**“When a Butterfly Flaps its Wings in China...”**

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After Sultan Bin Salman al-Suad orbited the earth in a space shuttle, he wrote, “The first day or so, we all pointed to our countries. The third or fourth day, we were pointing to our continents. By the fifth day, we were aware of only one Earth.”

The Church has spoken and written about what it calls “The Seven Deadly Sins”. Give some thought to the following “Ten Dangerous Delusions” that can hinder or cripple the worldwide mission of the Church.

**“The Ten Dangerous Delusions”**

* Delusion 1: “God wants us to give Him a percentage of what He has first given us. If only people would practice tithing!”
* Delusion 2: “God has blessed us in this country with many wonderful things to enjoy.”
* Delusion 3: “This country offers many opportunities for people to achieve success for themselves.”
* Delusion 4: “We must put God First in our lives. Christianity must always be the most important part of life!”
* Delusion 5: “We are to serve God in the secular realm as well as in the spiritual sphere.”
* Delusion 6: “We must continue to stress the importance of grace, and preach the gospel of the forgiveness of sins with power!”
* Delusion 7: “We must meet our own budget before we send anything to outside causes.”
* Delusion 8: “With all the troubles now plaguing the nation, we need to train as many professional church workers as possible.”
* Delusion 9: “It is good to see that the Church is organizing more ‘servant events’ for young people. There should be more of them!”
* Delusion 10: “It seems that other countries put more emphasis on the importance of the community. We, in the United States, put more emphasis on the importance of the individual. We have more freedom here.”

**“When a Butterfly Flaps its Wings in China...”**

**Answers to “The Ten Dangerous Delusions”**

**Delusion 1: “God wants us to give Him a percentage of what He has first given us. If only people would practice tithing!”**

God gives us nothing. The First Article of the Creed might well be edited to read, “I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker and owner of heaven and earth.” There is no such thing as Christian giving. There is only *Christian management*, and *Christian distribution*. The problem in the church is not so much Christian giving, as un-Christian keeping. The problem is not the high cost of living, but the cost of high living. God did not give humanity ownership of creation, but “dominion over” creation, Genesis 1:26.

The practice of tithing is based on Old Testament principles. It can lead to confusion regarding what constitutes discipleship. For example, let’s say Mr. A earns $20,000 per year and gives $2,000. He has $18,000 left. Mr. B earns $100,000, gives $10,000, and has $90,000 over. Does Mr. A need $90,000 per year? If the response is that as we earn more, we increase our standard of living – a costly affair – then we do well to note the example of John Wesley, the father of Methodism. Wesley became a Christian while teaching at Oxford University in England. His salary was 30 pounds per year. He gave 28 and lived on 2. When his salary was increased to 50 pounds per year, he lived on 28 and gave 22. When his salary was increased to 100 pounds per year, he lived on 28 and gave 72. The “Wesley Way” is worthy of thought in a world in which the motto is “Make what you can, can what you make, and sit on the lid.” Wesley taught his followers that they should make as much as possible, save as much as possible, and give as much as possible. Money is merely stored service, “stored self” that facilitates service to others by proxy.

**Delusion 2: “God has blessed us in this country with many wonderful things to enjoy.”**

We do well to note the words of the first century Roman satirist, Juvenal, who wrote, “Luxury is more ruthless than war.” And Karl Barth’s comment, “The human mind is an idol factory.” We are neither deserving nor special. God has not blessed us, but endowed us. We are not here to live comfortably, but usefully – to use whatever God provides by serving others without limit in their every need, whoever or wherever they may be. Needs abound. We live in a world in which 6% of the people receive half the income, 50% are constantly hungry, 60% live in shanty-towns, and 70% are illiterate.

**Delusion 3: “This country offers many opportunities for people to achieve success for themselves.”**

Success is not determined by what we accumulate fro ourselves, but by what we do to the glory of God in the service of others, Matthew 25:31ff. The “Great American (or Australian or Western World) Dream” is proving to be a “great nightmare” in many frightening ways. Simply put, we are not here to accumulate riches, but to seek after righteousness.

**Delusion 4: “We must put God First in our lives. Christianity must always be the most important part of life!”**

God commands us to put Him *only*, not *first*, Matthew 4:10. Compare Matthew 6:33 with Luke 12:31 where the word “first” is omitted. To put God *first* is to operate with priorities. To put Him *only* is to operate with options. Luther reminds us that each person is like a horse with a saddle, in which either Jesus or Satan holds the reins. C.S. Lewis said, “There is no neutral ground in the universe. Every square inch is claimed by God and counter-claimed by Satan.”

**Delusion 5: “We are to serve God in the secular realm as well as in the spiritual sphere.”**

There is no secular realm (see 4, above). There is one world which God made and owns. We use life and creation either according to God’s will, or according to the will of the devil, the world, and our flesh (Luther). We would do well to edit the Third Article of the Apostle’s Creed, so that it reads, “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church – *and I believe in the existence of the unholy Satanic Spirit, and the unholy demonic realm...*” The demonic is every person, power or influence that sidetracks us from living as servants of God and others into living merely for ourselves.

**Delusion 6: “We must continue to stress the importance of grace, and preach the gospel of the forgiveness of sins with power!”**

True, but the “good news” of the New Testament is that the Messianic Age has broken in – with all that implies; see Isaiah 60; 61:1-7; Mark 1:1; John 20:30-31. We must beware of merely telling people why they should not do “good works” for the wrong reason, while failing to tell them what good work they should be doing for the right reason. Preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments is merely a means to an end – an end that the Anglican Catechism sums up beautifully: “The mission of the church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.” Above the entrance doors of our churches, we need a sign saying, “Servants’ Entrance.” Above the exit door, we need another sign saying, “Mission Field Ahead”.

**Delusion 7: “We must meet our own budget before we send anything to outside causes.”**

Though it is easy to criticize what some people in the Head Office might want to do with our benevolence, some of these people have seen something of the nightmares and challenges that exist beyond our own shores. True, local congregations need to remain financially viable. However, some tend to become slaves to their own facility. They provide amenities, fixtures and programs that everyone will enjoy, but do not weep for a heartbreaking world about which they know so little.

**Delusion 8: “With all the troubles now plaguing the nation, we need to train as many professional church workers as possible.”**

The answer is not merely a matter of training “professional church workers.” To begin with, every Christian is called to be a priest of God. Whatever we touch has a sacred quality to it – for God made and owns all things. Hence, as priests of God, we constantly touch and handle sacred things. As a priest is one who goes to God for others and to others for God, so we, in our daily work, do something for God in the service of others. Those who preach sermons from pulpits are not doing something more sacred than those who paints houses or grow corn. Though there are differences in function, sight is in no way superior to the works of a farmer laboring in the fields, or a woman scrubbing floors in her home. The view that scrubbing floors held as much dignity as occupying the pulpit radically changed the work ethic of Luther’s day, and has made an impact on the world ever since.

Furthermore, clergy are not so much professionals as those called by God to make a profession and to make it with a passion. If anything, their task is equip God’s priests for their work throughout creation, and to be protesters against the prevailing sin and corruption within society at large.

Finally, churches that install a number of professional workers can give the impression that they can assume responsibility for Christian nurture and growth on behalf of the church’s parents! This is a disastrous impression to give. Parents are God’s children – workers and youth-workers!

**Delusion 9: “It is good to see that the Church is organizing more ‘servant events’ for young people. There should be more of them!”**

For Christians, life itself is to be a servant event! We need to insert into the Second Article of the Creed, “...born of the Virgin Mary, *walked the way of a Servant without limit,* suffered...the third day He rose again from the dead, *He has not withdrawn but transformed His presence, and will at the Last Day finally reappear,* to judge the living and the dead.”

**Delusion 10: “It seems that other countries put more emphasis on the importance of the community. We, in the United States, put more emphasis on the importance of the individual. We have more freedom here.”**

There is no such thing as private Christianity. We are called to personal faith, yes – but never to private faith. It might be argued that the emphasis on individualism in the US is destroying the fabric of its society. Christians are not free to do their own thing, but free (from the guilt, power and punishment of sin) to do God’s thing by serving others. Free grace calls us to costly discipleship.