



Thoughts on apathy

In a recent church service I heard the lay preacher say that the opposite of love is not hatred. Rather it is apathy. This stuck in my head and I have been pondering it for some time. He was right in that hatred remains active and in relationship whereas apathy no longer cares and abandons.

Those who hate something good are at least aware of its power and might even be won over by it. The apathetic, however, are much more difficult. Any effort they put forth is an effort to avoid choice. They simply want to be left alone. If they serve anything at all, it is whatever is in power and only for what they can get out of it. Self-sacrifice ruins their pursuit of personal pleasure. Causes are to be avoided.

Let's put this in an organizational context. The greatest problems organizations face do not come from those who stand outside – hating and opposing. Rather, the problem comes from those inside who lapse into apathy. Once apathy finds its way into leadership, the organization immediately disconnects from mission, purpose and ability to extend its reach.

There is no quick fix for removing apathy. There is no easy path once it settles in. Anyone invited to help turn an apathy-riddled organization into something meaningful once more will face far greater demons than if the problem were only angry neighbors bordering a congregation's property, a disgruntled former employee who posted a bile-filled Web site, or a discouraged donor who establishes an organization to turn giving elsewhere.

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I won't pretend this to be a hope-filled or practical essay. Instead, I'm offering a brief meditation that recognizes how difficult a weed apathy is to pull. And should pulling out those weeds be the strategy anyway? Aren't we better off cultivating the love we find instead? Won't we see better results from encouraging and strengthening love for ministry rather than attempting to recover love already intentionally thrown away?

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