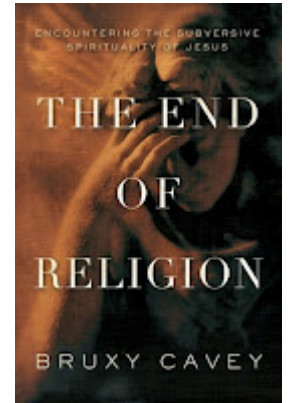


Review: The End of Religion

How can you go past a book by someone called *Bruxy Cavey*? I recently read his *The End of Religion*.



It is a book in the same vein as Dave Andrews' *Christi-Anarchy* but with less vindictive and perhaps a tad more towards the evangelical-as-we-know-it end of the spectrum.

Cavey's basic premise is that the mission of Jesus was not to *begin* a religion but to bring about the *end* of religion – to undo the world of human institutions and rituals mediating relationship with God and to inaugurate a time of restoration through grace alone. It is a simple premise, and he does get a little bit repetitive in the many short-sharp chapters that attack the issue from a myriad of angles. Generally speaking I find myself sympathising with his view.

I certainly have some appreciation for his description of most people's perspective on religion:

"Our world is full of people on a quest for ultimate reality... Often they reject religion for one simple reason: They have had firsthand experience with it." (Page 11)

"Religion can be tiring – a treadmill of legislated performance powered by guilt and fear." (Page 13)

"Because she was not raised in a Christian home... my wife has the advantage of seeing Christian culture... with a higher degree of objectivity. Often, when I'm listening to a televangelist or radio preacher... Nina asks, 'Why is he so

angry?"... She tells me to listen to the tone of his voice... "What would you say if a professor was giving a lecture on biology with that tone of voice? Or if a commercial was describing the merits of a product? Or, even better, what would you say if a friend was talking about his or her new love interest this way?"... When I listen this way, a light goes on. Many Christian leaders and teachers seem to have an undercurrent of anger." (Page 65)

This critique of religion (including an historical "Chamber of Horrors" chapter that is basically a more objective consideration as the same thing as Andrews' "Why?-Wham" introduction) is the fuel of the first part of the book. From the crusades to the inquisition to empty religion of the present day the negative side of religion is clearly presented.

Against this Cavey brings the second part of the book – an examination of the life and teaching of Jesus. Drawing heavily from the Gospels and the arguments of respected exegetes such as Capon he expounds Jesus' ministry. For instance, in considering the Last Supper (now one of the most traditionalised religious practices in Christendom) he writes (emphasis mine):

*"Through the newly invigorated symbolism of the Last Supper, Jesus shows his disciples what would replace the blood of the sacrificial system – Jesus ' own blood. Jesus had condemned the temple system and now he offers himself as the replacement, the final sacrifice that would make all other sacrifices trivial. **Jesus claims to have successfully replaced religion with himself.**" (Page 146)*

The fundamental point is simple gospel: "We don't need religion as our way to God because God has come to us." (Page 165). And his consideration is more than adequate.

It is in the *implications* of all this (covered in the third and last part of the book) that I find that most people on an “anti-religion” kerygmatic wave tend to come unstuck. The eventual application all too readily becomes a pseudo-hippy lets-get-rid-of-institution-and-just-love-one-another-man. And while the name “Bruxy” fits that style his substance is much more mature.

For instance he does not advocate simply the replacing of religion with a “tiring” generic spirituality that “lacks a focal point” (Page 13) – he is about replacing religion with Jesus. The rhetoric is typical – embracing a spirituality of a “centre” rather than patrolling a “perimeter” (Page 212) and occasionally walking close to the edge of having a weakened view of Scripture (“Bible knowledge is just the first step toward the goal of following Jesus.” Page 182). But Bruxy is far from being a universalist who’s sole task in life is to “find the Jesus in everyone.” His evangelical credentials are evident throughout the book and made explicit in the final chapter (unfortunately an Appendix) which gives a solid overview of the gospel and salvation in Christ alone.

Moreover, he is also not on some sort of quest to see the end of all organisation. He writes “The problem with organised religion is not that it’s *organised* but that it is *religious*.” (Page 223). And I admire a spirituality that leads to this:

“Because I am a pastor of a church that seems healthy and vibrant, occasionally someone asks me about the question of sustainability: ‘What are the leaders of The Meeting House doing to ensure that the organization endures in good form for the next generation?’ Although there are some specific things I could mention in response, my answer always begins with this question: What makes you think we think The Meeting House needs to endure? Organizational expression of faith and spirituality can come and go... Knowing that no organization is indispensable to God, I can celebrate the present health of The Meeting House and elight in how God is using this

organization for now without worrying about the future. This is joyfully freeing, and deeply restful.” (Page 222)

The weakness of this is that it is an overly-utilitarian ecclesiology. Cavey is right in that, in the end, organisations are the means not the end. But the visible church is meant to reflect the invisible church – and brevity of life can sometimes undermine that reflection. The true church transcends history and geography and so there is testimony in an institution being able to do that as well. It is not wrong to strive for spiritual health in our institutions – but truly for the sake of God’s glory, not the glory of the machine.

There are other niggles in the book with overstatements and implications left hanging in a number of places. It is not rocket science. It is prophetic and a speaking of truth but with no real clear step of “how do I put this into practice in my church?” But it remains thought-provoking and for those of us who are part of ecclesiastical machines, a healthy challenge of the sort we should consider frequently.

