

Summer 2005 EFCA Today

Letters to the Editor

Like many, I eagerly read the articles on emerging postmodernism [winter 2004 issue], hoping to comprehend the incomprehensible. Here's what I read: I read three- and four-point articles mocking three-point sermons, and well-crafted arguments challenging the validity of well-crafted arguments. I read propositional statements negating the usefulness of propositional statements and linear reasoning decrying the use of linear reasoning. In *Blue Like Jazz* Don Miller writes that Christianity is not a religion to be explained but a relationship to be experienced. He then he adds over a hundred pages *explaining* his religious values. Likewise, these articles offer numerous explanations announcing the end of explanation as a persuasive method. However, the mind is still primary in *order* and the heart is still primary in *value*. The inability to appropriately fold this relationship together often polarizes the church.

I think Michael Horton is right. This movement looks more "most modern" than postmodern. In reality it's a new proposition with its own argument, apologetic, explanation and sermonic points looking for "legs." Whether it will prove to have long-term prophetic value remains to be seen. I'm sure that good things will stick. However, the postmodern claim to offer us truth made by its practitioners seems to me contradictory and naïve.

— James Lincoln, senior pastor
Hope Fellowship, Wilsonville, Ore.

I just got my copy of the spring '05 *EFCA Today* and haven't gotten past the letters. I find myself sympathetic with the concerns raised by Dr. David Larsen, who asked where sound doctrine was in the discussion of postmodernism. My question isn't about the decision to include books by authors such as McLaren among the NextStep Resources recommendations. I understand the rationale for doing so. However, I am in curious about your [editorial response] that "a greater understanding of their beliefs reveals that some fall outside traditional EFCA boundaries." Do you think that the only boundaries that some of the emergent authors cross are traditional Free Church ones, or is it the case that some of them think outside the boundaries of historic Christian orthodoxy as well?

— *Keith Plummer, associate pastor*
Our Saviour EFC, Wheeling, Ill

I imagine you are being flooded with e-mails about the article, "Should Pastors Know What Their People Give?" [The author] says that if God's children are giving between 2 and 3 percent of their income, that this is significant sin. He uses adultery as a comparison sin. It seems to me that this statement lacks balance and depth. I would expand on my view on the doctrine of tithing a little more. Pastor Johnson's view on pastors being aware of what their church members give is different from my view, but I admit it is a possible way of pastoring a local body of believers.

I personally would not want to know what the church body is giving. It would be in my heart and mind, and I wouldn't be able to deal with it as he says we should. I would be forever comparing and criticizing my brothers and sisters in my mind and heart, which would drive me crazy, because I would be beating myself up for do it. I am an elder, and I appreciate you printing such a different view on something that I took for granted and thought had only one possible way of interpretation. I disagree strongly, but this is my conviction, and of course this is not an essential teaching in the church. May the Lord grant us His wisdom and keep us from leaning on our own understanding, even when it seems to work.

— *Donald Sands*
Stillmeadow EFC, Baltimore

Bruce Johnson's article "Should Pastors Know What Their People Give?" largely rests on specious "ends justify the means" arguments for its affirmative answer. It also reveals a distressingly misplaced faith in the incorruptibility of pastors with its facile "favoritism is sin" and "you can get beyond that" answer to concerns that pastors might be tempted to misuse information on individual congregant's giving. None of the six major points was convincingly argued or biblically supported. The editorial staff may not be responsible for views expressed, but they should have helped Mr. Johnson make a better case, or dropped this article altogether.

— *Randy Mitchell*
Georgetown (Texas) EFC

I appreciate the spirit of Bruce Johnson's article in the spring 2005 issue of *EFCA Today*, but have come to a different conviction when it comes to knowing what people in my church give. Like Bruce, I have served as the pastor of the church I founded, in my case, for 23 years. Also, like Bruce, my relationships with folks in the church have never been impacted, either positively or negatively, by the amount of money someone gives to the ministry. I believe a large part of the reason is that I don't know what people give.

In fact, I don't want to know how much someone gives because:

Knowing the number doesn't give enough information to be helpful. Is the amount Member A gives the sum total of his giving to support the Lord's work, or does he also support other fine, deserving gospel works? Does Member B's giving reflect her support of aging parents? Without knowing Member C's income, how can generosity be gauged? We could suggest other scenarios where knowing a dollar figure simply tells too little to tell much.

Partiality is a problem. Knowing who gives what would allow me to know who funds the ministry. While, as Bruce suggests, I could resist the temptation to show partiality, "Lead [me] not into temptation" (Matthew 6:13) comes to mind.

The New Testament mandates neither percentage nor amount. That many American Christians give a small amount of their money to support the Lord's work is a genuine concern and should be addressed as the discipleship problem it is. However, I have yet to be convinced that that a 10-percent giving figure is a New Testament requirement. Also, despite the fact that such is taught in some churches today, I believe it is a stretch to suggest that the local church can, with the stamp of a "thus saith the Lord" expect to receive 10 percent of each member's income.

Anonymity safeguards motives. Let's not forget Jesus' words, "When you are giving to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you" (Matthew 4:3,4). When a member understands that her giving is between herself and the Lord, a vertical accountability is established that may be a tremendous source of godly motivation for generosity. This purity of motive is compromised when a member knows that not only will the Lord know, Pastor Dave will know too.

Not knowing robs leadership of nothing. The pastor- and church leadership, generally-is not at all hamstrung by not knowing how much a member gives. To the contrary, leaders are equipped to minister effectively with or without this information by teaching the truth of Scripture, asking pointed questions in conversation, issuing strong challenges in sermons and praying for the people in our church.

I will admit to the possibility of other God-honoring positions on this and many other issues. If my fellow pastors believe that they should know what their people give, I pray that they will use that information with care and that such knowledge will increase their pastoral effectiveness and the purposes of Christ. For myself, I will continue joyfully ignorant of the specifics of my people's giving, believing that this is the God-honoring path He would have me travel as I shepherd the flock of God entrusted to me.

- *Rev. Dave Smith*

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