

Conversion from Respectable Religion to Evangelical Faith

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At the Mix in 06 in Indianapolis, John Thomas and Sharon Watkins, the General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) were asked to reflect briefly on their dreams for the church. These are John Thomas' remarks, shared again as part of his "State of the Church" presentation at the Annual Meeting of the Kansas-Oklahoma Conference in Manhattan, Kansas.

Respectable religion is preoccupied with the people already in the church, caring only for ourselves as if we were one great chaplaincy to each other. Evangelical faith is deeply attentive to those outside the church, to the spiritually homeless yearning for a relationship with Jesus and with the community of Christ's people.

Respectable religion fears transgressing the rules. It guards the door and is always "well-behaved." Evangelical faith knows that the love of God and the love of neighbor ultimately trumps both the authority of the canons and the clerics, and will not stand for bouncers or ejector seats in our churches.

Respectable religion is afflicted with terminal politeness. It will never risk offending, even with the truth. Evangelical faith rises up with outrage on behalf of the poor and oppressed and violated in our world who are left out, left alone, left behind.

Respectable religion blesses the culture and seeks to protect its own privileged place in the world. Evangelical faith challenges the culture and risks the embrace of those at the margins.

Respectable religion seeks a congenial place where cross and flag can easily cohabit to claim our dual allegiance. Evangelical faith calls into question every parochial idolatry and places us under the sole and sovereign claim of our Lord.

Respectable religion wants at all cost to avoid standing out; its cry is "please don't make me feel embarrassed." Evangelical faith is prepared to be odd, a peculiar salt and leaven in the world.

Respectable religion prays for the victims of war and for those in harms way. Evangelical faith does that, but also challenges the arrogance and deception of those who lead us to war.

Respectable religion treats the church's Book as a shrine to be worshiped, a talisman to

be carried, an armor for protection. Evangelical faith opens the Book to hear the surprising, confounding voice of the Stillspeaking God.

Respectable religion is an older brother ever grumpy that grace abounds for those deemed undeserving. Evangelical faith is a waiting mother or father eager to embrace the one returning from a far country.

Respectable religion is always serious, sober, and somber. Evangelical faith plays, teases, pokes fun, provokes us toward joy!