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# The Center for Progressive Christianity: Take a Closer Look

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The Center’s founder is James R. Adams, for almost three decades pastor of St. Mark’s Episcopal Church on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. Adams, as you might expect, represents the far left wing of liberal Christianity in America. He and his fellow organizers present the Center for Progressive Christianity as an alternative to evangelicalism and traditional Christianity.

Religion doesn’t have to be irrelevant, ineffectual, or repressive, promises the Center. To the contrary, Jim Adams and company want to unite “conventional Christians and questioning skeptics” along with believers, agnostics, and all persons in between.

The Center presents its work by asking a series of questions: “Do you have religious interests and longings but cannot except the beliefs and dogmas you associate with Christianity? Are you repelled by claims that Christianity is the ‘only way’? Are you part of a faith community or organization that openly welcomes people who have had problems with organized religion?” If so, the Center for Progressive Christianity is just for you!

According to the group’s website, the Center seeks to promote “an understanding of Christian practice and teaching that leads to a greater concern for the way people treat each other than for the way people express their beliefs, the acceptance of all people, and a respect for other religious traditions.” What about non-Christian religions? “We are opposed to any exclusive dogma that limits the search for truth and free inquiry, and we encourage work that eases the pain, suffering and degradation inherent in many of the structures of society, as well as work that keeps central to the Christian life fair, open, peaceful, and loving treatment of all human beings.” The group also wants to “affirm the variety in-depth of human experience and the richness of each persons’ search for meaning.”

How does the group go about this? The Center holds conferences, publishes an on-line journal, and seeks to network “progressive” Christians through “building an international network.” Just what we need.

Of course, the group welcomes persons from all “sexual orientations and gender identities,” and sex is never far from the forefront.

The spring 2003 issue of Constellation, the group’s on-line journal, featured six essays in response to the question: “How do you experience God in the expressions of your sexuality?” The series is not for the faint-hearted. Identified only by initials, the writers gush about how sexuality and spirituality come together in their lives. “E.K.” offers that “life is an erotic journey. One only has to look around to find the unabashed sexuality of nature. I learned from that experience how my body brings in the world regardless of my appearance or health or age or condition. My body is in constant communication with God, and God with it.” “S.G.” identifies himself as a homosexual pastor living in partnership with another “religious professional” who serves as organist/choirmaster. He offers that “God enters my life at every point and every act of love, including sex, and every act of sharing involving self-giving is a deeply spiritual reality this is true no matter what kind of sexual expression is involved.”

“R.D.” finds God and sex everywhere. “Whether I am gardening, swimming or doing dishes I often describe these moments of heightened sensual or sexual expression as heaven on earth.” “J.T.” offers the option of learning to pray while naked because “my initial experience of praying naked was something so concrete and natural, yet so unexpected and so unaccustomed, that the role of my ‘willful intellect’ interested me immediately the most important thing I recollect about the whole experience was that ‘I found myself’ praying naked.” Well, as tempted as we may be to say “to each his own,” there is something deeply troubling going on here.

At the 2001 forum presented by The Center for Progressive Christianity, Professor S. Wesley Ariarajah of Drew Divinity School rebuked orthodox Christianity for its exclusiveness. “What is it about the Christian faith that we can’t handle the reality that other people have a life with God and that God has a life with other people? Why is it that other people should be wrong in order for us to be right? Why is it that we cannot present the understanding of God that we have in Jesus Christ in the context of a people who are already in a relationship with God?”

It is clear that Wesley Ariarajah is in basic conflict with his namesake, John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. In what must rank as a first-class understatement, Ariarajah says “the word ‘truth’ is also a problem.” Truth would have to be a problem for one posing as a Christian theologian while simultaneously seeking to undermine the faith.

Speaking at the forum held the previous year, Marcus Borg of Oregon State University, one of the most infamous revisionists theologians of our times, called upon participants to “re-vision Christianity.” Borg’s “re-visioning” would require a rejection of Jesus Christ as the center of God’s saving activity. Borg allows that Christians can claim that Jesus is “for us as Christians, the decisive disclosure of God.” But, argues Borg, we cannot say, “He is the only one.” Christianity, argues Borg, should be seen as “a sacrament of the sacred - as a tradition that mediates the reality of God to us.” The Bible is just a collection of stories that invite us to see new truths and reconceived reality. Nevertheless, we are not to take it seriously as being the Word of God.

Christians should see The Center for Progressive Christianity, not as posing a threat to Christianity itself, but as exposing the basic hatred of biblical truth that drives those on the theological left. Evangelical Christians should be aware of this organization, not because we should fear it’s influence—it isn’t likely to have much. No, we should look to a group like this in order to understand how a course of theological revisionism inevitably heads in this direction. Once the faith handed down by the Apostles is subjected to any process of “updating” for the sake of relevance, The Center for Progressive Christianity, or something quite like it, is never far behind.

Jim Adams and his colleagues hope to jumpstart liberal Christianity through their new organization. But liberal Christianity is not in need of a wake up call. The dead do not answer alarms.

