

## The Gospel of Barney:

In our Neo-pagan, Hedonistic Narcissistic Society

If you are easily offended do not read this!

What the ELCA is today is totally foreign to what I was ordained and called to at Stella Lutheran Chapel on June 17th of 1984. It is foreign to the to the ELC my father was ordained in the ELC back in 1949 or the LCA my father served on the Board of American Missions for most of his 37 years active ministry! He started seven congregations in the Pacific Northwest Synod in those years. All still remain, but since its formation in 1988 the ELCA has not started one church in WA, OR, ID, MT, or AK (The old Pacific Northwest Synod of the LCA)! I am told we are too saturated with Lutheran churches (ELCA ones, perhaps)! I have heard Dave Peters (MT Synod Director of Missions) say, the ELCA is not in the business of building churches (all too true!) It is foreign to what either my father or I were ordained into, but far from new!

Face it; we live in a Neo-pagan age! There is no Absolute truth, or as Malcolm Mugridge put it in his book The End of Christendom, (1980) "One of the peculiar sins of the twentieth century which we've developed to a very high level is the sin of credulity. It has been said that when human beings stop believing in God they believe in nothing. The truth is much worse: they believe in anything!" When we take away the cross and absolute truth then this Neo-Paganism, a veritable pantheon of idols rivaling Act's description of Athens! "While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, 'What is this babbling trying to say?' Others remarked, 'He seems to be advocating foreign gods.' They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, 'May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean.' (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)" – (Acts 17: 16-21) – Sound familiar? All positions are equally as valid as any other. Jesus is no longer the way, the truth, and the life, but a way, a truth, a life! Life is totally centered on self, convenience and non-offense! People spend their time talking about and listening to the latest ideas, and believing anything! Proving the truism, "A person who stands for nothing, will fall for anything!"

We still have Epicureans: "Epicurus felt that it was useless to argue over metaphysics, that there was no such thing as a soul that lived after death, that we arrived at our present condition by means of evolution, and that we had the quality of free will.

We can see an almost 'modern' materialism and empiricism here: All things -- including minds -- are made of atoms and follow natural laws. All knowledge comes from the senses. Thoughts and memories are nothing but weak sensations.

Virtue for Epicurus was a means to an end. That end is happiness. It is good to feel pleasure and to avoid pain, but one needs to apply reason to life. Sometimes pain is necessary in order to gain happiness. Other times, pleasure leads to more suffering than it is worth." (Dr. C. George Boeree) We just call them Atheists.

We still have Stoics: "The founder of stoicism is Zeno of Citium (333-262) in Cyprus. Zeno may have been Phoenician or part Phoenician. He was a student of the cynics, but was also influenced by Socrates. His philosophy was similar to that of Antisthenes, but tempered by reason. Basically, he believed in being virtuous, and that virtue was a matter of submitting to God's will. As usual for Greeks who postulated a single god, Zeno did not strongly differentiate God from nature. So another way of putting it is to live according to nature ("Zen kata physin.").

The school got its name from the Painted Porch (stoa poikile) in Athens where Zeno studied. Walking up and down the open hallways, he lectured his students on the value of apatheia, the absence of passion, something not too different from the Buddhist idea of non-attachment. By passion Zeno meant uncontrolled emotion or physical desire. Only by taking this attitude, he felt, could we develop wisdom and the ability to apply it.

'Let no one break your will!' he said. Man conquers the world by conquering himself. Start by developing an indifference to pain and pleasure, through meditation. Wisdom occurs when reason controls passions; Evil occurs when passions control us.

Another aspect of Stoicism is its belief in the development of a universal state, in which all men were brothers. Stoics believed in certain 'natural rights,' a concept which we wouldn't see again until the 18th century. They also believed in the right to commit suicide -- an important part of Roman cultural tradition." (Dr. C. George Boeree)

Hedonism is alive and well! Its Founder: "Aristippus (435-355) was also a student of Socrates. Originally from Cyrene on the north coast of Africa, he returned there to found his own school, where he taught the philosophy of hedonism (from the Greek word for pleasure).

Hedonism is very simple: Whatever we do, we do to gain pleasure or to avoid pain. Pleasure is the only good, and the achievement of pleasure the only virtue. Morality is only a matter of culture and customs and laws, something we now call ethical relativism. Further, science, art, civilization in general, are good only to the extent that they are useful in producing pleasure.

Note, however, that Aristippus also taught that some pleasures are higher than others, and that we should be slaves to none of them. He was equally cheerful in good times and in poverty, and despised useless displays of wealth.

He and his students lived as a part of a commune-like school where all practiced what they preached, including free love, more than 2000 years before Woodstock! Women were the full equals of men, and not only hypothetically: His daughter Arete succeeded him in leadership of the school and commune. She wrote 40 books herself and was honored by the city of Cyrene with the title 'Light of Hellas.'" (Dr. C. George Boeree)

Self-centered, Hedonism marks our actions, masked by a search for "justice" or "fairness." The ELCA (as have most other mainline Protestant denominations) has certainly been in the business of pushing a social gospel: "social justice" issues, or "climate justice" issues regardless of whether they are Scriptural, reasonable or sound doctrine. The focus has been on being "welcoming", "accepting", making sure everyone "feels good"(You know- I love you, you love me, we're one big happy family- Gospel of Barney). The Augsburg Confessions, Creeds, and Book of Concord and Catechism are ignored as irrelevant to our day. Long before either my father or I were ordained, H. Richard Niebuhr wrote in his book, The Kingdom of God in America (1937), about the social gospel, describing its message as: "A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross!"

A new doctrine of "Bound Conscience" was introduced in the ELCA in 2009 to try to satisfy all and make as many as possible happy (A Utilitarian ethic at best, the greatest good for the greatest number, decided by a democratic vote at the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly). In essence, then ELCA bowed to the trend of moral relativism (Universal Hedonism is the other name for a utilitarian ethic). It is all in how "you" perceive Scripture. Whatever "you" believe is as valid as whatever anyone else believes! It is a doctrine of "In My Holy Opinion" (IMHO)

Paul Harvey first wrote in his syndicated column in 1964: "If I were the Prince of Darkness I would want to engulf the whole world in darkness I'd have a third of its real estate and four fifths of its population but, I wouldn't be happy until I had seized the ripest apple on the tree. So I'd set about however necessary to take over the United States. I'd subvert the churches first, and I would begin with a campaign of whispers. With the wisdom of a serpent, I

would whisper to you as I whispered to Eve: 'Do as you please. Do as you please.' To the young, I would whisper, 'The Bible is a myth.' I would convince them that man created God instead of the other way around. I would confide that what is bad is good, and what is good is square. In the ears of the young married I would whisper that work is debasing and that cocktail parties are good for you. I'd caution them not to be extreme in religion, in patriotism, in moral conduct. And the old, I would teach to pray. I would teach them to pray after me, 'Our Father, which art in Washington.'

And then I'd get organized. I'd educate authors on how to lurid literature exciting, so that anything else would appear dull and uninteresting. I'd threaten TV with dirtier movies and vice versa. I'd infiltrate unions and urge more loafing, less work, idle hands usually work for me. I'd pedal narcotics to whom I could. I'd sell alcohol to ladies and gentlemen of distinction. I'd tranquilize the rest with pills.

If I were the devil I would encourage schools to refine young intellects, and neglect to discipline emotions—just let those run wild. I'd get an atheist to front for me before the highest courts and I'd get preachers to say, 'She's right.'

Thus I could evict God from the courthouse, and then the schoolhouse, and then from the houses of Congress. And in His own churches I would substitute psychology for religion, and deify science. If I were the devil I'd make the symbols of Easter an egg and the symbol of Christmas a bottle. If I were the devil I'd take from those, and who have, and give to those wanted until I had killed the incentive of the ambitious. Then my police state would force everybody back to work then I'd separate families, putting children in uniforms, women in coal mines, and objectors in slave labor camps. If I were Satan I'd just keep doing what I'm doing and the whole world go to hell as sure as the Devil." - Paul Harvey- 1964

This differs some from his re-edited re-released piece in 1996, (and embellished versions are all over the internet) but I find it far more prophetic, as it first came out in 1964! "Do as you please," is not whispered, but shouted, touted, advertised and promoted! Emotions just run wild. We are more concerned about how people "feel" about our preaching and teaching in the church, so it is reduced to the Lowest Common Denominator (LCD) Faith that can make the greatest number of people feel good (A utilitarian/universal hedonism): The Gospel of Barney, You know- "I love you, you love me, we're one big happy family." But as far as I know, a purple and green dinosaur has never saved anyone!

The way I sum up much of the ELCA and Mainline Protestant theology can be sung to the refrain of Supercalifragilisticexpealidosius:

Liberal revisionist situational universalism,

Even though the practice looks a lot like hedonism!

Luther says we're saved by grace,

What use have we for laws?

We simply exegete away our sins,

And celebrate our flaws!

Barney is concerned with love, caring, sharing, and fairness, not bad ideals per se, but when coupled with the Antinomian view of forgiveness without repentance, acceptance without discipline, a both-and rather than an either or ethic, it becomes the epitome of cheap grace! There is no response or responsibility to God's grace. To which Paul said, "Do you not know, brothers and sisters—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law has authority over someone only as long as that person lives? For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law that binds her to him. So then, if she has sexual relations with another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress if she marries another man. So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. 5 For when we were in the realm of the flesh,[a] the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in us, so that we bore fruit for death. 6 But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code. What shall we say, then? Is the law sinful? Certainly not! Nevertheless, I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.' But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting. For apart from the law, sin was dead. Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good. Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! Nevertheless, in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it used what is good to bring about my death, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful. We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to

do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! – (Romans 7:1-25)

Liberal revisionist and progressives dismiss the Authority of Scripture, because it does not match current culture and customs and laws, pure ethical relativism. The Bible is reinterpreted to suit the individual's pursuit of pleasure and happiness! Of course we have democratized it to universal hedonism and a utilitarian ethic so if you can convince the majority your position is moral and ethical- it is, Scripture is anachronistic and irrelevant!

The church then becomes caught up in the crusade for equal pleasure and happiness for all. Working for "civil liberties" – the rights to "do as you please," so long as it is not criminal. And the Church in some cases seeks to de-criminalize more socially acceptable sins. Everything is a "justice issue": social justice, economic justice, and my personal favorite "climate justice!" When pressed for answers on how these justices are defined, it depends on who you ask, and since they subscribe to a very Hindu both-and theology now defined in the ELCA as "bound conscience" in the ELCA you get nothing but a In My Holy Opinion (IMHO) response which is beholdng neither to Scripture or Science (Evident Reason) The two things Luther appealed to at the Diet of Worms and the ELCA has left in the dust! Funny I don't recall Moses being told to take the Ten Commandments back down the mountain for a vote! But I forget myself, that is (in the ELCA) merely an analogous mythological story, like the virgin birth, cross and resurrection! We are no longer as Luther understood us "simul Justus et peccator (simultaneously saint and sinner), but "semper justus umquam peccator" (always saint, never sinner) Natural Law is deistic in nature. We all carry the divine spark. Like Zeno and the stoics, there is a failure to differentiate God from nature! If it is natural it is right – which ignores the doctrine of original sin! In the old SBH we used to confess: "we are by nature sinful and unclean," that was softened to, "we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves," in the LBW! "lex orandi lex credenda" (the law of worship is the law of belief) subtle changes to allow us to "do as we please!" As Paul advised Timothy, "But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people." (2 Timothy 3:1-5)

God forbid the Gospel actually offends someone! Personally if you are not offended by what you read there, you haven't read it or are choosing to ignore what you reading. It is highly offensive as a mirror to my sinful human nature!

Does the Gospel offend? Ask Paul: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.' Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block (some translations read 'an offense') to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength." – (1 Corinthians 1:18-25)

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References:

1. Scripture quotation are from NIV

2. The Ancient Greeks, Part Three:

Epicureans and Stoics

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