

BothAndMore Christianity? (Give credit to Rich Nathan who wrote a book on this topic)

- Things get off track when we are asked to pick between two biblical options.

Introduction: Either/Or thinking during my interview seven years ago. "Save the drowning, don't polish the deck on a sinking ship. Let's go after the eternal truths of the Bible, not just do nice things for folk, *like a bunch of liberals.*" How embarrassing to admit that I actually said that, and also sad that everybody scrambled to affirm it and to distance themselves from associating with "those terrible liberals." Well, that's either/or christianity for you. "EITHER we can save souls OR we can make life here on earth better. BUT WE CAN'T DO BOTH." Woops.

False Either/Or dichotomies:

- caring for the soul in the next life vs caring for the soul in this life
- forgiveness of sins vs inner healing
- caring for lost people vs caring for found people
- divine healing vs medicine
- creationism vs science
- extending grace vs calling people to holiness
- an outreach church vs a discipling church
- a church for young families vs a church for college age and singles
- a well organized church vs a Spirit-led church
- good teaching vs strong community
- truth-driven vs experience driven
- A vertical church vs A horizontal church

Matthew 22:29 NIV Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God..."

Scriptures Only: Dry theological "rightness" and logic, study, and the evidence-based approach of the lawyer. Totally interested in what can be "proven" from the Bible. Interested in placing the Bible in the place of supremacy in our lives where it really can't function well. What really ends up happening is that REASON, not divine truth, becomes the Master. This is modernity, the enlightenment, the rise of the individual's reason, as king.

Intellectualism without power and without encounter become dry, formal. Right, but not free or powerful. Not prone to fits of faith to move mountains. The emphasis becomes human wisdom in saying and explaining things brilliantly and biblically. It sounds good, but it is missing the power of Jesus in the Gospels and the power of the Church in the book of Acts. Where is the God of Elijah who shows up and shows off? All we are left with is what is possible for well organized and ethical people. **This is Christianity without an empty tomb.**

Power Only: An example of power only is a story from the 16th century Anabaptists. A young man thought that his and his friend's impressions of the end-times significance of their role in the plan of God were trustworthy, that the end was near, that if so and so would go to a nearby major city and preach, he would be imprisoned, but then Jesus was to return, and the young man would be placed in a position of great authority and glory in the kingdom of God. So the young man went, preached, went to prison, and died there. Nearly five

hundred years later and Jesus still hasn't returned. There was such an emphasis on the Spirit, that the scriptures seemed to take a back seat to personal impressions. *This was what Luther meant when he said that the Anabaptists swallowed the Holy Ghost feathers and all.*

Charismatics without deep biblical rooting become overly credulous in the name of faith. They believe irresponsibly. Sloppily. Too much fluff and faith without reason or substance. It can degenerate into materialism with miracles. Healing *for us*. Answered prayers *for us*. Incredible experiences with God *for us*. Easy quick answers. **This is christianity without a cross.**

BZ talked about packing his bags from the charismatic movement back in 2004 because there was an almost arrogant dismissal of anything intellectual, difficult, or academic. The very word "theology" was almost held in disdain. And what he saw in place of substance and depth was what he calls, "easy, cheesy, cotton candy spirituality." Offering people nothing more than what the world wants, layered over by a thin veneer of Christian spirituality. (By "packing his bags" he meant taking that which is good and keeping it, but leaving the confines of the movement.)

My prof at college...I can understand why it would be easy for folk to be cynical about theological education. I understand why we joke about seminary as "cemetery." I once had a professor - with a doctorate - tell us that the cases in the New Testament of demonization are simply the bible writers way of talking about schizophrenia. I raised my hand and offered an alternative theory based upon my first person experience of casting demons out of people - namely, that the Bible writers were simply being accurate. The awesome thing about this professor is that he was totally curious and asked questions. He even seemed happy to hear my stories. He had never been taught or experienced the power aspect of the Gospel, at least not in overtly supernatural ways. He knew the Scriptures, but not the power of God.

We need deep Both/And More theology because life (reality) is complex, which is why orthodox Christian teaching is complex. A key is complicated because it fits the lock (GK Chesterton). What faithful discipleship calls for is living and thinking robust and deep enough to open the locks real life involves. A flathead screwdriver won't work. It looks like it will fit. But it won't. Only a key will do.

Example: Homosexuality - *EITHER welcome and affirm OR reject and condemn?* Not either/or. Both/And More. There's the moral question, the pastoral question, and the political question.

Orthodoxy is almost always about keeping things together that seem not to fit, but do:

- God is 3 and 1
- Jesus is divine and human
- The world is fallen and good
- God's kingdom is now and later

We don't need Either/OR. We need Both/And More.

- Helping the poor AND pro life
- Biblically rooted AND Holy Spirit empowered
- Evangelism AND Social Action
- Confront personal evil AND confront systemic evil
- Proclamation AND demonstration
- sound doctrine AND divine encounter
- godly character AND spiritual gifts
- Crisis moments of change AND slow development over time

Early 20th century - liberalism - Walter Rauschenbusch, an urban Baptist pastor, saw the devastation among his flock. He was sick and tired of performing funerals for children who contracted illness and died in unsafe working conditions. "How many more children have to die?" He searched the Scriptures and saw in their pages that the prophets of old railed against similar practices in their times. Walter Rauschenbusch coined the phrase, "the social gospel," unwillingly, since in his mind it was not a different or new gospel, but only the social outworking of the true Gospel.

Early 20th century - Conservative reaction. Milton and Lyman Stewart published "the fundamentals of the Christian faith," and sent copies EVERYWHERE because they felt that the emphasis on social concern coincided with the loss of historic Christian orthodoxy. Conservatives withdraw from educational institutions to start their own "bible colleges." Christians pulled out of public schools and start their own Christian ones. Denominations split. So the war was between this biblical value and that one. False dichotomy. But I'm happy to say that we don't need to *permanently live in our ancestral war camps*.

Flag Pole Rallies. A lot of the church in the historical past was about christian conflict surrounding *which biblical truths to rally around*. The modern buffet of denominational or nondenominational options is basically a game of "What's your favorite biblical truth? Because that's what's on the menu HERE." If you LIKE holiness, you may enjoy Methodism. If you LIKE miracles, you may enjoy Pentecostalism. If you LIKE evangelism, you may like the Southern Baptists. If you like deep theology, you may enjoy Presbyterianism. If you LIKE the sermon on the mount, come down son, try out the Mennonites. On and on we could go. It all feels built on the Either/Or idea that "We can only do one thing."

"Add to your faith; don't subtract." Don't repudiate the things learned in previous seasons of your journey. This is very common. I want to give you **two examples of subtraction**:

1.) Years ago I read an article about a number of Pentecostals who left that movement to become Greek Orthodox. They were like, "Wow! This liturgy is so much healthier and more biblically rich than the individualism and subjective emotionalism we've been living under! Wow! It's beautiful and biblical! I can't go back. This is better." The worship is so reverent and has sights, smells, and sounds. They seemed to view the Pentecostalism of their past with disdain.

2.) Evangelicals who discover the deep theological wells of the Reformed tradition. They hear clarity on the nature of humanity, the absolute free grace of the gospel, the cultural mandate of the church in society, and the sovereignty of God over all history. It really is a stunning and compelling vision. I had a conversation with a young reformed believer who was mystified that I started out in that camp, but grew away from it. He said, "That's the first time I've ever heard of that. I've only heard of people becoming Reformed once they really pay attention to the details of the Bible - the deeper teachings of the Bible. You're the first person I know who left."

Usually when people discover the theology of Calvin, Luther, Piper, Sproul, MacArthur, and others they are just thrilled with it's depth and carefulness of thought, such great and majestic thoughts of God which are so missing front the contemporary landscape of feel good, softy, happy cloud, nice grandpa God. So I'm an anomaly to "pack my bags" from the reformed movement.

When people discover good stuff somewhere else they tend to repudiate the good things at are here. When people discover something they've been missing they often reject the good thing they have. They pull an either/or instead of both and more.

MLK Jr caught a lot of flack from his civil rights brethren over his active involvement in speaking out over the Vietnam war. They believed he was distracting people from their cause. They thought he was diluting his platform and slowing down the effectiveness of the civil rights movement. They believed that he could Either push civil rights here or the vietnam issue. He argued that the civil rights of people of all races and nationalities must be the concern of a person of justice, not only the civil rights of *my people*. Both/And More.

The OT Prophets are Both/And More: The prophets preached against both Idolatry AND Injustice. The message of the conservatives AND the message of the liberals.

The Ten Commandments are Both/And More

1. No other gods
2. No graven images
3. No Name in Vain
4. Sabbath kept holy
5. Honor mom and dad
6. No Murder
7. No Adultery
8. No Stealing
9. Don't bear false witness
10. Don't covet

1-4 are about God. **5-10** are about people. Just like the prophets.

George Whitefield was a raging evangelist, concerned about souls in eternity. But he also gave sacrificial amounts of his finances to establish many orphanages.

Finney and the 19th century American Revivals were deeply personal, spiritual, and focused on personal holiness unto the Lord. But they quickly began to ask questions about systemic evil. It was just natural for them in times of great Holy Ghost outpouring to be Both/And More disciples. They tackled issues like...

- slavery
- voting rights for women
- child labor laws
- alcohol abuse
- working conditions among the poor
- orphanages
- soup kitchens
- hospitals etc

Head and Heart. Deep christian truth clearly spoken, prayed, and sung. And big loving believing hearts that love and believe deeply, with great feeling, and with action. Thinking deeply, clearly, truly, so that we don't have false pictures of God in our minds. But then the work of the mind isn't finished until it hands off it's truth to the Heart to be embraced emotionally.

It's time for Both/And More christianity:

- caring for the soul in the next life AND caring for the soul in this life
- forgiveness of sins AND inner healing
- caring for lost people AND caring for found people
- divine healing AND medicine

- creationism AND science
- extending grace AND calling people to holiness
- an outreach church AND a discipling church
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Jesus turned over the tables of the moneychangers. He kicked over the chairs of those selling doves. He took a stand to remove the materialism, greed, and the status quo acceptance of evil in his Father's place of worship. The evil of idolatry. And the evil of injustice. **He did it for God. He did it for people.** In my mind I can see the hushed and awed onlookers staring at the aftermath of the mess all over the place. I hear Jesus yelling to the offended religious leaders that *this is to be a house of prayer but you have made it into a den of robbers.* And then I see him turn and stare at the people. The bystanders. I hear his soul whispering to them through a plaintive look. *"Come with me and you won't get cheated. Come with me and you won't get sold down the river. Come with me and you'll get the real thing. Come with me. Come. Come."*