



# Point of View

Dear Marketplace Friend,

In/around **The Master's Program**, we're on "Summer Break." We don't schedule our day-long sessions while school is out; we support our participants' commitment to family during this time...

**Point of View** continues, every Monday, but our summer emphasis is on "great books." I read and review; you consider expanding your library (or, not!) based on my subjective summaries.

We were in church yesterday with longtime friends, far from SoCal. Their "new" church is a few miles from a few "mega" churches; they used to be in one of them. Their new digs are different; the service we attended had <100 people (more were in the first service). Why the change, for them? *"We were looking for something smaller..."*

I'm kicking-off the Summer Series with a book I was given by Chris Bonga, a TMPer who "gets it." The title is intentionally provocative: *Your Church is Too Small* (Zondervan, 2010). Hot off the press, written by longtime pastor John H. Armstrong, who now heads a para

church called ACT 3, based in Illinois.

*Thanks, bro' Armstrong, for your book. I may not be as*

*crazy as I've been led to believe over the course of the last 25 years.*

My father haunts me. Dead for 12 years, his history - before I came along - included a family with six kids, in another part of the country. After a quickie Mexican divorce, he married my mother and three more of us followed. His first family was broken; we - his second family - grew up fractured by myriad dysfunctions (*I hate to use the term, but it is clinically accurate*). My parents stayed together, but I got away at 17 and never went back...

My longing - forever - has been wholeness. Division was woven into my family-of-origin DNA, and it never satisfied the longing. Wholeness, for me, disallows *division* and celebrates *multiplication*.



Armstrong's book scratches my itch. Raised in Christian contexts (*as I have been*), he became "a professional" in ministry leadership that was steeped in separation. The more you know - in terms of faith - the smaller your associations become. Theological sophistication leads to ideological isolation... and the "church" is shrink-wrapped around its narrowing leadership.

He really begins the book with Jesus' prayer, from John 17: *"I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."* (vs. 20-23)

Armstrong's 200 pages, boiled to the essence: Jesus' prayer for "complete unity" has been compromised when "unity" is regarded as a sin - when it involves spiritual relationship(s) between Christians whose Sunday morning affiliation involves churches of conflicting beliefs and/or practices. Next door neighbors in heaven someday... who cannot sit next to one another at the Lord's Table, down here...

A warning, from the book: "All hell breaks loose when we begin to emphasize the unity... of God's people... I am convinced that Satan hates a unified church and will do his best to oppose all who work and pray for unity. He will use aggressive tactics, defame our character, and subject us to vicious gossip - whatever he can do to discourage and dissuade us from following Christ in mission with other Christians." That paragraph is taken out of my personal life story, in ministry leadership; Armstrong's right...

#### ***Your Church is Too Small.***

God's intends that His church be multiplying; Satan is out to divide (and conquer). *How about kicking-off summer with some healthy horizon-stretching?*

Bob Shank

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