

RESPONSE TO DAN BOONE'S "ESCHATOLOGICAL TRAVELERS"

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It is a privilege and honor to listen, learn, and now to respond to my colleague and friend Dr. Dan Boone's paper "Eschatological Travelers." In light of the robust diversity within Christendom, Boone calls for persons to resist the temptation to react to these diversities and challenges by splintering off in fearful sectarian cul de sacs. Boone warns that these isolated paths could certainly lead someone to a blissful, content, and self-assured journey to hell. Boone quickly corrects this temptation by noting that a Christian identity is not about competition, violence, and conquest, but a kenotic hospitality of grace. It is this hospitality of grace that is the method, means, and ends in calling for Christians to live as *eschatological travelers*.

The center of Boone's paper helpfully listens to the context of 1 Peter where the people are celebrated to be *eschatological travelers*. Eschatological travelers are not pre-millennial gnostic complainers nor are they afraid of anything, including the "Babylonian" culture. Eschatological travelers (*ET from this point forward*) are people of hope, courage, and promise. In the best of the Wesleyan tradition they are optimistic about the sovereignty and power of God's love and grace.

Boone contends that such *ET's* resist methods of social control through "civic" (not necessarily civil) politics which has clearly shown itself to be either misguided or no longer effective. Perhaps trying to make Babylon nicer through a Babylonian president is not the method and mission of the Kingdom of God.

Moreover these *ET's* are on a continual journey of transformation. Just as God is at work continuing to redeem all things, the Triune God is still working/sanctifying these travelers to more fully be renewed into the image of Christ. This healing and renewal is not a moral individual quest, but is done within the body of Christ, the Church. To be an *ET* is not fixated on fear, but is one of disciplined vigilance, where attention is paid to the cultural liturgies of life that can subtly mold us into the imagination of Babylon. There is a sense of freedom these travelers have, but this freedom is bounded in humility and ecclesial responsibility while resisting the temptation of a Babylonian culture war.

Boone also raises the reality of suffering. While suffering is never a goal, such suffering is to be kenotically cruciform. This suffering is not about winning or getting our way but is a suffering of loving fiercely. The suffering as described by Boone, especially drawing upon Martin, is reminiscent of the Christian martyr tradition. The martyr tradition is not masochistic nor about desiring to die, it is about being willing to lay down one's life for the other. These *ET's* are enslaved to hope, not called to fight nor flee, but follow Christ in faithful, compassionate love.

Noting the limitations of the diaspora of 1 Peter, Boone calls forth the significance of the place of communal worship and social justice as a participation that God's kingdom is present and coming more fully. These *ET's* view the world with a lens of the kingdom. Such a lens encourages us to refuse methods of coercive power forcing cultural conformity; rather there are occasions where the kingdom calls us to withdraw from the power and practices of Babylon and see one's politics as the Church participating in God's kingdom. The methods of Babylon provide a continual temptation for these *ET's* to secure their fate and force the kingdom. These

ET's refuse the liturgies and imagination of Babylon and are fixated on the imagination of a cruciform kenotic love.

Boone also put to words, why the syntax of exile has been so unsatisfying to me. “The American church tends to view our current exile as a loss of privilege and power in the public square” (4). In other words too often the discourse about *now* being in exile rings as little more than hollow whining that the culture is not going how we would like (with little discourse if the culture is more Christian than we are.) What is also disturbing is how often this current claim of exile is a very white, male Euro-North American claim. Ask African-Americans how long they have been in exile? Ask Hispanics and Asian-Americans in North America how long they have been in exile. Ask women how long they have been in exile. It would be too shameful to begin to engage our Native American sisters and brothers.

If the syntax of “exile” persists, the Old Testament may offer daunting insight. In the Old Testament exile is caused by the sinfulness of the Israelites. The Assyrians and Babylonians were not necessarily righteous nor the enemies of God; rather God used them as a sacramental means of grace. If we are in exile it is because of the Church’s sin, thus our posture should be one not of pity or whining, but penitence and confession.

With Boone I say “enough.” We are not whiners, complainers, worriers, haters or fear mongers. We are Christians! We are hopeful, loving, grace filled and confident that God is sovereignly loving and the kingdom of God is here and coming more every day.

As *ET's* are enslaved to hope we should get jobs, work, love, and fight against injustice. Like manna in the desert we make our lives about sharing and spreading, not hoarding and consuming. We are people who do not tell those not like us to stay away or hide behind legal exemptions. As Jesus did, we go to all the dirty and dark places preaching forgiveness, healing, and inclusion into the people of God.

It is curious that while the Jewish religious leaders and Roman governors may have tried to marginalize Jesus, Jesus simply ignored their political maneuvers and loved people. Having a seat in the White House is not worth it, if we have sold our souls to the enemy.

With Boone I invite us to become more fully *ET's*. Being sanctified and transformed into the image of Christ as the people of God, we are courageously hopeful, kenotically loving, and fiercely compassionate.