

# “Values Clashes & Christianity”

Acts 7:59-8:3; 9:26-31

6/4/2000 Maryvale Drive Presbyterian Church – Philip Siddons

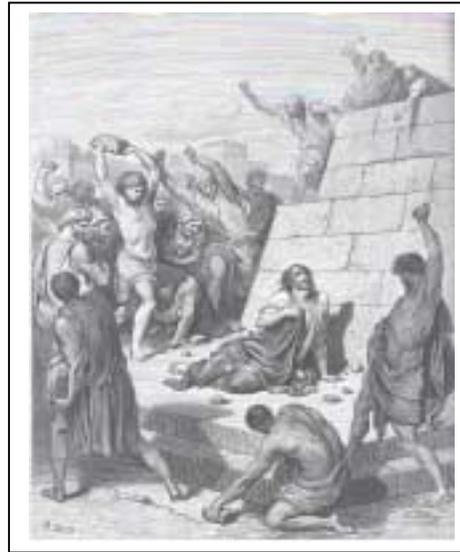
When Saul the Pharisee, with his new name Paul, tried to join First Church in Jerusalem, people wouldn't believe it.<sup>1</sup> Even after Paul began preaching in Damascus, the Jewish converts tried to kill him. When the Jerusalem Church was told that Paul had become a Christian, Barnabus tried everything in his power to convince the apostles of Paul's credibility. Soon the Greek-speaking believers tried to kill Paul. Everyone thought was that he must be trying to trick them in order to find out where the church was meeting so he could continue his murderous persecution of Christians.

If you were to go back and tell them that Paul would personally be responsible for the establishment of new churches all over Asia minor, . . . that he would be the most articulate writer and theologian of the faith, making possible Christianity's emergence as a distinct faith in the Roman Empire – they would probably tie you up and haul you out the door to stone you as well. Everyone was afraid of Paul and they wouldn't trust him as far as they could throw him. They were scared to death of him and it wasn't until after they saw Paul win a debate against the Greek speaking Jews, that they relaxed and accepted him into their fellowship. Thank goodness Paul didn't have tattoos or his ears pierced – the church would never have accepted him no matter how smart he was. ☺

Take a moment to look at the art relating to Paul's early life. In the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, Gustave Dore carved the woodcut depicting the murder of Stephen the first Deacon. The figure, to the left of the action within the highlighted portion, was Paul who not only held the mob's coats but approved of that violence.<sup>2</sup> Paul was no passive character because from there, he launched an aggressive campaign to kill the new Christians. He even got written permission from the Sanhedrin to travel to all the town synagogues to search for and destroy those who believed in this Messiah figure.

<sup>1</sup> See Acts 9

<sup>2</sup> Acts 7:54-8:1

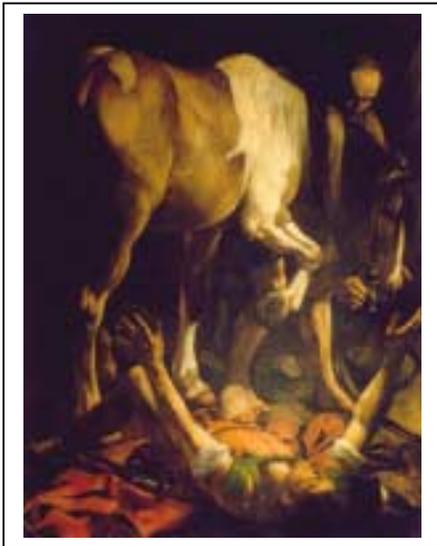


↑ Gustave Dore, woodcut “The Martyrdom of St. Stephen” c. 1865 in France (see page 12)

Take a look at the two representations of Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus. In the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century, Parmigianino was painting at a time when the world was just coming alive to the humanity of Christ and the people to whom Christ ministered.<sup>3</sup> You can see his great attention to detail, Paul's facial expression and even the horse's expression in having its rider somehow forced down from his riding position.



← Parmigianino, “The Conversion of St. Paul” c. 1552



← Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio  
“The Conversion of Saint Paul” c. 1600-1601

Caravaggio gave his rendering of the incident fifty years later, using more muted and shadowy tones.<sup>4</sup> In contrast to the fellow traveler holding the horse away from the fallen Paul, notice how the painter used light from above to spotlight Paul’s helplessness in being confronted by the God Whose believers he had been murdering. I wonder if his technique of contrasting dark and light influenced Rembrandt’s work in Ansterdam.<sup>5</sup>

In passing, we’ll note that Luke didn’t include a horse in his description of Paul’s Damascus conversion in Acts. The artists were trying to communicate their sense of the event using transportation with which they were familiar.

Would Paul have been portrayed today as having fallen from his driver’s seat of a Chevy Nova? Probably not because in our time, our society has embraced a higher sensitivity to the first century historical and cultural context that is now embodied in the majority of today’s Bible studies. But today we would feel that the members of the First Church of Jerusalem were perhaps justified in their feelings of alienation and judgment toward Paul; . . . at least for a while, until Paul would successfully pass all the

<sup>4</sup> Approximately 1600

<sup>5</sup> Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn

tests, interviews and psychological examinations of the Presbyterian Committees on Clergy Licensure. ☺

We don’t have such fears and rage because we live with freedom of religion and a diversity which fosters religious tolerance. We enjoy the marvelous rights to worship as we please. We don’t fear others who may persecute us on account of our faith. We don’t know any individuals who would be a violent threat to us because of our Christianity.

On the other hand, there is alienation in Christian circles because of differences in economic means, educational levels, occupational positions, religious expressions, race and gender-related polarizations. Remember those days when Protestant and Catholic youth were prohibited from playing with each other? Remember the racial prejudice that more severely separated us from other Christians of a different race? Remember the polarization in social gatherings where the men remained in one room and the women in another – as if they are different species and unable to find anything in common on which to talk?

Those days are diminishing, largely fading into history, but what causes alienation among Christians today more often has something to do with the values that different clusters of generations have adopted for themselves. Unfortunately we are alienated from other Christians (and non-Christians) for relatively unimportant differences in values. If everyone would slow down and calm down enough to look at the emotions and substance between the shouting, these conflict in the Church would actually have little to do with our Christian faith. I think hearing about the values clusters research would save us from a lot of breast beating and rattling of our swords against our shields.

Dr. Morris Massey and other scholars of human behavior have discovered what many think are observable *patterns* of *values* that repeatedly emerge in the various generation clusters.<sup>6</sup> And these are not strictly limited to ages but have originated in specific generation groups. A generation cluster is a group of

<sup>6</sup> The material on the values clusters is a product of the studies of Morris Massey, produced in his series “What You are Is”, and available in the Performax System’s International, Inc. *Values Analysis Profile*, Division of Carlson Marketing Group.

individuals who are about the same age and who share the same gut-level values. Ninety percent of our values are formed by the time we are ten years old – 90%. After the decade of our twenties, few of us seem to change our values in any dramatic way unless we are jolted by a significant emotional experience.

Some of the generalizations that I'll be describing are only that – researchers' best attempts to see *general* patterns. But remember that all those "other people" who are different from us appear to be such because they seem to value different things than we do. By understanding some of the general patterns of values, we gain insight into our own values choices as well.

Churches have always been values-laden institutions but often at board meetings, in social gatherings and in discussions with other people, we find ourselves clashing with others not over theology or doctrine. We find that when engaging with others who have been influenced by other values (than those taught to us in *our* youth), we become threatened, defensive and sometimes combative. This is why it is a tendency to flock around those who just like us. The downside of that is we tend not to open ourselves to different ways at which to look at things. The learning process can become inhibited.

For the next several minutes, then, I'd like to summarize the four recognized values clusters that are also described in your outline pages. If you want, put a check mark next to the items that you judge as a fair generalization of the people you have experienced in that generation cluster. Put Xs, or little frowning faces, next to the ones where their generalizations do not hold up in your experience. The Christian church has benefited from archaeology, language studies, anthropology, science and art so we'll see if we can gain practical spiritual insight from sociology and psychology.

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**The Traditionalists** were those of us who had our youth influenced in the decades of the 40s or before. Their values are expressed in the statements, beliefs, and customs that had been handed down from the previous generations. Things held in respect were embodied in the popular sayings you've probably heard. "Like father like son," "you reap what you sow," "a penny saved is a penny earned." Benjamin Franklin wrote many of them.

One relative of mine frequently told me, in my youth, that "if copper buckets are a penny a bucket and you don't need a bucket, it isn't a deal." Because I wasn't a traditionalist at age seven, I usually replied that "despite your lack of need for buckets, you should still buy as many as you can for that price, sell them for their copper value and make your fortune on the scrap value of copper. ☺"

In their work, home and social contacts, traditionalists are said to generally rely on the given values to interact to what goes on around them. There is a strong belief that one works for work's sake. "The one who doesn't work, doesn't eat and that's that."

Traditionalists value the group or team concept so that a person's worth is largely measured in terms of their belonging to the group or organization. Belonging to the Rotary, Elks, Masons or a church were socially expected ways one should maintain their sense of belonging. Traditionalists tend to be "company people" and they readily accept authority figures. In that values cluster, there is a tendency to view the organization as more important than the individuals making up the organization. It used to be said that "What's good for General Motors is good for the U.S.A."

Because of their loyalty to the organization, the so-called traditionalists have tended to stick together in their family and business through hardships. Hence, they have had great difficulty in accepting the reality of contemporary divorce rates. For traditionalists, the father was defined as the central authority figure, expecting that other family members remain economically dependent upon him. This thinking carried over into the economic system, laws and religion so that the male's authority position was thought to maintain what was perceived as cohesiveness.

The high respect for authority lines also caused traditionalists to expect people to stay in their social place. This chain-of-command value cluster expects people to conform to the expected place in social situations, in business meetings, fraternities and in organized religion. According to this values description, traditionalists have a deep-seated need for stability and the *status quo*. They do not like others who "tell it like it is" and "do their own thing."

Traditionalists are also said to be somewhat materialistic. If this is true, it is understandable. These folks have seen and suffered through the Depression and World War II and they did not always have the money to acquire material goods. They learned to ‘work for work’s sake’ because work was a matter of survival. And this hard working drive has reaped a powerful economic system, enabling recent generations to take our American affluence for granted.

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Those considered to be **In-Betweeners** were often raised by traditionalists in the 40s and 50s. They feel torn, however, between traditional values and the innovations coming along in their time. They seem to search for answers to how to be happy, how to survive divorce and how to basically be a better person. They are the largest consumers of “how-to” books.

In-betweeners see the value of working on a team, or being in the organization, but they also value the worth of the individual. They want to accomplish things through the help of the system of the bureaucracy and yet they have seen some of their elders do so at the sacrifice of their own individuality and self worth. In-betweeners recognize the need for authority figures but when they see “yes people” licking the boots of their superiors, they feel those individuals have lost their creativity, their integrity and perhaps their soul.

In-betweeners, then, want to participate in the decision making. They question the “that’s the way it has always been” and in churches, they are the ones who remind us that the seven last words of a dying church are: “we’ve never done it that way before.”

In-betweeners recognize the need for rules and guidelines but also feel that as circumstances change, individual’s needs have to be considered – even if the standing rules seem to dictate otherwise. This causes in-betweeners swing back and forth between formality and informality. Often they find themselves expressing conformity on the job but individuality in their personal lives. While there are fewer in-betweeners than all the others, what is happening now is that in organizations, the traditionalists are retiring and the in-betweeners are assuming the top leadership positions: the presidency,

the chair of the board, the senior pastor,<sup>7</sup> and the president of the P.T.A.

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**The Challengers** were programmed with their values in the late 50s through to the early 70s. They are the bulk of the post-World War II baby boom. They seem to love to ask embarrassing questions like “why?” They have demanded better answers than “that’s the way it has always been.”

Challengers have been basing their values on humanist principles – especially with themes of equality, personal fulfillment, self-esteem and communication. Probably the last thing in the world they want to do is join an Elks club in order to find their self worth. Instead, they want to have their worth determined by their own personal accomplishments.

In the movie *The Graduate*, the traditionalist came up to the challenger (played by Dustin Hoffman) and said “Young man, think plastic!” Of course, the traditionalist was saying that this young man’s life and worth would be infinitely improved if he committed himself to a company that was getting into plastic products and technology.

The challenger’s repulsion, of that goal for self worth, was aptly symbolized by his diving underwater into the backyard pool with a scuba suit and sitting there (at the bottom), for the remainder of the garden party. For Challengers, it is not *what you do for a living* but *who you are as a person*. To them, each person should be judged in light of his or her total capabilities as an individual – not their value to the organization.

So Challengers have considerably less allegiance to the company and the traditionalists (who have been in management) could never understand challengers’ less-than-religious dedication to the company. They can not believe that people under them have changed careers in mid life, when they could have had so much more if they had just stuck it out.

Challengers not only want personal satisfaction and fulfillment in their careers – they expect and demand participation in decision making. They have been brought up with many material things,

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<sup>7</sup> In churches which feel the need to have hierarchical thinking embedded in the titles of their staff

and they hear words like “bread line” on their way out the door to go water skiing or to spend (on an evening date) an amount of money that would have taken his or her father a month to earn.<sup>8</sup> But while challengers are enjoying the material comforts, they use their affluence to explore new life-styles. The material things are not tied to their self worth but thought of as tools to deepen their learning and growth as a person.

But with all the changes and alternatives challengers seek out, they crave emotional security. They seem not to take much stock in being a so called “married person” but whatever relationship in which they find themselves, they want that relating to be secure and fulfilling. Challengers have high demands of their intimate relationships requiring: fulfillment, equality, nurturing, intellectual and emotional growth and even spiritual improvement. They want *anything but* a chain-of-command authority structure. So challengers see change as a normal and an expected part of their life style. In most Christian circles, socially, formally or between parents and children, the greatest values clashes are between the traditionalists and the challengers.

Finally the **Synthesizers** are the emerging young adults who have had their formative years in the 70s and 80s. They feel bombarded by the various clashing values of those preceding them. They see the challengers clashing with the traditionalists and they sense the acute anxiety of the in-betweeners. They are very skeptical about the future. If you talk with some of them, they might tell you that they hope to get a master’s in social work, health care or computer programming **if** the world hasn’t blown itself up or gone bankrupt before then.

Synthesizers are tending to be conservative only because they feel pessimistic about the future. They know there is not unlimited oil, water, clean air and radiation free environments. They know that one in four of us will die from cancer and that one third of us will succumb from heart disease and that their boomer parents will easily exhaust the federal banked

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<sup>8</sup> If you remember back in history when it was only the father who worked and when one person could make enough to support an entire family.

“Social Security” funds. They honestly feel that what is coming in the future will not be as good as it is now or was. They’ve had too many economics and sociology classes not to see this.

Synthesizers do not look at corporations as totally corrupt nor do they see them as the total solution to life’s problems. Since they are now only emerging from their educational experiences and are new to established institutions, we do not yet know how different they may be from the challengers who have preceded them.

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Now, the point of all this research is to remind us of some things we either already know or are beginning to sense. Our culture has undergone tremendous shifts of values in our lifetime. Most of these changes have come along in clusters with these groupings of generations.

The Church talks about values all the time but as we are sitting in church, we are tending to hear (mostly) the words that ring true to the cluster of values with which we are most comfortable. During every adult study class, every sermon and every verbal exchange, we filter all incoming information through the values cluster with which we have been programmed. But each of these four patterns of values seems not to be any more “Christian” than the others.

What I’d like to suggest to you, is for you to think through the experiences you have had with other Christians in the last few years. Think about the people from whom you are alienated. Recall those arguments when you both were trying to get to the same place but your means were *so* different, that you almost hated the other person for their outlook.

I think, first of all, that if we could take an interest in trying to understand from where another person is coming – and where we are ourselves – we may be able to start *responding* to others, instead of *reacting* to them. Responding, not reacting. When we are talking with someone, do we slow down enough to allow them to have been raised with different emotional values scripts than the ones we had?

All these values patterns I have summarized seem to be emotionally important to us because we’re comfortable with interpreting life from that standpoint alone – but they are not what is ultimately most important to what Jesus taught as essential to walking with God. What is most important are God’s

unconditional love for us and Jesus' answer to human worth and guilt and the mysteries of the unfairness of life, and hope of life after life. I think if we look hard, we often do not argue over these things but over the other less-than-important issues such as issues of conformity, lifestyle, trends and the standard symbols of self-worth through economic or race conformity.

What I'd like to suggest for you to take home this morning, is an awareness of these different values patterns. Think, if you will, about the other members of your family – about yourself and about your friends. Think about the folks here in this church who seem not to be on your wave length.

Next, spend some time living in their skin. Using the summaries in the outline, pretend that you have a different scripting that what you've been given. Rethink some conversations you have had with other Christians when discussing a conflict that turned into alienation.

Finally, when you think of the conflicts you experienced, think about how *little* these kinds of disagreements actually have to do with the really important matters of the soul. They killed Stephen because he articulately disagreed with their religious way of doing things. They tried to kill Paul several times because he argued against the mandatory circumcision. They killed Jesus and He was a non-violent pacifist.

In the end, we're all family here and no matter how traditional or challenging or in-between we find ourselves, we are here because of our joys, because life has tremendous pain and we are here because of our pressing need to find meaning in life – to find God and the love of God in our own lives. Look for the presence of God's Spirit in our diversity. There is power in our midst and this power is life-changing. There is magic here in this community, because we reverence God as utterly holy and God's love can transform our differences into creative and caring behavior. ■

