

“Leaders - Navigating an Enchanted World”

Extended Leadership Team Meeting

February 1, 2018

“...even belief is changed in our secular age. There are still believers who believe the same things as their forebears 1,500 years ago; but how we believe has changed. Thus faith communities need to ask: How does this change in the “conditions” of belief impact the way we proclaim and teach the faith? How does this impact faith formation? How should this change the propagation of the faith for the next generation?”

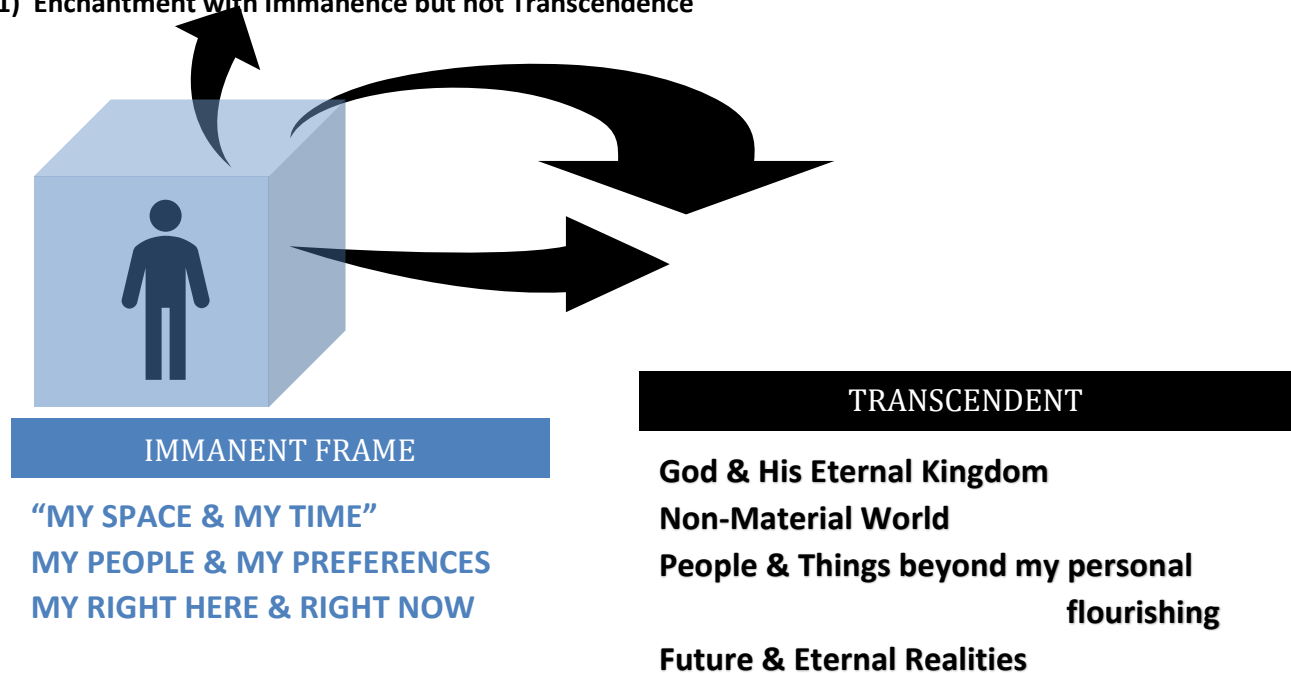
The emergence of the secular is also bound up with the production of a new option — a way of constructing meaning and significance without any reference to the divine or transcendence. So it wasn’t enough for us to stop believing in the gods; we also had to be able to imagine significance within an immanent frame, to imagine modes of meaning that did not depend on transcendence.

How did we get here from there? How did we get from a time (in, say, 1500) in which atheism was virtually unthinkable to a time (in 2000) when theism is almost unbelievable? ...We have to consider the change in conditions that made it possible for the West to be able to imagine exclusive humanism as a viable vision of significance.” **Smith, James K. A.** *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (pp. 23, 26-27). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.. Kindle Edition.

“How Did We Get Here?” ...to a Land with some new VOCABULARY

- Immanence vs Transcendence
- Personal Flourishing as the Gate Keeper of the Soul’s Interests and Activity
- The Malaise of Discontent, Disappointment, and Despondency (People FEEL Unrewarded & Unhappy)— BUT, they are Enchanted to Keep Trying to Make it Work for them!!

(1) Enchantment with Immanence but not Transcendence



(2) Enchantment with PERSONAL FLOURISHING

- Acts as the Gatekeeper of my will, my decision, my interests, and my pursuits
- The motivator of my desires, ambitions, and passions

"The modern person who sees personal human flourishing as his or her highest commitment then sees every relationship or obligation (personal, relational, religious, or communal) as merely and only an enhancement to the primary commitment to personal flourishing. ...our churches are potentially filled with people who see their current church commitments and investments into community as enhancements to their flourishing. When these 'enhancements' begin to impede our 'flourishing' by asking for sacrifice and demanding discomfort, the temptation will be to put off faith as an intolerable intruder..." John Starke, "Preaching to a Secular Age", (from 'Our Secular Age', p. 43)

For our achievement culture at its core, powered by the rise of therapy as a kind of secular religion, has elevated feelings as the peak of human flourishing. The greatest good is to feel good. ... The contemporary life script of the achievement culture is to arrange a life that delivers constant pleasurable feelings, to keep the social and psychic borders up, to keep negative feelings outside. Mark Sayers, Strange Days: Life in the Spirit in a Time of Upheaval (pp. 159-160). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.

CONSEQUENCES & FEATURES of This Enchantment

- Immanence has Obscured Transcendence
- "The Age of Authenticity" has Obscured Authority
- We Have High Expectations and Increasing Discontent
 - Institutions, Partnerships, and Relationships BEWARE! (Marriage is being deferred due to these very high expectations, discontent and unfulfillment in marriage is flourishing)
 - Geographical Moves are more frequent than ever (Resource: "Age of Mobilization" by Taylor)
 - Employment is Tentative, Short duration, and unrewarding
 - The Quest for MORE ...is raising the burden of financial income on families, generating more and more two income household needs
 - Church Participation is not primary, more negotiable than ever, and easy to find disappointing.
 - People claim they want something deep and meaningful, they want to be part of a community, they want to be part of something that's making a difference. ...Yet they haven't figured out that their own life is NOT CONDUCIVE to either of those. People want relationships with people like them, who scratch some personal itch or preference; people are overscheduled and mentally exhausted, so finding down-time is much more important than finding connections—besides, we actually 'feel' connected by our devices now and no longer feel the same need for personal connection ...however, we notice a lack of reward or meaningfulness by this type of connection, but we've not figured out that WE are the source of that disconnect—not the other people of the church that we've been attending. ["We just didn't feel connected or welcomed or meaningfully involved" ...but they haven't noticed their severe inconsistency, their tendency to lack handles on their own lives for others to engage!]

As communal life moves into a more individual form, and community is found online, we can avoid encountering and relating to those who think differently. ...In a microsecond we can connect with friends, family, and coworkers across the globe. The paradox, though, is that the tool that offers us incredible social connectivity can also isolate us. Emerging online technologies offer broad social networks yet struggle to offer the deep connections essential to human well-being. Adding to the sense of fragility is the wane in traditional notions of family. Radical individualism continues to dominate, and more and more adults are living alone. Our increasing

connectivity to more people, more news, and more opinions, alongside our relational poverty, can make us feel disconnected and estranged from others." **Sayers, Mark**. *Strange Days: Life in the Spirit in a Time of Upheaval* (p. 16, 17).

- The Coming Challenge of Unity & Continuity—in an Age of "Gallop­ing Pluralism"

"...the pluralistic social environment permitted by religious freedom does lead to a 'dissolution' of the shared meanings of words. Moral consensus and peaceful resolution of conflicts become every more difficult. ...One thing is for sure: there is no going back. ...In a world of rapid transit and instant communication, you simply can't avoid the pluralistic social environment. Various kinds of fundamentalism—religious and secular—may attempt to create homogeneous social environments; not only do they fail and collapse, but even while they last they never really establish the epistemically pure mindset they seek. ...Back when people lived in social environments that were small, homogeneous, and isolated, it was possible for people to take their religious beliefs for granted. Today, belief of any kind MUST be a conscious choice, and that fact changes everything about it. One of the most prominent changes this creates is that religious coercion becomes impossible and even absurd." **Greg Forster**, "Our Secular Age", p. 108-109

Enchantment is a Blinding Spell—AMBLYOPIA of the SOUL

"...Charles Taylor writes, 'many people are happy living for goals which are purely immanent; they live in a way that takes no account of the transcendent.' In the secular age, 'cross-pressured' as we are between doubt and belief, we can't know for certain if God exists. But if he does, surely he wills our good. ...Which betrays the real problem: secularism is not the problem 'out there.' Instead, every Sunday morning, it is 'Secular people' filling our pews. They attest to loving Jesus—but accept 'no final goals beyond human flourishing, nor any allegiance to anything else beyond this flourishing.' They pray for God's kingdom to come—and imagine the advent of their own happiness. ...In the secular age, God becomes the guarantor of our 'best life now.' **Jen Pollock Michel**, "Our Secular Age", p. 117

"...we Christians live and breathe in this secular age as well. This self-sufficient humanism becomes part of the muscle memory of our own souls, even if we are often unconscious to its effect. What Taylor tells us about secularists hits awfully close to home in the pews. ...The task of the preacher, it seems, is to aim at this dual temptation. We speak to the longings of those outside the faith and the wanderings of those inside." **John Starke**, "Preaching to a Secular Age" (from 'Our Secular Age', p. 40)

Understanding Amblyopia (Lazy Eye)

"...we could ask whether people recognize something beyond or transcendent to their lives. ...Every person and every society, lives life with or by some conception(s) of what human flourishing is: what constitutes a fulfilled life? What makes life really worth living? What would we most admire people for? We can't help asking these and related questions in our lives. And our struggles to answer them define the view or views that we try to live by..." **Charles Taylor**, "A Secular Age", p. 16

— Ours has become a culture that has 'Stopped Perceiving the Transcendent'—it is neurologically damaged from ongoing neglect.

Matthew 13:10-17 Then the disciples came and said to him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” ¹¹ And he answered them, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. ¹² For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. ¹³ This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. ¹⁴ Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: ““You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.” ¹⁵ For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.’ ¹⁶ But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. ¹⁷ For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

Leadership Awareness

Leadership Awareness Means...

- **Being aware and insightful about the 'setting' of life that people are going to have to apply faith to.**
- **There's more to this than better announcements and going back through 'why small groups'. ...although we should do both—because we are called to do certain things, no matter what kind of fruit.**
- **Leadership Awareness means... You are a missionary to a different people**
 - **We used to face the salvation substitute of 'moralism' ...now we face 'meism' (Immanence + Personal Flourishing).**
 - **We used to emphasize a "Personal Relationship with Jesus" ...now that's exactly what everybody has—their own, valid, personal way of relating to Jesus. (Who is also their own concept and creation)**
- **Leadership awareness means addressing today's version of the question: "What does Human Flourishing Look Like?" ... "What is the good life?"**

How are you seeing these factors play out: (1) In the lives of people you relate to ... (2) In the way relationships 'feel' today ... (3) In your own life

RESOURCES That Have Helped Me in This Study

- "Our Secular Age" by Charles Taylor
- "A Secular Age" edited by Colin Hansen
- "Strange Days - Life in the Spirit in a Time of Upheaval" by Mark Sayers
- "Disappearing Church - From Cultural Relevance to Gospel Resilience" by Mark Sayers
- "How Not to be Secular" by James Smith
- "Desiring the Kingdom - Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation" by James Smith
- "You Are What You Love" by James Smith
- "Recapturing the Wonder" by Mike Cospers
- "12 Ways Your Phone is Changing You" by Tony Reinke
- "Living in the Light - Money, Sex, and Power" by John Piper
- "Impossible People - Christian Courage and the Struggle for the Soul of Civilization" by Os Guinness
- "Renaissance – The Power of the Gospel However Dark the Times" by Os Guinness
- "God in the Whirlwind" by David Wells
- Any book by David Wells in the past 20 years
- "The Next Christendom - The Coming of Global Christianity" by Phillip Jenkins
- "Everyday Church" by Tim Chester and Steve Timmis
- "Reclaiming Conversation - The Power of Talk in a Digital Age" by Sherry Turkle
- "Alone Together - Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other" by Sherry Turkle
- "The Shallows - What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains" by Nicholas Carr
- "Theology in the Context of World Christianity" by Timothy Tenent