

PIONEERS AND SETTLERS

There are two views of life, and two kinds of people. Some see life as a possession to be carefully guarded -- they are SETTLERS. Others see life as a fantastic, wild, explosive gift -- they are PIONEERS.

The wild west offers a stage for picturing these two types of theology. Settlers and pioneers use the same words, but that is where it stops. To see what I mean, read on.

SETTLER THEOLOGY

Settler theology is an attempt to answer all the questions, define and housebreak some sort of Supreme Being, and establish the status quo on golden tablets in cinemascope.

PIONEER THEOLOGY

Pioneer theology is an attempt to talk about what it means to receive the strange gift of life and live. The pioneer sees theology complete with Indians and the haunting call of what is yet to be.

The visible church is an outfit with an abundance of settlers and a few pioneers. The invisible church is the fellowship of pioneers.

The church in settler theology is the courthouse. It is the center of town life. The old stone structure dominates the town square. Its windows are small, thus making it easy to defend, but quite dark inside. Its doors are solid oak. Within the thick courthouse walls records are kept, taxes collected, and trials are held for bad guys. The courthouse runs the town. It is the settler's symbol of law, order, stability, and most important -- security. The mayor's office is on the top floor of the courthouse. His eagle eye scopes out the smallest details of town life.

The church in pioneer theology is the covered wagon. It is a house on wheels -- always on the move. No place is its home. The covered wagon is where the pioneers eat, sleep, fight, love, and die. It bears the marks of life and movement; it creaks, is scarred with arrows and banded with baling wire. The covered wagon is always where the action is. It moves in on the future and doesn't bother to glorify its own ruts. The old wagon isn't comfortable, but the pioneers could care less. There is a new world to explore.

God in settler theology is the Mayor. The honorable Alpha O. Mega is chief executive of Settler City, and a sight to behold. Dressed like a dude from back East, he lounges in an overstuffed chair in his courthouse office. He keeps the blinds drawn. No one sees him or knows him directly, but since there is order in the town, who can deny that he is there? The mayor is predictable and always on schedule. The settlers fear the mayor, but look to him to clear the payroll and keep things going. The mayor controls the courthouse, which in turn runs the town. Peace and quiet are the mayor's main concerns. That's why he sends the sheriff to check on pioneers who ride into town.

God in pioneer theology is the Wagon Master. He is rough and rugged -- full of life. The Wagon Master lives, eats, sleeps, and fights with his men. Their well-being is his concern. Without him the wagons wouldn't move -- the pioneers would become fat and lazy. Living as a free man would be impossible. The Wagon Master often gets down in the mud with the pioneers to help push the wagons, which frequently get stuck. He slugs the pioneers when they get soft and want to turn back, but his fist is an expression of his concern.

Jesus in settler theology is the Sheriff. He is the guy who is sent by the mayor to enforce the rules. He wears a white hat -- drinks sarsaparilla -- outdraws the bad guys. He saves the settlers by offering security. The sheriff decides who is thrown in jail. There is a saying in town that goes like this: "Those who believe in the sheriff and follow the rules won't stay in boot hill when it comes their time."

Jesus in pioneer theology is the Scout. He rides ahead to find out which way the pioneers should go. He lives all the dangers of the trail. The scout suffers every hardship, is attacked by Indians, and feared by the settlers. Through his actions and words he shows the true spirit, intent and concern of the Wagon Master. By looking at the scout, those on the trail learn what it really means to be a pioneer.

The Christian in settler theology is the settler. He fears the open, unknown frontier. His concern is to stay in good with the mayor and keep out of the sheriff's way. He tends a small garden. "Safety First" is his motto. To him the courthouse is a symbol of security, peace, order, and happiness. He keeps his money in the bank. The banker is his best friend. He spends his time playing checkers in the restful shade of the oak trees lining the courthouse lawn. He never misses an ice cream party.

The Christian in pioneer theology is the pioneer. He is a man of risk and daring -- hungry for adventure, new life, and the challenge of being on the trail. He is tough, rides hard, and knows how to use a gun when necessary. The pioneer feels sorry for the town folks and tries to tell them about the joy and fulfillment of life following the trail. He dies with his boots on.

The clergyman in settler theology is the banker. Within his vaults are locked the valuables of the town. He is suspicious of strangers. And why not? Look what he has to protect! The banker is a highly respected man in town. He has a gun, but keeps it hidden behind his desk. He feels that he and the sheriff have a lot in common. After all, they both protect the bank.

The clergyman in pioneer theology is the cook. He doesn't furnish the meat -- he just dishes up what the buffalo hunter provides. Just as the Wagon Master built the wagon and keeps it moving, the scout reveals the purpose of the Wagon Master; the buffalo hunter furnishes meat to sustain the drive. This is how the cook supports the movement of the wagon. He never confuses his job with that of the Wagon Master, scout, or buffalo hunter. He sees himself as just another pioneer who has learned to cook. The cook's job is to help the pioneers blaze the trail.

Faith in settler theology is trusting the safety of the town. That involves obeying the laws, keeping your nose clean, and believing the mayor is in the courthouse.

Faith in pioneer theology is the spirit of adventure. It is the readiness to move out and risk everything on the trail. Faith is obedience to the restless voice of the Wagon Master.

Sin in settler theology is breaking one of the town's ordinances.

Sin in pioneer theology is wanting to turn back.

Salvation in settler theology is living close to home, and hanging around the courthouse.

In contrast, **Salvation in pioneer theology** is more complicated. Salvation is being more afraid of sterile town life than life on the trail. There's joy at the thought of another day to push into the unknown. It is trusting the Wagon Master and following his Scout while living on the meat provided by the buffalo hunter.

ARE YOU A SETTLER OR PIONEER?