

A Reaction to Exiled Insiders: our Sempiternal, Subversive, Submissive Life in Two Kingdoms Ruled by One Crucified King, by Jonathan P. Bauer

“...the pressing question of our day is not so much whether our circumstances warrant an identification as exiles but why we would have ever considered ourselves anything else in the first place” (p. 6).

Every child of God every moment they walk this earth is an exile. Christendom is a community of exiles sempiternally, which is to say, throughout the entire time of time Christians are exiles in this world. From the moment that Adam sinned to the day on which Jesus returns, this has been and will be the sempiternal, earthbound forever of every believer’s exile. The dysphoria or imminent demise of our current cultural situation has nothing to do with our status as exiles except to be a platform for it.

From identity to mission, we heard that the task of God’s exiled insiders is subversive because—from the inside—it upends the world we live in. God’s exiles are submissive as they carry this work out because that’s how Christians prove their love for and loyalty to the King who chose crucifixion as the means by which to establish his kingdom. This is the jumping-off point for our essayist’s presentation.

Part 1 of the essay described our sempiternal mission in the spiritual world. We began by confessing the obvious: Our **goal** for our mission in the spiritual world is spiritual. Christians are not called to make America “slightly more Christian-ish” (p. 13) but to rescue souls for Jesus. With a powerful metaphor, our essayist encouraged us to be spiritual Clara Bartons seeking—unarmed—to tend to the spiritual wounds inflicted upon combatants from both sides of the culture war.

The battle between the socially conservative liberals who advocate for the marketplace of ideas to produce objective truth through logic and empirical data and the socially liberal side that believes such “truth” to be the weapons of a majority culture to maintain the majority’s oppression over oppressed groups (ethnic minorities, sexual identity minorities, physical ability minorities, etc.) is causing actual injury to real people. Both sides in this cultural war advance wounding ideologies. Our essayist appropriately insists that we “maintain our credibility as people able to help” (p. 10) our injured unbelieving neighbors.

Injured ones are also sitting in front of us on Sunday morning. Again, our credibility as non-combatant spiritual medics is critical. If the preacher takes up the rhetoric of the culture war combatants, what is the impact on our ability to tend “to the wounded at our feet” (p. 10)? If some people in our pews are persuaded by culture war influencers to question their gender identity, will they seek help with their spiritual struggles from a pastor who has engaged in combating instead of holding out hope and healing?

Our essayist defines the **voice** with which Christians in sempiternal exile will use as they work to accomplish their goal. The sides fighting the culture war around us use a voice of “coercive power” (p. 17) to establish religious-like submission. A Christian exile’s voice is 1 Peter 3:15’s gentleness and respect. This is the voice of love for others, a love that avoids divisions and allows “accusations of inconsistency and disloyalty” (p. 18). An exile’s voice facilitates relationships, undermines stereotypes, and sets up conversations about Christ.

The exile’s **way** will not objectify the very people who need to be rescued. The way for some combatants in our culture’s culture war valorizes victimhood and advocates a cancelling of the

oppressors until the oppressed have taken upon themselves the mantle of those who once oppressed them. The exile's way will instead respect all of the inhabitants of the earth but perhaps especially our fellow Christians from a minority community. Victimization without hope of reconciliation is just not an acceptable way and surely is not our way.

Ironically, as our essayist proposes, Christians adopt components of this unacceptable way. When a Christian leads with the whine that American culture is out to get Christians, the "revolutionary way of being revolutionary" (p. 21) is forfeited. The Christian's way is the subversive, submissive truth that our power is found in weakness. Though faced with fierce opposition or perhaps even death, we are fearless. We do not fear a man or anything a man can do to us. We will joyfully embrace the grace of suffering for a righteous act. Our fearlessness in the face of our weakness and our witness in the context of our suffering is more powerful than any power on this earth. We have been called to the glory of Christ but also to suffer with him for his glory and to advance his kingdom.

The **outcome** of the spiritual exile's goal, voice, and way is that the Christian church will continue proclaiming its witness to the world with confident humility. The outcome of the church of Jesus, the rejected stone that has become the cornerstone, is that this church will witness boldly and bravely till the end of time – sempiternally. There is nothing more irresistible than a Christian confessing Christ. There is nothing more relevant than the offer of forgiveness and eternal life to a troubled sinner. "Christianity has no competition" (p. 27). Believe in the Church!

In Part 2, our essayist guides us into the Christian exile's mission in the temporal realm. Christians are born into a temporal kingdom before they are re-born into Christ's spiritual kingdom. Our rebirth does not excuse us from responsibilities we owe to the earthly kingdom where we live as citizens.

Though challenging to generalize a Christian exile's **goal** or mission in our temporal realm, our essayist encourages us to advocate for moral laws, freedom of religion, and societal peace. We will do so, however, not primarily for our own benefit but in service to and support of our neighbor. Christians will defend the First Amendment, not because we need "Caesar's help to carry out Christ's mandate" (p. 35) but because we do not want "authoritarian levers" (p. 35) used against our neighbors or against Christians. Interesting also is our essayist's assertion that working for societal peace "gives space for competing moral visions to sort themselves out" (p. 36) because these competing moral visions will reveal their ultimate failure to provide help or answers. Let the Christian be confident in how Christianity will fare when compared to other religions or to the ideologies of this world. Believe in faith!

The appropriate **voice** to accomplish this goal for our temporal realm is a subversive critique of both sides of the culture war or a subversive critique of any human religion or ideology. This critique listens carefully to a position and, assuming natural knowledge, seeks to understand what might be logical and true about it along with conclusions or solutions that might be contrary to God's truth. So instead of dismissing another person's worldview or perspective in a way that prevents dialogue and relationship, thoughtful exiles aspiring to accomplish service goals from the inside will seek to understand a worldview and even walk a mile in it and to even affirm aspects of a worldview where it is authentic to affirm. This then allows the insertion of the "perpendicular plank" (p. 39) into an argument that ultimately presents a better solution because it is a divinely informed solution that all sides may see.

There are multiple compelling examples of the perpendicular plank in the essay. It gives glory to God and helps people, for example, to see that behind the shaping of Critical Race Theory is the simple truth

that not all people or peoples have the same experience in their interaction with America's legal system. To acknowledge this truth does not imply a subscription to the unbiblical solutions offered by CRT. This acknowledgement does show respect and support for our fellow Christians who have suffered a different kind of interaction with our legal system. To reject offhand the reality of racial injustice or systemic oppression does not enhance our witness. Let us "identify with the aggrieved" (p. 42). The aggrieved who are part of our community of exiles would thank God for this plank.

What is the best way to jam perpendicular planks into human arguments? How do we identify with the aggrieved? How do we sempiternal, exiled insiders influence and serve and change the earthly kingdom into which we were born or emigrated to? Our essay nearly rescues us from what might otherwise seem overwhelming with this **way**: "do as much good as we can from where we are at the time we are there." (Doctrine of Vocation)

Thank you, Pastor Jonathan Bauer, for your thoroughly biblical and authentically Lutheran presentation. Your insights are important and timely. Questions that come immediately to my mind include:

1. Would you recommend a follow up to this paper? If so, what might this follow up look like in our homes, congregations, and circuits?
2. How would you respond to the challenge that being a medic to those who have suffered injury in the culture war includes condemning toxic ideologies?
3. What steps might a Christian congregation take to equip and encourage its membership to understand the tactics needed to accomplish the goals you describe in your essay?
4. Agree or disagree: Pastors will experience resistance if they proclaim to their membership that they are exiled insiders with a sempiternal, subversive mission that is carried out submissively.
5. How would you respond to the challenge that the encouragement to identify with the aggrieved is political activism or social gospel?

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