appealing to the American consumer, the mission of the Christ will have greater success. They say they have no intention of changing the substance of the Gospel – only the STYLE. They want to take the humble, meek, unappealing Gospel and give it a “make-over.” They want to change the “image” of the church so it may fit into our present culture, and appeal to the needs (or rather the “wants”) of the un-churched multitude. When they do this, they find that the Gospel is more attractive and winsome to the unbeliever. Perhaps even thousands can be gathered in Christ’s Name. But, is it still the Gospel that is being proclaimed? Is it the Gospel that is attracting the multitudes? If this marvelous “success” is real and legitimate, one wonders why God did not use marketing wisdom from the beginning. Why did He send such eccentric men to be prophets? Why did He choose the most humble of men to be Apostles? Why did He form the very Cornerstone in such a way that the builders rejected it?

Did God do it all wrong? Could He have been aided by “handlers” and marketing consultants?



These are foolish questions because it is obvious that the Lord ordained not only the Gospel substance but the style and presentation. The two are inseparable. If one seeks a man clothed in purple and fine linen or a reed blowing in the wind, he will not find John the Baptist or Christ. Marketing seeks to remake God into the world’s image. The Gospel seeks to renew the sinner into the image of God. There is a vast chasm between the two! The offense of the Gospel includes form as well as substance. The Christmas message is good news to humble sinners. It has no appeal to the world unless it is highly commercialized. May the Lord open our eyes to see and our ears to hear the good news about the Babe of Bethlehem. **“UNTO YOU IS BORN A SAVIOR WHO IS CHRIST THE LORD!”**