

HELPING THE 21ST CENTURY CHURCH RECAPTURE THE 1ST CENTURY CHURCH'S SUBVERSIVE FOCUS

Rev. "Bud" Tillinghast, December 2018

I am a retired parish minister who has been trying to translate the recent academic insights about the Jesus movement in the first two centuries into what this might mean for the contemporary church.

I started with what the Greco-Roman Meals research tells us about what took place in those earliest gatherings of the followers of Jesus. By means of a blog and a Facebook page with the name "Dinner Church" I was able to locate over 100 local sites where there was experimentation going on where the group gathered around a full meal, which often included a Eucharist ritual. By the time I turned the Facebook page over to the younger generation who were doing this experimentation, there were over 1500 persons following the Facebook page.

This freed me to turn from what the early 'churches' did when they met to what would have been their mission as they moved back into their exterior context, the politically oppressive, economically exploitative empire of Rome. For this I developed a Facebook page and blog which I have called "Subversive Church". I am convinced that this perception of the church as an alternative movement to today's empire would renew the contemporary church, which is at ease in Zion.

On my blog I have begun to lay this out. In its menu, the 'About' page lays out the vision; the 'Blog Posts' shows what I have written and plan to write; the 'Bibliography' contains the over 100 books I have located that present the work of academics on 'empire criticism' and which I am using as the basis of this project.

Are you aware of any clergy who are either incorporating the reality of empire into their preaching or are working on a model of the church as an alternative community helping its members to 'negotiate living in an empire context'? I would appreciate any contacts -with email addresses or net links- that you could give me.

Grace and Peace on Earth

Rev. H A "Bud" Tillinghast

An email to Order Ecumenical Colleagues, December 2018:

O E Colleagues,

I have been influenced by the Order since making an abortive attempt to find out what you were doing by traveling to Austin in the Spring of 1962. It was abortive because most of the group had left for Chicago to begin the Ecumenical Institute leaving poor Jack behind almost on his own. Most of what I found in that trip I got from Bill Holmes in Northaven Dallas. My concern was the same as yours at the time: to renew the church.

I'm still at it. I have a blog and Facebook page which I call Subversive Church. The links are below.

As you were impacted by Bultmann and Existentialism in the 60s and on, so I am motivated by the recent N T scholarship which has uncovered for the first time the nature of the earliest communities of Jesus's followers in the first 150 years. They were trying to follow Kingdom ethics in a brutal, oppressive, exploitative empire of the Romans. I believe there is a source for the renewal of the church coming from that academic research. But academics are academics, so they dump their research on us, leaving us with the questions: What do we do with this? What difference does/could this make for the contemporary church? What is the form of empire today that needs to be subverted? Where is today's church colluding with a foreign power that is contrary to the Kingdom?

So I am looking for persons, lay or clergy whose adrenalin is set racing with the thought of translating research into local church practictics. I've put below the content of the email I have begun to send out. I have been encouraged with the response, especially the one from Brian McLaren who says "we're traveling a similar road, we've reached the same conclusions. Read my latest blogpost "Help!" and ask if you are hearing a Macedonian call. Just because some of us are of an age that we may not see the Promised Land, it does not mean we can't help get this started. Are you or do you know lay or clergy or congregations that are involved in, how do you want to phrase it, resistance, subversion? Please send me contact information.

Grace and Peace,

Bud Tillinghast
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