

By Charles Pinkney

The **CO** **SP**EL **with** **out** **RE** **L**IGION

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Religious Emulation

Emulated Behaviors, Discipleship is not just learning how to talk Christian talk and act with religious behavior: It is easy to appear good and righteous if you learn the patterns of religious behaviors. All religions have worship; Within the gathering in a place of worship we observe behaviors and attitudes that mark an individual as devout or pious. Any practitioner can appear devout regardless of what is the object of their worship. When worship becomes something that can be expressed by mere physical postures we are easily removed from the focus of the heart. We find specific kinds of actions in our religious practice. Sometimes this involves bowing, kneeling or gestures – a purely external matter. But God judges the inner man of the heart. *"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds."*

As Paul said in his epistles, "Be imitators of me, as I imitate Christ." There are some who we discover of worthy of emulation. These men or women truly "know who they worship." There is a place for conformity and imitation and there is a place where conformity is a hindrance to knowing God. "Are we to follow God or man?" was a sound bench mark for belief and behavior from the beginning.

Most of us have had a time in our lives that we tried to keep up with the latest fashions and trends. We kept our eyes on trendsetters and tried to emulate those fashions and fads. Teenagers are tuned in to the issues of "being cool" or being in and staying in. In contemporary media expressions and fashions or behaviors that are "in" today blast our minds and emotions. It's message tries to persuade us to conform to the things which are "hip" or "cool." Fashionable-ness whether in the "look", in language affectations, or owning material toys and accessories that are presumed to make life fulfilling. Media trends have the power to turn our minds away from things which are true or eternal. While we may quickly condemn conformity we still find ourselves being its victim.

Conformity is also relevant within Christian institutions. Religion models and promotes its own kind of behaviors to emulate. One can learn how to be appear pious or religious with "Copy-cat" behavior can promote a perception of one's status in the church community. Practically everything about church life can be seen, demonstrated or modeled, and replicated. We are exhorted to be sincere in our expressions of compassion and humility and not merely put on an act.

Preaching style can also become affected or stylized. It is not uncommon for preachers to sound like they were cut out of the same mold. The preaching voice is really not like men or women talk a certain way among themselves but when they get inside a church they use a different voice, or mannerisms, or inflections which seem somehow more "spiritual?" How is it preachers sound like preachers? Where do they learn this "preacher voicing" and emphasis?

No doubt from one of their preaching heroes.

King James English the language of Shakespeare, does not make us more Godly. But the religious tone often reverts to this out dated synthetic language by which to affect spirituality and appropriate reverence. This affectation has no more power to influence God than for you and I to simply talk as ourselves. God knows who we are, he knows our weakness and sees we are dust. Do we think that we can persuade him that we are something we are not: That we can "fake anything"

with him. Because of this kind of praying many simply don't attempt to pray since they can't intone Elizabethan English well enough.

In a recent television broadcast featuring music and religion I enjoyed seeing the contrast of many kinds of musical traditions including "high church" and "low church" and all sorts in between. Music has a way of preserving things which are good and Godly even when the glory has for the most part faded. Among the musicians featured were a young black evangelist whose name I can not credit. His Spiritual gifting was obvious. After this evangelist's conversion, he used his gift to minister the Gospel and the power of God through Rap Music in the mean streets of a major city. The fact that God was using him was unmistakable, his strength and anointing and transparency to God was strongly evident. The difference between this man's street music and the highly intellectual liturgical music of a high church musicologist did not hinge upon natural ability but supernatural *anointing*. I can't say I'm a fan of rap music, but I confess that I would rather listen to Rap Music enabled and anointed by God, than a performer with a degree in performance, practiced in their method but who does not know God in the power of his Spirit.

What a shame that church gatherings should become an environment where anyone has to put on an act? In the pulpit there can be all manners of affectations which may or may not be sincere. If a pastor is charismatic (naturally gifted) many will begin to talk like him, gesture like him, or pray like him. It is too easy for us to emulate a man. Oratory and persuasive speech can hold an audience in rapt attention, with speaking skills. Even when the message is mundane an hour can go by more quickly when the pastor adds a few jokes or anecdotal commentary about his life or someone else's life.

Paul the apostle, wrote to the people of Corinth that he did not come to present stories, or teachings, with rhetorical drama, affectations, or oratory. He said rather, that he came to "demonstrate" the Spirit of God and demonstrate the "power" of the Gospel. (1 Corinthians 2:4). This manner of presentation is what I call the transparent messenger.

When the unbelieving world looks at these peculiar affectations of church life they soon begin to mock or make caricatures of them. There have been too many films portraying preachers or evangelists as conniving con-artists, usually out to deceive gullible folks at a "revival meeting" into giving their last dollar. Just about anyone especially those outside of the fellowship of God can do perfect imitations of a drawling evangelist pretending to heal a person by laying on hands to heal some gullible mark thus ridiculing Jesus, his gifts and salvation .

Copying Christ and the Apostolic Models

Not all role models are bad. God made each of us "originals." There is no need to copy anyone else unless what they know about the Kingdom of God 'works' and also conforms to the model of Scripture. Emulation of a human role model is understandable in the fact that we

view our own abilities as inadequate thus we feel a need to copy another. Success in human terms probably motivates us to be like others who we call successful. In church circles any person who imagines themselves as great, powerful, or successful in a very real sense is self deceived. A key distinction is the kind of "role model" we chose to emulate and the correct kind of behaviors which we see modeled. The Bible has some very important things to say about copying others. It even suggests, believe it or not, that we do copy others, but we are never to compare ourselves with others. There is a distinction.

The Bible states, "Be ye followers (imitators) of God as dear children." (Ephesians 5:1) "Be followers (imitators) of me even as I follow Christ." (1 Corinthians 11.1.) What makes it possible to imitate the apostle? It is because he is imitating Christ.

In apostolic ministry the apostle diminishes so God increases in him. Human gifts are surrendered to God's use and the vanity of personal achievement is discarded. Personal name, rank and reputations become irrelevant. The messenger must never overshadow the message with any affectation of ego or worldliness. Human character and the human flesh is the natural enemy of the Gospel. I have heard a spiritual man say wisely, "I have one great enemy to my ministry, myself." Human pride, (being somebody important) is an enemy of the Gospel. Being yielded is of primary importance. A person must cast aside his desire for self exaltation before God can do much with him. This is something that only God can do and does, as he prepares and disciples us. It is part of the task we call "learning Christ." The body of a fellowship suffers when hierarchies are established.

God does not want the world to see an ordinary man or woman when a Christian is presented. He wants the glory of God to be revealed through a messenger who is as transparent as possible. When believers come together it is not to exalt any person but to reveal His glory. Those who are struggling to find a Spiritual life often have limited choices about who might be an appropriate role model. Someone may choose to model themselves after a person whose attributes or credentials reflect personality affectations or performance gifts, such persons may be totally without spiritual insights and knowledge of God. Paul states again in 2 Corinthians 10:12, *that we should not make ourselves like any who tend to compare themselves to others, he says, to make such comparisons is "not wise"* (paraphrased.)

We need to be grounded in the beliefs and understanding of the Christian life. Mentors with authentic maturity come into play as we gather in *koinonia* (fellowship.) But the active force that causes a believer to grow mentors is principally met by God, through the Spirit of Truth. We listen to preachers, teachers and friends in the faith and some understanding may instruct a listener in a certain way. But our growth must also come through prayer and study of Scripture. Through the Spirit God constantly teaches us individually. Most of yearn to experience the goodness of God, the power of God, or the transforming mind-restoring Wisdom of God.

Failing to find a Spiritual mentor we may proceed to ask God to instruct or direct us. If any has faith and believes God will respond to us, we may ask him to meet us where we are. He can then direct us where you can find our "Annanais" The man who spoke by the Holy Spirit's revelation to the newly converted Saul of Tarsus. (Acts 9:10-17.) At this moment you may not have the faith that God can and will, reach down and touch you, in answer to your request. But I have perfect faith that He will do just that.

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Interview 2/20/2006 <http://www.sidroth.org>

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Tim and Katie Mather

Subject: Open Church

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