

Finding God at Your Job

In every generation from the Egyptian refugees until the present, human beings have attempted to define a physical sphere in which God can be observed. From the Ark of the Covenant to lavish cathedrals, people have built containers or boxes for God.

We deeply desire that He get into the box and stay there. Our humanity needs to establish God in our three-dimensional paradigm so we can watch Him and try to figure out where He is, what He is doing and what He might do next.

History suggests that after A.D. 300, as Christianity became legal, God seemingly was willing to confine Himself to another box so His growing, struggling **church** would have something tangible that could be seen, organized and managed. This box became a building, which the people began to understand as “the church.”

With Christianity’s new status as the religion of the land the church could no longer meet in homes among the people. Respectability as a proper **religion** demanded a classier act.

Impressive buildings were built, robes were donned by the priests, and many of the supernatural aspects of the church went away. **Christianity** had to become civilized and behave with more decorum. If ordinary people wanted to have church, they had to go inside the building.

There would be no more meetings in the potter’s shop or the food market or anywhere else the people spent most of their time. And though the **church** was certainly easier to manage, Scripture does not suggest in any way that the church’s activities should be confined to a building.

Where in the World is the Church? The buildings were built. And because they were so grand, the priests and elders agreed

God must be impressed and would not mind at all confining Himself to His new box.

Soon the ecclesia, the “called out ones,” the people of God who had heretofore understood themselves to be the church wherever they happened to be, no longer saw themselves as witnesses throughout the Earth. The hierarchy and the bureaucracy of the faith became more complex, and the people of God found themselves divided into two classes of believers: the **laity** and the **ordained**.

It became an accepted practice, embraced by both camps, that the laity go into the building that had become the church to be “in church.” The problem was not that church now took place in a building but that the people believed church could not take place anywhere else.

Furthermore, the laity came to believe they were an inferior class of believers. They thought they could be holy and set apart for God only when they were in the building or involved in supporting the agenda of those who ran the building.

The people came to believe that the really holy ones worked inside the building. For those who worked outside the building to please God and fulfill the call of God on their lives, they must work really hard in the workplace of the world and make enough money to quit and get a job inside the building.

God is Out of The Box Today, asking permission from no one, God has escaped again and has unabashedly showed up in the marketplace, where no one has thought to build a box for Him. As a result of doing this strange and unanticipated thing, God has shattered our comfortable paradigm about the sacred and the secular.

We have somewhat understood and agreed on which things were holy. But we have not always agreed or correctly understood which things were **secular**. It has been common to consider the secular and the profane to be the same thing, which of course

they are not.

We opined that the marketplace, the place where people worked and spent most of their time, was a secular—i.e., profane—entity whose only purpose was to generate money for the holy thing, which is the church. It followed then that the church building and its associated ministries, being the only holy things, were therefore the only things God really cared anything about.

One can appreciate our **corporate** shock in discovering that apparently God cares much more about the **secular** than we thought He did. Who would have guessed God intended to raise up a parallel church to the traditional church?

Many of us never imagined God would pour out the very same Holy Spirit gifts upon the **workplace church** as He had done in past revivals upon the nuclear church. But that is precisely what is happening.

Among the working class, it is common knowledge that the sick are being prayed for and healing is occurring. The gospel is being preached at work, and unsaved business people are getting saved. Deliverance is taking place as greed and injustice move out to make way for justice and righteousness.

AN OLD CONFLICT I suggest that the tension between the nuclear church and the extended church is not new. In fact, it is not unreasonable to note that the modern-day conflict between the two groups bears amazing similarity to what happened between the church in Jerusalem and the church at Antioch during a pivotal time in history.

The church in Jerusalem had heard about a move of God in Antioch, where God ought not to be. Concerned that a cult was arising there, the Jerusalem brethren sent Barnabas to check it out (see Acts 11:19-26).

Antioch was an entirely different kind of city than Jerusalem, and Barnabas found an entirely different kind of church there. It did not resemble the mother church in Jerusalem in any way. To start with, it was filled not with Jewish believers but with Gentile God-fearers.

It was not a proper church. There were no ordained people running it. It was out of order, and it was difficult to figure out who was in charge.

And yet, the power of the Holy Spirit was all over the place. Barnabas recognized that what was going on was an undeniable move of God.

Clearly, the Antioch church needed an apostle, but who? Barnabas left the city, made a right turn and went to Arabia in search of Paul and brought him to Antioch (see Acts 11:25-26).

Paul had the attention of the people immediately because his reputation was well-known. He had been a soldier, a persecutor of the people of "the way," but had now become a born-again evangelist to the very people he once tried to imprison.

The stories of Saul of Tarsus, now Paul the apostle, were still alive and well in the rumor mill. Paul began to preach to the people in Antioch and they listened—if for no other reason than to hear what such a man might have to say.

Asking permission of no one, not even the Jerusalem church, Paul summarily removed the stumbling blocks that had served as a "Do Not Enter" sign to these potential converts to the faith. Paul blatantly told Gentile believers, contrary to conventional wisdom of the day, that they did not have to get circumcised and that they could be saved without obeying the Mosaic Law (see Acts 13:38-39).

The mother church in Jerusalem became concerned about what was happening in Antioch among the uncircumcised Gentiles, who

claimed to be true believers in Jesus Christ. It was this conflict between the organized proper church and the unorthodox church at Antioch that caused the council at Jerusalem to convene (see Acts 15:1-6).

The issue was so important that the apostles and elders came to town for the meeting. Luke reports that the brothers were glad, but there is no indication that the apostles and elders were glad to hear about revival among the Gentiles (see v. 3).

At a crucial point in the meeting, Peter stood to address the gathering. Had you been there you could have heard the proverbial pin drop. Why? Because 10 years before this, the Lord had showed Peter the acceptance of the Gentiles through a dream of a sheet coming down from heaven. As a result of the dream, Peter went to a Gentile's house, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and Peter baptized the whole lot (see Acts 9:1-48).

Peter's words helped diffuse a potentially explosive situation. When he concluded, Paul and Barnabas told of the miracles they had witnessed among the Gentiles. This must have satisfied the apostles and elders, who were pleased to draft a decree that would encourage and embrace those Gentiles who were of the faith (see Acts 22-29).

You may be wondering if the rise of the extended church in the workplace is as serious as all that. It is indeed that serious. We are witnessing the same potential for a kingdom divided as was possible between the proper church of Jerusalem and the raucous church of Antioch.

CLASHING CHURCH CULTURES Something akin to the Jerusalem council may have to occur between the apostles of the workplace church and the apostles of the traditional church. The nuclear church will not be able to close the door God is opening to a full-throttle, Holy Ghost, signs-and-wonders outpouring on people whom He has sovereignly chosen.

Many of these are people who have not been to seminary, have

not been ordained by a suitable denomination and are not married to any denominational doctrine. They are men and women who are passionate about Jesus and really believe they can do what they perceive the nuclear church has struggled to do. They know they are called, and they intend to answer the call.

The nuclear church, as some see it, has only two options as to how it will respond to what is clearly going to happen in the workplace. The church can ignore it all, or the church can influence how the extended church develops.

To exert influence, nuclear church leaders must rethink the way in which they communicate Biblical truth. They must be willing to look at the Scriptures through the eyes of ordinary, workplace people—the same people for whom the Scriptures were written in the first place.

Is it even reasonable to suppose that such a work of antiquity as the Bible could have anything convincing to say to the people who do not work behind stained-glass windows or wear clerical robes and collars? Can people who communicate in cyberspace connect with those who communicated on papyrus?

Can the nuclear church become a trainer and equipper in the creation of a powerful army who might actually help fulfill the Great Commission? I think it can.

God will not be contained in a box, no matter how lavish and imposing it may be. The workplaces of corporate America are ripe for a visitation.

Linda Rios Brook *is president of the RiosBrook Foundation.*