

Ask Constantine

You fight the system. You become the system.

by David Hopkins

In high school, I could imagine no worse crime than “selling out.” I hung out with the students that prided themselves on their ability to move against the status quo. But even within our circle of freaks, a precarious line existed between the genuine article and the mere poser. The poser was never loved, because he simply tried too hard. These people wanted to be unpopular, just because it was the popular thing to do.

I liked hanging with the freaks, because they had more fun. I could color my hair. Wear odd stuff. Listen to music no one else ever heard of. We could talk about serious issues and trivial ones all in the same discussion. If I did anything strange, no one noticed my abnormality. Life was performance art and I searched for new ways to recreate myself. As my mom once said, “Always keep them guessing.” Maybe I had too much fun being freaky. I eventually found my own niche. A niche I became very comfortable with. I was no longer a freak, I was just weird.

Being weird meant never having to worry about selling out. I was safe—until last year, when I became a high school English teacher.

I’m still weird (ask my students!), but now I am the system. Like it or not, I’m the boss. I maintain the rules. I define the status quo. Of course, I give my students a lot of freedom to express themselves. But let’s not fool ourselves, I also create the boundaries for appropriate behavior. I’m the enemy.

During the 4th century, the Church sold out. We shifted from being an outcast freaky cult within the Roman Empire to becoming the state religion. Emperor Constantine’s sympathy towards Christianity delivered us from persecution faced for centuries. At one time, the Church defied the rules. After Constantine, we defined the rules. We were the system. Ever since this shift, the Church has never fully recovered.

Idealism is easy when you are not responsible for the results. Protest is easy. It is more difficult to establish. Should we be surprised at the atrocities that Church imperialism has done in God’s name? This world is fallen. And at one time, we ruled the world.

Due to various factors, the Church is again being pushed to the margins. A very profound shift in power is taking place. Very soon, if not already, the Church will cease to make the rules. I worry that we will protest too much. With Crusade-like zeal in our hearts, we will fight to take back America, take back Europe, take back (insert personal cause here). Protest is easy. Who doesn’t enjoy complaining? Instead, I hope that we establish. I hope we transform our surrounding culture through the Gospel, not rules. I get excited when Christians surprise people—when we shock them.

We were never told to become the system. But fighting the system is only half the battle. If we have nothing to replace the current system, we only become what we fought against. The Gospel is the system that replaces the old world order. From here, the Church can establish herself.

Martin Luther stated the Church is in a state of continually reformation. And in the postmodern spirit of deconstruction, I would suggest we are in a continual process of reconstruction. Culture changes as any living creature must change to survive. The Church is sensitive to these shifts, rebuilding from the fires of change, but always on the foundation of the Gospel. It is not enough

to merely lament or complain about our surroundings—we must establish ourselves and rebuild our habitat.

The Church may not be making the rules anymore. I have a mixed response to this situation. I grieve and I celebrate. Once again, Christianity is weird. And I am at home.



David Hopkins is the editor-in-chief of Next-Wave. He graduated from Texas A&M University at Commerce with a degree in English and Philosophy. David is a community pastor at Axxess. In addition to his work at Axxess, David teaches literature and composition at Martin High School.

* monkhouse.org/david