

Mourning the Passing of EASTER

By Bob Young

I mourn the passing of the EASTER I knew as a youth. Our world celebrates Easter but does not celebrate EASTER! When I was a boy, we had EASTER! We got up early for sunrise services, came home for a special breakfast, and then went to church—which always went longer on EASTER, not because of any special program but because everyone was more reflective and thoughtful. There were always lots of people at church—in our little town, everyone went to church on EASTER—even the less savory characters and some church members who only showed up once or twice a year. Later I learned that some people call these the “Lilly and Holly Crowd.”

The way in which the contemporary church does Easter (and does not do EASTER) is troubling. I have to admit that we have come a long way (in the wrong direction)—today church is mostly about us and much less about Jesus. We are consumer-driven, in entertainment mode (especially on Easter!), wanting people to notice us more than Jesus. Members are overheard to say, “I hope they like us!” My mental comeback is almost always the same: “I hope they like our Jesus!” Reading and watching the Easter ads from the churches helps one understand and focus on the really important aspects of Easter: hear our pipe organ; hear a pop singing group, listen to our (new) preacher!

The direction the Christian religion is heading is troublesome. Christians will celebrate Easter, but in many churches, it won't be EASTER. The desire to share the “good news” of the resurrection will take second place in many churches, second place behind what pleases us and tickles our fancy. Paul said it would be so, but it should make us uncomfortable to realize that he was describing us! The Barna Group (barna.org), known for their research of religious themes and attitudes, has identified two problems: (1) many Christians are hazy on the connection between Easter and Jesus' resurrection, (2) those who know the core message of Easter don't share that faith with others. Barna's survey of Christians found that only 42% tie the meaning of Easter to Jesus' resurrection and only 2% call Easter “the most important holiday of their faith.” Of those who are active churchgoers, less than a third said they would invite guests to Easter worship services this year.

The church must stop trivializing EASTER (and Easter). Tom Wright wrote an excellent article on this topic last year, available by clicking the link: [Click HERE](#).

Wright wrote,

Easter was the pilot project. What God did for Jesus that explosive morning is what He intends to do for the whole creation. We who live in the interval between Jesus' Resurrection and the final rescue and transformation of the whole world are called to be new-creation people here and now. That is the hidden meaning of the greatest festival Christians have.... This true meaning has remained hidden because the Church has trivialized it and the world has rubbished it. The Church has turned Jesus' Resurrection into a “happy ending” after the dark and messy story of Good Friday, often scaling it down so that “resurrection” becomes a fancy way of

saying "He went to Heaven". Easter then means: "There really is life after death". The world shrugs its shoulders. We may or may not believe in life after death, but we reach that conclusion independently of Jesus, of odd stories about risen bodies and empty tombs.

This would be a good time for the church to recover the story and the significance of the Resurrection of Jesus. Jesus really died, really arose, and really lives. He is really coming back. No other explanation for the birth of the church and the experiences of the early believers is feasible. The tomb was empty, early believers died maintaining that truth, and the church spread like wildfire. This happened, not because Christians were so powerful that they were able to remake their world, because of the power of God and his Holy Spirit within them, the Comforter who came because the resurrected Jesus ascended to the Father.

This brings the real meaning of Easter into view. Wright concluded, *Christianity's critics have always sneered that nothing has changed. But everything has. The world is a different place. Easter has been sidelined because this message doesn't fit our prevailing world view. For at least 200 years the West has lived on the dream that we can bring justice and beauty to the world all by ourselves.*

The world wants to hush up the real meaning of Easter. Death is the final weapon of the tyrant or, for that matter, the anarchist, and resurrection indicates that this weapon doesn't have the last word. When the Church begins to work with Easter energy on the twin tasks of justice and beauty, we may find that it can face down the sneers of skeptics, and speak once more of Jesus in a way that will be heard.