



Point of View

Dear Marketplace Friend,

Those were really good years, for me. "Good" may need some clarification; my four years as a senior pastor, in a challenging church environment, were not easy, nor were they *safe*. But, *good*?

They were good insofar as I had the chance to experience what our pastor friends experience, and it raised my respect for them - and, the challenges of their position - immensely.

For example, their year has four seasons. Their seasons connect the four "religious" holidays that define their year: Christmas, Easter, Memorial Day and Labor Day. Their four seasons: the months leading up to Easter, the months leading up to Memorial Day, the "dead months" between Memorial Day and Labor Day, and - then - the months leading up to Christmas. Right now, we're in the "months leading up to Easter" season. All extra energy - beyond fulfilling the ongoing demands of the weekly ministry - is now directed into planning the Easter to End All Easters (as it is every year).

It's a great year NOT to be a Catholic Pope, in the months leading up to Easter. In Pope Benedict XVI's third Easter (as Pope), he has sparked some great controversy in re-scripting a prayer that will be offered in their "standard" Good Friday services. Here's the explosive content: it asks God to "...enlighten



(Jews') hearts so that they may acknowledge Jesus Christ, the savior of all men," and expresses the hope that "all Israel may be saved."

Now, from my puny perspective, that sounds like a pretty nice prayer. In fact, it would have evoked the "atta-boy AMEN" from the Apostle Paul who wrote, "*Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness...*" (Romans 10:1-3)

My opinion is not shared by some Jewish leaders. In fact, David Rosen - the Rabbi who is Director of Interreligious Affairs for the American Jewish Committee - says, "We're disappointed. We were expecting language that would make room for the integrity of Jewish faith in its own right. Obviously, Benedict is

not able to do this in terms of his theological outlook..." (reported in *USA Today*, February 7, 2008)

On January 13, the Chicago Tribune described the "ministry" of Rabbi Adam Chalom in the affluent North Shore of Chica-goland. Rabbi Chalom isn't on the ministry calendar for either Christians or Jews; in fact, he represents an emerging movement of "Humanistic Judaism." When he stands before the Sabbath flames and sings the Hebrew blessing to welcome Shabbat, there is no mention of God. He believes there are no prophets. He preaches that only hard work yields miracles. And until science unlocks life's mysteries, his most honest answer to why people are here and where they go when they die is, "I don't know." God has nothing to do with it.

"If you look at Jewish newspapers or magazines or listen in on conversations in synagogues God is not a hot topic," said Steven Cohen, a sociologist of American Jewry at Hebrew Union College. "People have been able to maintain strong Jewish passions without a strong engagement with God."

Seems like everyone is wrestling right now, trying to figure out what it means to be who they are. Republicans are trying to find themselves; Democrats are on the same pursuit, on a separate track. Mitt Romney is sitting this one out, in part because many can't figure out whether Mormons are a denomination, or a cult. Catholics are suggesting that Christians have something that Jews need, while within Judaism, there is a movement to revoke God's membership in the mix.

In all of that, Easter will - once again - present the message that puts an end to all discussion: a man in First Century Israel - who was executed by Roman pros - was confirmed dead, and then came back to life... and was then seen taken into Heaven. His claims trumped all religious arguments, and remain superior to all alternatives. If he is He - if Jesus is God - it follows that Republicans, Democrats, Catholics, Jews, Mormons, Baptists, Presbyterians - name ANY organized grouping - have to figure out the most important question of life: ***What are you going to do about Jesus?***

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