

The Next American Spirituality

George Gallup

George Gallup outlines what he feels will be the next true spiritual movement in America. This book is a survey that answers two main questions. First, what is the daily shape of faith behind the public expressions? And secondly, how do people experience God in everyday life? The thrust of his ideology comes from his statistics of the need to experience spiritual growth (27). The church stands in the threshold of this opportunity and must learn how to step forward into its presence (24). Gallup has come to the conclusion that people want practical everyday approaches to spiritual life. They want “the prayers on the run, and spiritual practices squeezed into the crevices of a busy day...(136).” In this they *need* to be handed down the practices from centuries past that have been tested and proven wise. In this churches face two age group challenges. First, is to understand the first fully post-modern generation, the millennials. The second, is to address the needs of empty nesters who are the fast-growing group of pre-retirement households.

Gallup likens this to “forming souls” which requires diligence and practice (136). The 21st century congregations will have to place prayer over program, presence over practice, and authenticity over numbers (136). Without this approach the 21st century church will not be able to minister to a nation that longs for meaningful spirituality. The task for the church will be to ground the desire for meaningful spirituality in the concrete truth of God’s word (128). The problem with training the present church members is that they suffer from Biblical illiteracy. According to Gallup we lack the ability to present the gospel on a basic level that allows people to understand the profound truths of Christian

faith (131). This biblical illiteracy usually translated into spiritual blindness. He points out that the church needs simple incremental things that nurture their spiritual journey. These include having a spiritual focus to their activities, prayer without ceasing, and always asking spiritual implications questions about situations they face. As the churches themselves place priority on prayer, presence, and authority they become interwoven with their discipleship and operational methods. This intern roots itself into the daily personal discipleship of the individual members. The goal is to aid the post-modern society in experiencing an authentic spirituality outside on a daily basis. As the church models authenticity the people live authenticity. This modeling of authenticity can only be achieved when the spiritual blindness, or biblical illiteracy, is overcome.

Gallup points out that *small groups* are a crucial element in combating the biblical illiteracy. Nearly two thirds of all small groups have some connection to churches or synagogues. Americans' hunger for the divine lies behind at least part of their drive to join small groups and accounts for much of the pervasiveness of these small groups in our culture (62). These small groups are a way to nurture people along their spiritual journey. There should also be midsize groups where people can engage in learning experiences and large groups where corporate worship can inspire and challenge. According to Gallup the next American Spirituality will surge forth from three major groups, the first being Black Americans. "Given the emphasis on evangelism and outreach of many black churches, we believe black churches could become the crucible of renewal of American faith and the wider society (112)." The second group is the Millennial generation. "Approximately 40 percent of the world's population is nineteen or younger. The number of children and youth alive today exceeds the entire world's

population in 1950 (113-114).” The third group is the Pre-retirement Army. “While the pre-retirement group is poised to make a profound difference in our society, many congregations have given little thought to this changing demographic (122).” I agree with Gallup’s projection of the three groups that will be representatives of this new American Spirituality; however I disagree with the weight he puts on the Black American category. Not that I feel it will not be a major representative, but I think the dynamics of the Hispanic representation in the states will make it a more likely candidate. More than likely both will show signs of a new spiritual surge, but I feel that the Hispanic spiritual representation will one day rival the present Caucasian majority.

Our churches today have become stuck on providing programs rather than experiences. We have to get ourselves to the point where we are implementing strategies that will help people experience a spiritual growth journey.