

Topics in Viola & Barna's Pagan Christianity?

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The following topics are discussed at length in Pagan Christianity as examples of practices the church has adopted which violate the spirit or "pattern" of the New Testament and hinder spiritual growth. You may not find yourself upset at these practices as Viola is, but it is enlightening to understand that many of our most basic assumptions about worship are not from the New Testament, but may be, in fact, quite young and formerly controversial

1. The Church Building: Inheriting the Edifice Complex

The church building is based on the benighted idea that worship is removed from everyday life. The pew immobilizes the congregation of the saints and renders them mute spectators. It hinders face-to-face fellowship and interaction. Overhead kills.

2. The Order of Worship: Sunday Mornings Set in Concrete

The Protestant order of worship represses mutual participation and the growth of Christian community. It turns the body of Christ into one huge tongue (the pastor) and many little ears (the congregation). Even Christ himself is rendered a passive spectator. For many, the Sunday service is shamefully boring, and the Protestant liturgy actually hinders spiritual transformation because it encourages passivity, limits functioning, and implies that putting in one hour per week is the key to the victorious Christian life.

3. The Sermon: Protestantism's Most Sacred Cow

Around the third century a vacuum was created when mutual ministry faded from the body of Christ. . . the clergy began to emerge. . . church gatherings became more and more liturgical. . . many pagan orators and philosophers were becoming Christians. Many of these men became the theologians and leaders of the church – the "church fathers." Thus the pagan notion of a trained professional speaker who delivered orations for a fee moved straight into the Christian bloodstream.

4. The Pastor: Obstacle to Every-Member Functioning

We believe the pastoral office has stolen your right to function as a full member of Christ's body. It has rendered you a mute spectator who is proficient at taking sermon notes and passing an offering plate. It has voided the message of 1 Peter 2 that every brother and sister is a functioning priest. The demands of the pastorate will drain any mortal dry. Pastors lead very artificial lives. The pastoral role fosters dishonesty. . . many take to this role of being perfectly cheerful, always spiritual and available, and having a perfect family like actors in a Greek drama.

5. Sunday Morning Costumes: Covering Up the Problem

Dressing up for church began in the late 18th century with the Industrial Revolution. Before this time, dress was a clear marker of one's social class. The growing middle class could now dress up for social events, just like the well-to-do aristocrats of society. But dressing up reflects the false division between the secular and the sacred. It makes church the place where people hide their real selves. It is contrary to the primitive simplicity that was the sustaining hallmark of the early church.

6. Ministers of Music: Clergy Set to Music

Having a choir, a worship leader, or a praise team robs God's people of a vital function: to select and lead their own singing in the meetings – to have divine worship in their own hands – to allow Jesus Christ to direct the singing of his church rather than have it led by a human facilitator. The service becomes more like entertainment than corporate worship.

7. Tithing and Clergy Salaries: Sore Spots on the Wallet

God commanded Israel to give 23.3 percent of their income every year. It was the product of the land, not money. We never see Christians tithing in the New Testament, just as we don't see them sacrificing bulls and goats to cover their sins. Christians tithing to support the clergy did not become widespread until the eighth century. The widows, fatherless, and strangers were the rightful recipients of the tithe. However, in our day, mandatory tithing equals oppression to the poor. Paying a pastor encourages him to be a man pleaser. He is not able to speak freely. It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends upon his not understanding it.

8. Baptism and the Lord's Supper: Diluting the Sacraments

Baptism was the sinner's prayer in century one. D. L. Moody was the first to use the sinner's prayer, but it did not reach popular usage until the 1950s with Billy Graham and Campus Crusade for Christ. For the early Christians, the Lord's Supper was a festive community meal. By the fourth century, the love feast was prohibited among Christians. The table had been replaced by the altar.

9. Christian Education: Swelling the Cranium

In the first century, Christian training was hands-on, rather than academic. It was a matter of apprenticeship. Every church was then a seminary. Christ did not appoint professors, but followers. The intellect is not the gateway for knowing the Lord deeply. Neither are the emotions. Sunday schools began in 1780, as a way to teach poor children the basics of education. In 1810, the Sunday school began to shift from being a philanthropic effort to help poor children to an evangelical mechanism. Youth pastors did not exist until a separate demographic group called teenagers emerged in the 20th century.