

Markers of a New Reformation

Five Key Shifts for the Renewal of the Christian Movement

1. God always looks like Jesus, and all scripture is properly read through him.

A different way of reading scripture

Theological contrast: The truth about God is averaged from portraits across the Bible. Jesus is God's "soft side" but not the exact representation of God. Every verse in the Bible carries equal authoritative weight. An idea is "biblical" if you can find a verse anywhere that seems to support it.

Secular contrast: The Bible is outdated, supports violence and oppression, and is anti-science. There is no way to know the truth about God or ultimate Reality. There is no way to arbitrate between conflicting, private intuitions about good and evil, right and wrong.

2. To be saved includes belonging to a community under Jesus called to live the life of the future now.

A bigger gospel

Theological contrast: God is only interested in saving souls, not creation itself. Christian faith is mostly about consenting to the right ideas. Jesus is Savior from the world but not Lord of life within it. We are saved only as individuals and the church is incidental.

Secular contrast: Religion is private matter, only within the hearts of individuals. There is no authority outside of myself. The only salvation is the self-help kind. The highest good is individual freedom or self-expression rather than a beloved community.

3. Evil is overcome through the power of suffering love.

A new relationship with power

Theological contrast: Christendom—we try to make the world better by compelling others through force to live like Christians, regardless of what they believe. We build God's kingdom when we exercise power over others to bend them to our perception of God's desires.

Secular contrast: History is a highly polarized power-competition where everyone tries to seize control at the highest levels and impose their will on others. The ends justify the means. The only sort of power that exists is power over others.

4. The Holy Spirit empowers us to partner in God's work of reconciling all things.

A clarified mission and a fresh empowerment

Theological contrast: Disconnection between love of God and neighbor. Jesus makes us right with God but has little to say about human relationships or human systems. Or, alternatively, we reconcile the world under our own strength and power. Jesus is an inspiration for our work but little more. Christianity as a moral enterprise but emptied of its spiritual power.

Secular contrast: Teaching the ideals of 'liberalism' will allow everyone to tolerate each other across vast disagreement. Everything will work out if we can just get "those people" who are the problem out of the way. The world is without God's activity or any power but the human sort.

5. The church is defined by our shared center, not by the lines we draw.

A new approach to disagreement

Theological contrast: Endless fracturing in churches and denominations where everyone must agree on nearly everything to worship or do mission together. A spirit of judgmentalism. Fuzziness in which a community sticks together due to history or relationship but without any common mission or purpose or shared faith identity.

Secular contrast: Full inclusion in the group requires strict purity tests. Failure to subscribe to any one piece of current "orthodoxy" can result in exclusion or splintering.

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