History of the Integration of Religion and Society

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According to the syllabus, this course allows students to “Analyze trends, issues, and problems that need the transforming impact of a Christian worldview in the social sciences. Develop critical thinking skills to clarify the nature and significance of issues related to

the integration of religion and society. Finally, it helps students to identify historical precedents of Christianity's positive and negative social impacts for guidance in the sociological integration of religion and society to advance constructive social change” (Syllabus for PHI 815). These are lofty goals. However, in my occupational field, which happens to be ministry, these outcomes are critical for further research. The program, at Omega, is designed to create social change. However, if one cannot analyze a situation, how can he or she attempt to change it? Furthermore, there are certain societal aspects that are already “embedded.” Yet, what is unrecognized is how some of those embedded aspects came from religious experience. How much of society, that the modern world knows, was shaped by religion? That answer is a bit ambiguous and largely dependent upon backgrounds. For the Christian, much of the ethic that the world knows is based on religious background. However, for the secularist, the world has been good but needs honing or shaping. Notwithstanding, this class has been beneficial in studying and recognizing these backgrounds and how these backgrounds shape someone’s logic and perception of the world. It also helps shape a praxis of living. Therefore, this learning journal will engage and analyze how the church has started to neglect integrating religion with society. This has led the church to ultimately lose influence because it is out of touch with societal norms. Sadly, all of this is caused by the church losing or not expanding its mission and limiting its focus.

It wasn’t always this way. In fact, the church used to have a prominent place in society. It was the place where everyone went on Sunday. While this is a very generic statement, there is some truth to it. This is what Hauerwas and Willimon wrote about in *Resident Aliens*. They wrote about a time when the church was the only option in town. Then things changed (Willimon, 2014). Unfortunately, the church doesn’t do well with change. Instead, it embraces the concepts like those found in Romans 12:2, when it comes to change. The world may change, but do not be conformed to the world but transformed. Then the world continued to change. It continued to move forward. However, the church considered these movements to be persecutions. Yet, the church embraced the sermon on the mount in Matthew 5, where Jesus said that people are blessed when they are persecuting you. Society never considered itself persecuting the church. Instead, it felt as if it was just moving forward, and the church just didn’t move along with it. Rob Bell compares this movement to that of the Oldsmobile (Bell, 2013). Unfortunately, the church must change. It is starting to change. But the damage is done. There are many surveys where people are listing themselves as “nones” regarding religious affiliation. There are countless people who consider themselves to be “spiritual but not religious.” Almost every denomination is in decline. The church has lost its influence because it ignored the changes in society and hoped that their message was good enough. The thing is, it is! Notwithstanding, the church neglected that the Bible was written for the people of its time. The messaging was around the societal norms of society. This journal is not suggesting changing the Bible to fit societal norms. Instead, recognizing that the church has to help reveal how the Bible fits the societal norms of today. Unfortunately, the church has not done this. Or, if it has, society doesn’t know about it.

It isn’t as if the church has completely ignored society. In fact, there were aspects that the church tried to engage the society. Such things as the worship wars were a part of this attempt to adjust to society. When covid hit, almost every church moved to some type of online option to engage people in worship experiences. But, in major issues, the church failed. Chris Shirley writes about how the church continued to depend on its “professional” Christians and didn’t prepare the family to engage in ministry on its own. Sadly, this created children, who entered liberal arts colleges and left because the school was so wildly outside the Christian norms. Or, the children remained at the liberal arts school and recognized that Christianity was out of date. There are science advancements but the church considered these as persecutions to the church and fought against it. There were political, humanist, and societal advancements. Instead of embracing these changes and integrating religion with these advancements, the church fought against them.

Society and religion desperately need to be integrated. The two consistently help each other. However, part of the problem is the church’s limited view of mission. Sadly, the church has limited its focus on sending people to heaven. Yet, throughout the Bible, Jesus was teaching people to bring Heaven to Earth. There are certainly aspects where Jesus challenged the oppressive society and called them to see God’s better way. In fact, he spoke in weird parables that people did not completely understand. His actions, however, engaged society. Where he challenged society, it was when it was oppressive. So, I would agree, the church should call out anything that is oppressive. This includes the mistreatment of people, such as the lepers of our day (like the LGBTQ community). While Jesus did speak in weird parables, he would go back and explain himself to those who were actually there to listen, instead of just being fed or receive some miraculous act. Jesus calls the church to be better than that. In fact, he tells Peter that he will build the church on Peter confessing who Jesus is. He goes on to explain that the gates of Hell will not prevail. The thing is, gates are not offensive. They are a defensive mechanism. So, Jesus was saying that the church, filled with people confessing Jesus and doing what Jesus did, bringing Heaven to Earth, will integrate with society. It will be effective and “the gates of hell will not prevail.” But, it isn’t a battle. Instead, it embraces the aspects where religion had already affected society. In fact, most of the liberal arts colleges started as religious institutions, in some fashion. However, society is moving forward. The church, the primary teacher of religion, needs to embrace this move forward and integrate with society. It does this by expanding its mission beyond that of Christ’s saving acts and includes Christ’s movement to bring Heaven to Earth.

The church is very important to me. When I began ministry someone told me that the church will mean more to me than it will others because it is what we, as ministers, are called to serve. There is some truth to this, but the church is important to others as well. This is why people give money and time to it. People, inside the church, want to see the church thrive. This journal argues that the people outside the church, simply do not know its value. The reason the people do not know the value is because the church has failed in its mission. It has failed in its mission to integrate religion with society.

# Works Cited

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