

Jason Questions a Jesus Freak

A young man from PBC, Jason Cronn asked me about the earlier latter days for a research paper he was doing on 20th century Churchish history (Probably for graduating purposes). This is my answer to his curiosity.

Ted Wise

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1) What was your life like before you became a Christian and got involved with the Jesus movement?

My wife and I met and married in college. I had just returned from a four year enlistment in the US. Navy. Our beatnik sentiments lead us to San Francisco in 1960. We lived with a number of notable beats in a commune in SF's Fillmore district. After the birth of our daughter we moved across the bay to the former fishing village of Sausalito. I worked as a sailmaker, making sails for racing yachts and boats. Soon my wife gave us another wonderful child, a boy this time. Our life on the outside looked like the coolest life anyone could have. Friends from beats to yachtsman, jazz musicians, artists and poets. Olympic sailors, sea faring adventurers and America's Cup captains. Dedicated Yogis, Buddhists, Anarchists, Communists and right wing extremists. The notorious and the famous. Sausalito was the fastest game in the west.

Inside, known only to a small circle of friends, was our real life. Both of us and a few others were supremely disappointed; we found ourselves part of an alienated group that fell through the cracks of post-Korean War American society. We called ourselves the Interstitial Culture. Many of our adventures together were mixed with large doses of LSD. The experience that LSD produces is what makes it a dangerous drug. This is not a comforting thought. It means that the LSD will wear off but the experience, like any other event, will not. Eventually, (sometimes the first time) one will experience a brutal revelation of the poverty of one's soul or psyche. Sometimes people become so lost to themselves that only Jesus can rescue them. Madness or Christ. Some free will choice. That's what happened to me. While on my way to my own Damascus, (to become a genie I think), I found it necessary to cry out to God to save my life in every sense of the word. Jesus knocked me off my metaphysical ass. I could choose Him or literally suffer a fate worse than death.

Fortunately my wife, suffering the same devastation of her own spiritual ecology, had begun to attend a small old fashioned Baptist church. Like a tiny island in a sea of sensual nonsense, this church had managed to survive in what was the most fleshly indulgent county in California. The folks who attended it reminded my wife of her family church and of her 11th year acceptance of Christ. She started to attend church for our children's sake and perhaps to run into her long lost spiritual friend Jesus. She also asked some elderly saints to pray for me. They did and I was soon reading the New Testament.

My brothers and I weren't raised in any kind of religious tradition. My father believed in minding his own business and I never knew him to be a hypocrite. He considered a man's beliefs to be his own business. Apart from going to church once with my grandmother and forced attendance at a couple of all purpose chapel services in the Navy, my first exposure to Christianity was reading the New Testament.

My second Christian encounter was my confrontation with Jesus and the third was when I went with my wife and children to the small Baptist church in Marin and made my first in-front-of Christians profession of my faith in Jesus as my savior, much to the surprise of the pastor who later baptized me. This is also where I first met my brothers and sisters in Christ. I didn't like church much but I sure liked Jesus. However, I still had my

life outside the church where I had already confessed Jesus as my Lord. At first most of my friends thought I had flipped out. It was as obvious to them as it was to me that I was just as out of place in this church, if not more so, as I was everywhere else in my life.

I wanted to be as good a Christian as I could but these church folks were not at all like the people I had read about in the Book of Acts. They didn't live together or share much of anything, they didn't hold everything in common or give to each as any had need. They had a tough time coughing up the salary for their one pastor. I have never been able to understand church finances. It only takes 10 people, one law and an empty hat to give a pastor the same standard of living that those 10 enjoy.

At first I tried to advocate change. Later the pastor told me, "Ted, perhaps you're not a Baptist.". This turned out to be the case. I should have suspected it; I had hair down to my shoulders, a beard and was the only one in hipster clothes. Oh well.

Meanwhile, many of my friends were becoming Christians; some even attended church with us. The pastor, in an effort to keep the peace with his regular congregation, put us in a special category. He called it a ministry; I called it prejudice. I wanted out of the madness and excesses of my not so former life. He thought that my bringing friends to church, so that he could bore them to tears, was my spiritual duty. He just didn't understand. I brought people to church for him to preach to all right, but I wanted to him bore them so I would be graciously freed of their still strong influence without having to reject anyone. I didn't actually want my friends to become Baptists, except maybe to prove to the other church members the reality of my conversion by reproducing. If I bore fruit I must be part of the True Vine.

My wife and I did have one serious concern; we weren't completely cynical. After a short time of regular attendance, I asked the pastor if I, being a dues-paying, meeting-going, praying-out-loud member, productively bringing new people to church, could make use of the empty church facilities during the day to feed a few odd people we knew were coming to San Francisco for the summer. He said it could not be done because of insurance problems.

Actually the real obstacle was that a lot of evangelicals tend to see everything in terms of "for or against" rather than as opportunities to serve. Somehow they feel that if they are against something they perceive as wrong, they are making a stand for what is right. These Baptists acted as though they believed that just being for or against the right things was all that Christ required of them. They dealt with their spiritual failure by insincerely claiming that they sincerely tried to do their best. To them the work of the church is to divide up the world into two piles. To my knowledge, this "stance" didn't stop anyone from coming to San Francisco for what was to become the now famous "Summer of Love".

However, the pastor and a couple of other SF Baptist ministers were able to show me from the Word of God that my distress over the well being of these anticipated newcomers and for a few friends from my old life, could actually be from God. I couldn't get them out of my mind anyway because they were always arguing. Our born again old friends and the born again new ones had very differing points of view. Some were so radical that they thought the communists were too conservative while others were practically Monarchists. But there they were, standing side by side. The still leftist liberals with the not so former right wingers. However, a few of us agreed on one thing: that we ought to live out the Book of Acts like a script.

Before long, we began to sell our possessions: houses, cars, etc. and to call nothing our own. We rented a large old two story farm house in northern Marin County, first just four couples and seven children. Within a month or so another couple from Los Angeles joined us. Then we proceeded to offer our hospitality to as many others as we had room for. Meanwhile, the pastors provided some of the means and all the respectability we needed to rent a storefront in the Haight Ashbury so that we could feed people and preach Christ.

At first it worked fine. We were out of their hair (believe it or not, hair was a moral issue in those days) and we were able to preach the gospel to several thousand people. Mostly one-on-one over a bowl of soup, but sometimes in the park at free concerts we would ask if we could make an announcement about how the world was coming to an end and what to do about it. Mind you, not just anyone can pull this off. I would have loved to ease my way onto the platform at the Million Man March on Washington and to have asked Mr. Farrakhan if

I could make a short statement about the imminent demise of the white man. Like my friend Ron Ritchie says, "Just show up, God will do the rest". The Lord has gotten me past the most elaborate security systems just so I could give my testimony as a witness for Christ or to quietly whisper in someone's ear that Jesus is Lord. All doors are open to Him.

Soon though, the press found us and the gospel hit the fan. First, Christian Life magazine, then Time and hundreds of other publications. We became a "for or against" issue. Our welcome to the Church At Large was a lot of hate mail. It had not crossed our minds how the rest of Christendom might respond to our living arrangement. We naively thought that they would see that we were simply doing it right: living out the New Testament in 3D. Slim chance, fat attitude.

Eventually thousands of people came to Christ and we had a great time. But much to our surprise, instead of being able to enjoy the fruit of our fellowship in an even more rural setting, we were soon dispersed, just like the early church. We had become too utopian.

After closing down the house, I briefly went back to sailmaking in Sausalito but was soon asked to join the staff (if you could call it that) at Peninsula Bible Church. They wanted to start a drug rehabilitation program so they invited my wife and I to move to Palo Alto with our children and become a part of their church. That was in the early 70's and since then it has been so-far-so-good. Over the years we have been able to help jump start a number of other counseling outreaches, including two full fledged psychiatric clinics, and I teach semi-regularly at PBC.

I already knew a number of leaders at PBC and had spoken at Bodylife service on several occasions. I had been traveling with Dr. Ray Stedman as part of a team of men ministering all over the world. One Christmas Lambert Dolphin and I went to India to give our testimonies in a number of odd venues. Ray Stedman became my mentor and teacher. I learned that in the beginning I had indeed read the New Testament rightly. What the Bible taught me on that first reading was that Christianity was something that was supposed to happen to me, not something I did to myself. The Baptists, in a remarkably short time, had managed to lead us astray; they believe that God's will plus your will adds up to super-will and one can do anything. That is, as long as it involves standing for something. I know that the Baptists aren't the only legalistic folks in the world, PBC is blessed with quite a few as well (the Lord has brought them to hear the New Covenant).

It was wonderful to have my original faith restored, to hear from Dr. Stedman that what I thought I read in the first place was actually true. No wonder they called it good news. We had found, at least for now, our church home. Same old difficulties over appearances and the usual "for and against" issues. With one big difference though, there was and is a consistent effort being made by the elect to learn what the Apostles truly believed and to have a like minded faith. This is literally the foundation of authentic Christianity.

Over the years, we have noticed that other Interstitial Christians are drawn to PBC, outwardly grooving on whatever is happening for them. Privately, known only to a small circle of friends, we are still trying to live out what began in the Book of Acts, believing that Jesus taught us to totally depend on the Father. Everything from Him, nothing from us. I'm sure you know the old road apple, "The world has yet to see the good that a man fully yielded to God can do". This is not true! The world has seen a man fully yielded to God. Jesus was a man, fully man, fully God, and fully yielded to God. He said that everything He did and said was the Father. In fact He told His disciples that if they had seen Him, they had seen God.

For the most part, I think that the evangelical church's triumphant entrance into these last days is pretty much a parade of hot air balloons. We like to salute the passing banners but we prefer not to carry them into the fray. I have found that PBC is refreshingly involved on the front lines of our nation's spiritual battles (this time without the nuisance of the press).

2) Did you have any experiences with establishment Christianity before you became a Christian? What were your impressions?

Before I read the Bible, my exposure to Christ and the Church were distant, mistaken and totally ignorant. My wife never talked much about Jesus, I was pretty hostile toward the subject. However, she was a Christian and

came from a church going family. When in trouble she turned back to Christ. So other than noticing that she glowed after she and the kids came home from church while I stayed at home and felt like a burnt match, it was reading the New Testament and being personally confronted by the Living God that convinced me of the Truth. I really had hardened my heart against God.

3) How, when, and why did you first become involved with the Jesus Movement?

It fell on us. Actually, it wasn't a movement when we began. At first people said we were on a Christ trip. A little later we were called Jesus Freaks. ("It was in San Francisco that they were first called Jesus Freaks". Sounds almost like the Book of Acts.)

4) What was the Jesus Movement about?

Love. Most of us who were hip before that summer had already failed at being able to live in loving relationships. Even though some of us were better friends with one another than the Beatles were believed to be, we still couldn't do it. Why was love so hard to do????

5) Why do you think it came into being at that particular time?

For us, our concern was for the genuine dangers that a million or so young people were about to experience in California. In the interstitial Culture we have all had a few terror filled trips. Internal and external. Chemically enhanced and stone cold straight.

6) I read that you and some other Christians at one point lived communally together at a place called, "The House of Acts". What was life like at that place?

Better than church. We worked at any odd job that we could do together, like painting houses or digging ditches, anything we could do together and not have to make a long term commitment, so that we could continue to run our mission in the Haight. Every human problem common to mankind came up in the short time we were together. The Christian family that lived down the road from us did not need to face and solve the problems we encountered just trying to leave the house in the morning. It was a greenhouse of fertile Christian ideas and growth. Good soil, well fertilized. Lots of bull manure, lots of truth.

7) Why did you choose to do this? Why not just plug into one of the established churches?

We invited them to serve with us but they wouldn't come. We always attended church, we just wouldn't join one. I still haven't. PBC doesn't have a membership.

8) How does this fit in with your vision of the role of community in Christianity?

I believe that anyone who has a chance to try to live like the early church should do it. It's a way to build a homemade seminary. That is if one does it in the power of the Lord. One can learn a lot in a short time. It has to be like the early church though. The Apostles, through their writings, are still with us so we don't need any new ones. If you call no one boss but Jesus, you won't need any authority other than Him. The Bible is easy to read, so special revelations are unnecessary. Yeah, I say do it if you can, but watch out for cults. They came by our place almost daily. I don't believe it's a must-do or anything like that. It's really fun and according to the press (who can trust them?) it is a very effective way to evangelize.

9) Did you have church services in the commune? What were they like?

We prayed a lot. For actual worship service, in the Church sense, we went to several different churches. I don't join churches. I believe that I am a part of His body and I am part of the living Church. The Holy Spirit baptized me into union with all the Christians that there are and have ever been or will be. That's joining enough for anybody. I think God has called me to serve at PBC and I am committed to that, with all my shallow heart.

10) How did you worship God?

The same way we do now. In "truth" and "spirit". That's what Jesus told the woman at the well. She said, "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." In "truth", meaning in reality, basically how we live and as Paul wrote in Romans 12 through the offering of our bodies as a living sacrifice to God. This is acceptable to Him as worship. In "spirit", meaning motivated from within by His indwelling presence and our complete and total dependence on Him. Just as He exemplified in His own life and public ministry. No one can really confess that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. Any worship that does not bend the knee to this fact is vain and working against the inevitable.

11) Have you seen American politics meshed in with the practice of "establishment churches" either then or now?

As long as we think of ourselves as a Christian nation, we will continue the practice of another moldy old heresy, Anglo-Israel-ism. This gem simply appropriates all the promises that God made to Israel and applies them to Europeans and their descendants by virtue of a self proclaimed or enforced Christian majority. As far as I know, God has a deal with only one nation and that's Israel. In the early years of our nation's history it was easy to believe that we were His nation because there simply wasn't an Israel anywhere on the map. When I first became a Christian, before Israel's famous six day war, lots of older Christians believed that those Jews that were in Palestine, as they called it, were not really the Biblical nation of Israel. Sure. and, "Shakespeare didn't write Shakespeare, another guy named Shakespeare wrote it". (Pogo)

12) How would you describe "establishment" Christian thought?

Ineffectual. The basic for or against stance doesn't work. Can you actually imagine the manager of a movie theater anxiously pacing up and down outside of his nearly packed theater wondering where the Christians are?

But! If you wish to publicly declare the truth, do so as Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, "But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good...". Good! Declare what is Good. Evil is already judged. Salvation doesn't come from God's condemnation, it comes from His forgiveness.

13) Do or did you see evidence of American concepts such as individual pursuit of happiness, freedom, sacrifice for nation and God in certain realms of Christian thought?

When one's exposure to actual first century Christianity is limited to reading the New Testament, it is obvious that our founding fathers identified very strongly with the Book of Acts and Exodus. Off hand, I'm not aware of any pre-colonial or colonial communities, except for those established by Christians of various rather extreme (at least from here) points of view.

14) Did you encounter any resistance or feedback from established churches while you were involved with the Jesus Movement. What sort?

Among the harder things we had to deal with concerning the established church were slander and hostility based on their inability to tell who was a Christian and who wasn't (even in their own churches). Some of the hassles were just a 20th century versions of "Those who would circumcise you that they might glory in your flesh". Local churches here and there liked to parade hippy converts shorn of their sinful appearance, clothed and in their right mind, dressed just like Young Republicans (who didn't have to change their clothes upon conversion because they already dressed like Richard Nixon).

Equating the square look with true belief must have driven millions of young Christians mad. Church going families wanted to present their offspring for all the world to see as non-hippy true believers! Anyone could tell their children were real Christians because they were compelled to wear the very, ah, eer, latest of styles. By late, I mean that their hair and clothing had to be painfully out of date. I have no idea why some do as they do but sometimes Christian parents act like they think secular fashion become less worldly with age.

15) What ways do you think the message and practice of the Jesus Movement differed from

that of other traditional Protestant churches?

At the time the most important difference was over the Viet Nam War. We hated it. The churches tried to draw us into the usual for or against bull-manure. We used every riot, every protest, every march, every dance, every day as a fantastic opportunity. The churches were always trying to draw crowds but they wanted them on their own property for some insane reason. There were crowds everywhere. Why anyone would want a large unruly crowd in their own place was beyond me.

I am still very sorry that we could not stop the war sooner. Every time I see some aging homeless vet, I'm sorry. We did what we thought would stop the madness of war the fastest. I'm sorry the churches didn't do more to help us equip those who went to war with the person of Christ so that it wouldn't have driven so many of them mad. I'm sorry that many of those going to Bosnia or what ever conflict is next aren't going with God. How can anyone come home from war unchanged? In Christ all things work together for good. Without Him, nothing works for good. It takes the power of Christ's resurrection to bring good out of war.

16) What should the role of the church be in the nation or vice versa?

We are salt and light. Salt preserves, it seasons and is necessary for life to be palatable. Light illuminates the darkness. We are the secret government of the world. We don't need political office to be effective. We have the words of Christ which change men's hearts so that they write better laws. We know what's wrong with the world, Jesus said it from the cross, "Father forgive them, they don't know what they are doing". We don't even need to become salt and light, we already are what we are supposed to be. According to the Bible, "We have everything pertaining to life and godliness". Unless it's too late and the salt of the Church has lost it's savor.

I don't know if things are that blandly bad or not but I do think we Christians have a serious light-under-the-basket problem. We all mean well and I'm sure as soon as we get everything divided up into two piles we'll probably get around to studying the Word so that we'll know what we are doing then perhaps we will shine again. Or, maybe not. After all, what can I say other than that I was saved outside of the established church and so were a lot of other people. Some of us are still mistakenly viewed as a little out of it, so to speak. Of course, like the old joke goes, "When there are more of us outside than inside....who's inside then?" I'll tell you what, like Bob Dylan sang, "I'll let you in my dreams if I can be in yours."

17) Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about this movement or your perspectives on Christianity in America today?

Martin Luther started it and it's not over yet. The Interstitial Christians are still among the Koinonia. As they should be, it's one of their favorite words. They have not fallen away in any greater a number than one would expect based Jesus' parable of the sower, "...And others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. And others fell on the good soil, and yielded a crop, some a hundred-fold, some sixty, and some thirty". For all I know you might be one. Did you know that the University campus in Moscow (MGIMO) is just like Berkeley's was in the 60's. Anyone can just "show up".

Oh, one more very important fact about all shooting off of the mouth. Always end important statements with, ".....eer, something".

E...er, something.

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