



Christian clichés: Stepping out for God, my Bible says, Old Time Religion by Sara Tusek

Right away I'd like to say that I'm poking fun at these clichés in a fondly humorous way, not a nasty way. I've held each of them myself at some point and have very dear friends that use these expressions daily.

BUT...

Having said that, I'd like to look closely at these three common statements and see what they are really communicating. Clichés are employed because they are useful shortcuts for expressing longer, more complex ideas. The question is, then, what imbedded ideas are being shared in these clichés?

Stepping out for God: scary and dangerous!

This kind of statement is often made by people whose idea of being a missionary is that you live a life of deprivation, endless toil, and sacrifice. You'll be asked to do dangerous and frightening things, and your reward for all your effort will be, all too often, ingratitude from those you are serving.

On a smaller scale, this cliché is applied to everyone in a servant's role: a mother, a teacher, a minister, a nurse or anyone who tried to help people. Unfortunately, believing such a statement encourages a few negative attitudes, including paranoia, an unwillingness to be corrected and pride.

The paranoia comes from thinking that people are predisposed to be harsh with you because you are a Christian. The world is your enemy, and will try to beat you down. So you go out the door in the morning, prepared to be abused. That's paranoia.

Because you are already thinking that others will criticize you simply because of your faith in Jesus, you lose sight of the fact that others may criticize you because you're wrong! Maybe your non-Christian co-workers are spiteful toward you because you are making them feel inferior. They're not inferior to you—God made them and Jesus died for them. So check your behavior when you're corrected to see if you need to change; don't just call it "persecution for the faith." Be willing to be corrected.

The third bad fruit of belief that stepping out for God is hard is that you may become puffed up. I've known Christians whose behavior was so conceited (in their belief that they suffered for God) that they were laughable. They really thought that every mean word aimed at them was on account of their being Christians, and were proud to suffer so for Jesus.

Of course, sometimes Christians do suffer for Jesus' sake, but not all that often. Mostly I see that Christians, including myself, suffer because we do foolish things or needlessly offend people.

My Bible says

I had a friend, a man who'd served God all his life, who was a very sincere Christian. But he was so rigid and unbending in his beliefs as to be impossible to talk with in a normal way. He spiritualized every comment you made, so if you said something like, "it's a beautiful day," he'd reply that the grass withers, the flower fades, but God's word endures forever.

Ye, this is true, but sometimes you just want to make a statement to be civil without it becoming a deep lesson on the brevity of life.

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Christian clichés

My Bible says, continued from p. 1

When he was challenged, or got excited, this man would pull out all the stops and make the ultimate statement of proof:

“My Bible says...” Then he’d find a verse to back up whatever he was saying.

And that was that. Nothing more could be said. His Bible was the ultimate authority. I was always tempted to say something smart-alecky, like, “Oh? Do you have a special version of the Bible that’s not available to lesser mortals?” or “do you mean that any non-King James version of the Bible is not so trustworthy?” but I didn’t. I know he meant well.

But, still, I found his attitude irritating. It’s a narrow view of the world to think that the Bible, all by itself, answers everything. We have brains, emotions, bodies and spirits; I believe God uses all of these aspects of our being, along with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the counsel of the saints, the wisdom acquired from study, meditation, reflection and discussion, and the Bible, to help us live as His followers and His representatives.

The Bible doesn’t have it all; if it did, we wouldn’t need to go to church, to pray, to talk with other Christians or to do anything except read the Bible. We as humans would have no role in the ongoing love of God that wants to reach everyone in the world.

We have to interpret the Bible’s message in view of our own culture and life situa-

tions, not try to squeeze answers out of it as if it were a Magic 8 ball. We are expected to use every gift that God gave us to understand Him and be His followers.

Old Time Religion

There’s a country song, “Give me that old-time religion—it’s good enough for me.” I’ve been around many, many Christians with this attitude.

These Christians range from Dominionists (people who want to run the U.S.A. as if it were a theocracy, pointing to the Massachusetts Bay Colony as a model) to people who hate contemporary Christian music (I sympathize!). What they have in common is a backward-looking mentality; they think that things were better in the past, and the world is deteriorating.

I hold the opposite view. The world is getting better in terms of health care, technology, religious tolerance, education, modern conveniences such as electricity and clean running water, transportation—the list goes on and on. The past was a time of simple truths, but also of violent prejudices and murderous xenophobia.

Old time religion in the U.S. was usually racially segregated, class-conscious, repressive and psychologically overwrought. The American Great Awakenings, were we to see them with today’s eyes, included displays of religious hysteria and self-indulgent emotionalism that verged on spiritualism, if not downright demonism.

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Give me new-time religion: multicultural, non-homophobic, and welcoming to the unrepentant in the hopes that God will speak to their hearts and they’ll come to know Him. Give me new-time religion: not class-conscious, not judging people by their clothing, their accent or their parents, but rather being tender-hearted and giving to everyone.

To say that the past was better than the future is a sad, sad position in life. God means for us to appreciate the resources He’s given us, including the culture and place in which we live. We’re meant to be forward-looking—remember what happened to Lots’ wife when she looked back.

Clichés

So be careful of using clichés.

The convenience of using clichés must be balanced against the fact that they convey a set of attitudes that may not really fit your own views of living for God, and may mislead people who hear you. At best, clichés are lazy and unimaginative; at worst, they enshrine beliefs that need to be examined before being exhibited.