

"I will set a Plumbline among my people..." Amos 7:8



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The Plumbline

Assessing Current Teachings, Issues and Events with Scripture

Circling the Wagons

Pan Evangelicals Still Wield the Broken Sword of Political/Cultural Evangelism



An editorial by Dr. Orrel Steinkamp

The evangelical political games are essentially over. All that is left is to create an evangelical political party. The GOP will sooner, rather than later, nominate a presidential candidate advocating same sex marriage. The past election cycle demonstrated the culture is too far gone to be saved by the ballot box and raw political and legislative power.

Actually the Gospel was never intended to be a political/cultural product. Nevertheless, seeker-sensitive evangelism gave it the ole college try. All that remains is what Shakespeare called "wind and fury signifying nothing."

Pragmatic Christianity tried desperately to accommodate to postmodern culture but it has peaked and is now flirting with medieval Catholic monastic mysticism.

Only a handful of attractional megachurches with multiple campus satellites draw lot of media attention. They have staked their hope on getting too big to fail, and then getting even bigger. Their motto is "grow or die." But the price isn't cheap spiritually and monetarily. They have to tinker with their product line to attract and then hold their postmodern shoppers. But the megachurch monstrosities of over 20,000 consumers linked to a singular CEO by super-optic technology on satellite campuses are actually very rare. Someone has designated 2000 congregants as the the mini-megachurch entrance level. But only 10% of the 56 million Protestant churchgoers in America are even in churches of

2000. 47 million Protestant churchgoers are in churches that have 199 or less congregants. 50% have 99 or fewer people in their churches.

Nevertheless, many of these pastors are flat out trying to get mega. Pastors sign up for leadership courses and get their sermons from Rick Warren's pastoral toolbox on the net. But still they are failing to get mega. This "get out there and lure them in" only produces a bread and circus mentality. The pastors and people should just give up and return to being an authentic New Testament local body of Christ. But the business model of the big box megachurches has already set in and purpose-driven pragmatism rules.

The "take dominion" Apostles and Prophets have tried their hand at national politics as a form of Dominion evangelism. This wedding to Pentecostal Latter-Rain extremists and political activity produced some interesting activity in the last election. They had their hands all over Texas Gov. Perry's failed presidential bid. They then tried to prophesy serial marriage practitioner Newt Gingrich to the top of the ticket. That collapsed and then they turned to a Paleo-Catholic Rick Santorum, and finally dutifully followed Mormons Glenn Beck and Mitt Romney to the election gallows. But God didn't raise up Mitt.

The Dominionists are now left with trying to fast and pray their Dominion agenda into churches having struck out politically. The jet-setting "apostles and prophets" have now aimed their Dominionist agenda on China, Africa and Europe. Surely they won't want to waste their time on the small churches in America.

Others want to hitch a ride on international Catholicism. Thanks or no-thanks to the seminal work of the late Chuck Colson and his "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" (ECT) project, many are offering Reformation and Counter-reformational mystical monastic spirituality to breathe new life (pun intended) into the pragmatic/political evangelical corpses strewn around. Bill Hybels confessed the failure of his seeker-sensitive pragmatics. And in nearly the same breath he introduced Catholic mystical spiritual formation and centering prayer techniques to his congregation.

This is not victory, folks. It is admitting that political/cultural evangelicals have failed and now need to continually change their product line to hold their consumer base. Scazzero, who teaches Catholic Contemplative Prayer across the evangelical world and joins Trappist monks in silent spiritual retreats, nevertheless finds his speaking schedule filled with evangelical churches (Rick Warren, etc.). I noticed that he had an article in the recent "Enrichment," the Assemblies of God national pastors magazine. In his intro to Catholic contemplative prayer teaching his opening play suggests that something has to be done about the low level of spiritual "health" among evangelicals, especially pastors in general. His solution is to cross the Rubicon (return to Rome) and introduce the Catholic practice of entering the "silence" of Contemplative Prayer and Centering Prayer, and actually have "Jesus" speak verbally into the silence.

The Elephant Room experiment of a grouping of megachurches last year suggested that we need to link up with Word/Faith heretics like T.D. Jakes who is still a non-trinitarian. Lou Giglio and John Piper (Neo Calvinists) needed mystical, Catholic-promoting Beth Moore reading the lectio-divina and Bill Johnson's Jesus Culture rock band to make a splash at the Passion youth conference in Atlanta.

This appears to be a "circling the wagons" to recruit every able-bodied sort of evangelical into the new effort. Converting the culture appears harder than anticipated. Now even the venerable Chuck Swindoll has invited a non-trinitarian rock band to his church. If you can't defeat the culture in the ballot box or with political alliances then you need to circle the wagons. If you can't dominate the culture by "apostolic and prophetic decrees" in league with political forces, and if you can't become junior partners with the Vatican and Jesuits,... Well! recruit every able body in sight. Different doctrine does not deter them. Anyone can enter this wide circle.

Aligning with Word/Faith apostates is now deemed acceptable (whose beliefs actually reach the extreme that Jesus did not save us at the cross but rather when the Father caused a demoniacally defeated Jesus in Hell to be born again and resurrected Him). Word/Faith advocates call this "identification" teaching. Essentially they claim we are identified with Jesus in that we together with Jesus have been born again. That parity right? Well! So be it. Why align with Word/Faith? They need to coalesce with everyone they can get just to survive in this culture. Besides, they preach a prosperity message and everyone needs more money to build their programs these days.

But it will take more than a wholesale adaption of of rock and roll music and cheap imitations of lewd cultural crazes like the Harlem Shake to rescue the future of the 60-year-old neo-evangelical experiment. Youth workers can't ride to victory by aping rock concerts right down to mosh pits and metal/punk copies of the worst in the youth culture. It won't help to make the kick drum explode against the sternum and the electric base to make the backbone ring like a tuning fork even if the song is "How great thou art." Indeed this produces a full-bodied rush that has more to do with Springsteen in Phillips arena than Paul's more modest "*singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs in your heart to God*" (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19). This is slavish imitation of a culture far along in decay. Yet evangelicals are madly rushing off in hot pursuit of accommodating to it!

Same sex marriage is unstoppable in the wider culture. The only question now is can the evangelical church find the spiritual fiber to stand against it. Especially when there are so many other sexual sins tolerated nowadays in the church. The Andy Stanley non-stance and double-speak about homosexuals in his North Point megachurch complex is not that promising. Rob Bell, the evangelical Wheaton and Fuller Seminary-trained emergent who insists that he is an evangelical, has called for full scale capitulation to homosexuals marriage and the culture. Bell's solution is simple capitulation. Bell recently stated "I am for marriage. I am for fidelity. I am for love, whether it's a man and woman, a woman and a woman, a man and a man. I think the ship has sailed and I think the church needs—I think this is the world we are living in and we need to affirm people wherever they are." Bell sees evangelicalism as a very narrow politically intertwined, culturized evangelical subculture. Bell urges people to to embrace a different sense of the term evangelical. He states: "a beautiful thing would be if evangelical came to mean buoyant, joyful, honest announcement about all of us receiving the grace of God." He further feels the evangelical subculture is dying if not dead already. Notice Bell is striving to retain his new version of evangelicalism. It is the term 'evangelical' that needs to be re-defined to fit his new image of it. That way he can still claim to be one.

Many evangelicals for now would not follow Bell that far. Nevertheless, they put their eggs with stealth into the cultural basket. Subtly many are changing their message and only one in a hundred pew-sitters sees the shift. I heard it recently. In an Easter message the pastor *dramatically told of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead*. But in the application there was a subtle change. Jesus was raised so people are able to “hit the restart button” for their daily lives. Indeed, it is true we will live new lives in Christ. But! No my friends! Jesus defeated DEATH in his resurrection and now the gift of God is ETERNAL LIFE. The resurrection is not about rebooting our physical lives that are already passing away. We look not to the seen world but the unseen world and the resurrection victory over the grave. That is the traditional Easter message.

Where in the New Testament did the church attempt to gain pagan popularity in order to evangelize? Roman emperors and provincial authorities openly had legal homosexual marriage partners. But Paul and his churches didn't give them the time of day. They zealously protected their so-called product line, the Gospel message. No cheap pagan knock-offs. They actually believed the so-called 'product' of the Gospel would sell itself if faithfully preached and lived. *I (Paul) planted, Apollos watered but God gives the increase.* (1 Cor. 3:6). Just a reliable, unashamed intelligent presentation of the Gospel, because it (the Gospel) is the *power of God unto salvation* (Romans 1:17).

My son recently gave me, almost ashamedly, a watch. It was a copy of a Rolex with the exact logo and all. I asked him how much he paid for it. “Oh! Dad, I bought it on the street for 10 dollars.” What an analogy! Haven't we had enough cultural knock-off's of the Gospel? Haven't we had it with evangelical, political, money raising action committees? They don't work anyway in a culture that Paul said long ago was passing away. False apostles and prophets and their conjured glory clouds will only reach evangelicals that have been surviving on inferior rations. Artificial lure fishing is not what the Bible writers were talking about in becoming fishers of men.

In biblical cultures as well as many cultures today fishing is done with a net. If the net is mended and has no holes it will bring in a catch. May our church repair the broken nets, deliver the Gospel message, and return to biblical fishing for men.

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