EVERYBODY NEEDS A FRIEND, BUT WHO NEEDS A SAVIOR?

Mark 1.14-15: "Jesus came preaching, 'REPENT, and believe the Good News!'"

Our Lord Jesus extended an "extravagant welcome" not to everybody but only to penitents: "REPENT, and believe the Good News!" Let's analogize from the ancient Near Eastern temple plan (including the Bible's tabernacles & Solomonic-&-Herodian temples). The first door is marked "I'm Bad News." I open it & walk into the outer court, the court of confessed sinners. The next door is marked "Jesus Is the Good News." I walk through it into the court of converts. The last door is marked "The Servant Church." I walk through it into the court of the community set to serve the Holy Trinity in praise & to serve the world by being good news to the near-&-far neighbor.

1 If we switch from the three doors to the three baseball-bases, the impenitent "can't get to first base" toward salvation. No matter how many home runs the sinner hits (i.e., no matter how great the sinner's achievements, "works"), there's no leaving homeplate without becoming aware of & repenting from being a sinner....

2 ....but there's the cultural impediment in America today. Most Americans have been public-school taught not only that there's nothing basically wrong with them but even that what they need more of is (not repentance but) pride, the pride of "self-esteem": "I am worthy," the opposite of "Lord, I am not worthy" (Mt.8.8; L.7.6; the "Dominus, non sum dignus" in the Latin mass). What's good in American law, viz. "the presumption of [legal] innocence," is bad outside court, where we're not presumed, but known, to be guilty, & will be sinners throughout this life even though "saved by grace through faith" (in Luther's phrase, *Simul justus et peccator* [Simultaneously "justified, made righteous, by grace" & a sinner.]). No matter how good a job our public schools may do otherwise, they wipe out the Bible (1) in the way science (actually, scientism, including evolutionism) is taught, & (2) in their Enlightenment doctrine of the worthy individual (which burdens the church with having to engage in **corrective education**--& having to do so in spite of public-school-sports encroachment on Sunday morning, eliminating Sunday school for sports-age children).

3 This Thinksheet's first clause would be challenged by few, but it's second clause radically divides the house between "yes" (everybody needs a savior, the Jewish position updated by Paul in Ro.1-3) & "no" (nobody needs a savior, the Greco-Roman position before East flowed West). (In 1525-6, Renaissance Erasmus [in his DE LIBRO ARBITRIO, "On the Bound Will")--as the "Greek"--was countered by Reformation Luther [in his DE SERVO ARBITRIO, "On the Bound Will"]--as the "Jew." In a recent book, Reinhard Huetter combines the two: BOUND TO BE FREE.) In the late Hellenistic period (roughly, NT through the Middle Ages), theologians could count almost everybody to have a sense of sin, of there being something wrong not just with "them" (others) & "it" (situations) but also with "me" (the standout penitent-"I" classic being Augustine's CONFESSIONS.

Almost a millenium ago, Aquinas in CUR DEUS HOMO ("Why Did God Become a Human Being?" could assume DEUS HOMO ("God Became a Human Being," the incarnation): orthodox Christology had defeated its rivals in Christendom. That was the pertinent religious fact. The pertinent cultural fact was sin-consciousness: Aquinas does not need to argue anybody into feeling sinful....

4 ....but we do. Today, I tried to convince of sin a woman I'd never seen before. Here's the near verbatin (my remarks, unindented):

May I ask, where did you go to church yesterday?
I didn't go. I don't go to church.
WHAT, not even on EASTER SUNDAY?
No, I never go; I have my own spirituality.
Well, did you never go?
I'm a native CapeCodder & was baptized as an infant in a Congregational church --but I never went on my own.
So you are not a Christian.
Oh, yes, I'm a Christian. You don't have to go to church to be a Christian.
A practicing Christian goes to church, so you're not a practicing Christian.

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Yes I am! And I'm a better practicing Christian than some I know who go to church but don't live it.

But if they preach it but don't practice it, they're hypocrites, aren't they?

They certainly are.

Are they, then, claiming to be something they aren't?

That's just the point.

I'm puzzled. You're telling me that though you don't go to church, you're superior to those hypocrites that do go to church. Right?

Right.

,,,,,But are you not also a hypocrite? You, too, are claiming something you're not living. Practicing Christians go to church, so you're not a practicing Christian--yet you claim to be one. But your hypocrisy may be more superficial than that of some of them: you could cure your hypocrisy either by coming to church (which I'm urging you, as a baptized Christian, to do) or by ceasing to call yourself a Christian.

NOTE: I enjoy going around calling sinners (especially hypocrites) who think they aren't. "This wonderful [Christian] hope makes us feel like speaking freely" (2Cor.3. 12_{cev}).The modest aim? Unforgettable conversations: she won't forget that one & will feel uncomfortable, at least irritated, every day she thinks of it--&, if she comes to see it as helping her out of her "spirituality" into a community of the Good News, she'll feel grateful when she remembers. The immodest aim? Conversion.

Right now, she sees no need of conversion. She's already a Christian,a baptized Christian. Or is pedobaptism an innocuation against catching the Faith? At least in her case, when she was "done" (i.e., pedobaptized) she was done with church--as so many are when "done" in & with confirmation. No easy answer; I can & do use pedobaptism as a conversational bridge into (or back into) the Faith.

5 Anselm's conversation (which is what CUR DEUS HOMO is) was easier. Boso, his interlocutor, was already in the Faith (1.25): "I come not...to have you remove doubts from my faith, but to have you show me the reason for my confidence....I perceive that man as a sinner [note the general-cultural assumption, contra USA '05] owes God for his sin [assumption #2] what he is unable to pay [assumption #3], and cannot be saved without paying [assumption #4]"; but Christ "avail[s] for the salvation of man [assumption #5]...."

Another mind-gap: America has redesigned the deity into sentimentalized Love: "TheMan upstairs will be kind to me without my having to go to church," as someone said recently to brush off my witness-confrontation. (H.Rich.Niebuhr's "a God without wrath....": liberal theology, Barth's original bete noire, has superficially persuaded the general public.) But Anselm's (& the Bible's) God cannot, by cheap grace (gratuitous, amoral forgiveness), violate his own nature & intention (ibid.): It would be "unfitting for God to elevate man with any stain upon him,...lest it should seem that God had repented of his good intent, or was unable to accomplish his designs. Therefore, a satisfaction...necessary for sin, must be found apart from the Christian faith,...or else we must accept the Christian doctrine."

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