

“Stage Managed” Ecumenism

Unbelievable and largely unseen ecumenical coalitions and ad hoc alliances are forming. These alliances are being forged by a small cadre of seeker-driven mega church celebrity pastors/authors. These vision-casting celebrities are in effect acting as power brokers in forming ecumenical coalitions. As with all coalitions these players are attempting to gain something for themselves and their “ministries” and the expanding of their personal reputations. They are willing to exchange their platforms and pulpits with other celebrities of like class and clout. These platform exchanges often cross boundaries into false and even heretical territory. Consequently, these celebrities become an endorsement of false teaching to the masses of low information evangelicals who are fans of these various Christian celebrities. The opportunity for these maneuvers is that classical evangelicalism as a theologically descriptive word is becoming near meaningless. Gregory Thornbury, now president of Kings College states: “the evangelicalism I signed up for is gone forever....In fact many leading theologians today see evangelicalism as a relic of a by gone era.” (Thornbury, *Recovering Classic Evangelicalism*, Crossway, 2013, pp. 223) The vacuum created by the disappearance of classical evangelicalism, unfortunately has been filled by TV ministries, bookstores, stadiums rallies, mega churches and extended mega church campuses and their media promotions.

These new media leaders have launched their own media outlets replete with fully equipped transportable entourages. If you can't attend the events you can get it all on GodTV, TBN or DVD for a price. These efforts are the beginnings of a back door ecumenism, an unpublicized ecumenical convergence. A sort of reverse ecumenical big bang is upon us. There is an unseen and undocumented ecumenical contraction in Christendom. This phenomena is unreported and even mostly an unspoken practical ecumenism. It's as if there is a gravitational pull that draws even the most unlikely supporters together. There is a handy deniable component built into this in that it is promoted by sharing a stage or platform. These coalition partners promote each other by inviting other celebrities to their platform of their mega church or stadium conferences. Some rush in to say that such so-called “platform ecumenism” is guilt by association. It is that but more so their presence together on a platform shouts for all to hear a guilt by endorsement. It is like forming a shadow government. This ground level ecumenism is not the product of denominational leaders. In fact denomination leaders in this postmodern era have been essentially relegated to the sidelines. The sheeple (the sheep as people) blindly follow their celebrities. They pay little or no attention to their unknown denominational leaders. Beyond that many denominational leaders join right in. The sheeple are out there. They can be organized to follow their leaders. Indeed sheep follow other sheep.

The seeds of this home grown ecumenical gravitational pull did not however burst on the scene from nowhere. One can trace this back many decades. The seeds planted earlier are now are maturing. The media mega stars are now stage managing not only huge stadium filled extravaganzas, but in the process they are engineering a major ecumenical event without even using the term.

The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association was among the earliest efforts that pointed in this direction when it made a major ecumenical ground breaking decision to include Roman

Catholic prelates on their crusade platforms and assigned catholic responders to the Roman catholic churches for follow up. Sorry but it was in effect giving away a baby to a stranger.

The Charismatic Renewal

The Charismatic Renewal of which I was a part had the unintended experiential effect of promoting ecumenism. The best way I can describe this is the spectacle of Father Pearson pleading with the Virgin Mary to help a seeker be released in tongues. This did more to endorse Romanism than any words could convey. What a sight when Catholic nuns in full habits spoke at Full Gospel Businessmen meetings speaking in some unknown tongue. The believers that pray "in a spirit" together also stay together. This is ecumenism beyond any denominational sanction or effort. One could write page after page of the how we have gotten to where we are today. But now we have to consider some the very recent events that point to more ecumenical chickens coming home to roost.

Contemplative Prayer

"Spiritual Formation" has been taking evangelicals by storm for some years now. Richard Foster and his seminal book "Celebration of Discipline" has been an attempt to fashion a Catholic Contemplative prayer experience for Protestants. The often used term Spiritual Formation is simply a code word for Contemplative Prayer and Contemplative Prayer is a revived form of early Catholic meditation going back to the early third and fourth centuries of Catholic Monastics called the Desert Fathers who borrowed a form of meditation from interaction with Eastern mystics in Egypt. The source of Contemplative Prayer is Catholicism. But ironically there are probably more evangelicals pursuing this prayer method than Catholics. In recent times Catholic monks, Thomas Merton and Henri Nouwen have devoted their entire lives to this prayer method and now many evangelicals are devoting themselves to Thomas Merton and Henri Nouwen. Contemplative Prayer is essentially a meditative discipline with a desire to attain an altered state of consciousness by entering the "silence." In this silence and out of this silence one supposedly attains oneness with God. But entering the silence is not easy and so an innovative Catholic monk, Thomas Keating, employed a centering prayer technique of repeating a chosen word (mantra). What formerly took monks months and years can now be attained in 20 minutes of centering prayer and repeating over and over a mantra. In the silence one supposedly finds God living deep in their unconscious being. . The rub is this. This internal god is also deeply buried in the unconscious of every other human alive today on the planet and even actually inhabits all created things. So this form of panentheistic meditative ecumenism eventually connects the contemplative not only to Catholicism but all of creation. Catholic monks Merton, Nouwen and Keating are like the trinity of Contemplative Prayer. This practice of Contemplative Prayer blurs the line between Catholics and Protestants. Peter Scazzero, senior pastor of New Life church Queens NYC, an evangelical and graduate of Gordon-Conwell Seminary, among others introduces this long neglected spirituality to evangelicals. But Scazzero doesn't mention Catholicism but he quotes favorably and often from the Contemplative trinity noted above in his books. He attends a Trappist monastery in Mass. each year. He has made available a skinned down version of a Benedictine Daily Office for evangelical devotional use. Via DVD, Scazzero was introduced to our local AOG church. No one knew what it was all about but it did seem a little strange to a few.

Scazzero's pitch is that American Christians need to slow down from the daily grind and the best method is essentially contemplative meditation techniques. Scazzero has held conferences for AOG pastors, CMA pastors and Focus on the family, etc. If people would note his dependence on Merton, Nouwen and Keating they would know the source of this new prayer technique. For our purposes Contemplative Prayer has proved to be a very effective ecumenical tool. It tends to legitimize Romanism. For further information the net is full of good explanations of CT. prayer. I have an article that can be accessed on the net via Google at "Plumbline Newsletter Archive" called: "Scazzero Scares Me."

Gary Gilley states: "On the contrary, Merton demonstrates that there is much to fear when we try to mix truth with error. Merton saw that Buddhism, a religion with little interest in theology or truth offered the same mystical experiences that contemplative Christianity did. They both used similar methods.... In the end Father Merton came to the idea that because doctrine did not matter and only experience did...Buddhism and his understanding of Christianity was offering the same thing." This is just the problem. Christian Contemplative techniques are not even hinted at in the teaching of scripture. Searching for something more from ancient and modern "holy men" can only eventually end badly.

The Elephant Room initiative

The Elephant Room was the brain-child Rev James McDonald the mega pastor of Harvest Bible Chapel in Chicago. McDonald's brain child was to bring together celebrity pastors and have a television media event in which the celebrities sparred with each other asking hard hitting questions. Someone described it as prize fight. Television provided everyone with a ring side seat. No (holds) questions barred. These episodes were full of hipster coolness. In Elephant Room One mega pastor Perry Noble was challenged for his featuring the demonic band AC/DC's "Highway to Hell" on Easter Sunday. But in the end the celebrities decided that Noble's pragmatic prank was just a matter of personal choice. It appears that the elephant in the room was a disregard for the fear of the Lord.

McDonald surprised everyone in Elephant Room Two with his cheek to invite TD Jakes. Jakes was well known for his Word/Faith teaching and someone who denied the Trinity. Jakes has a well earned reputation as a "Jesus only" modalist. In modalist teaching the trinity is denied by teaching that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are just different "manifestations of God. At various times the one God appears as a different mode or manifestation. The Father is manifested as the Creator, The Son is a manifestation of God as the Saviour and the Holy Spirit is the manifestation for the church age. Pentecostal Jesus Only followers are thus named "Oneness Pentecostals because Jesus only is God. McDonald and Driscoll, however, merely tossed Jakes slow toss softballs and Jakes was allowed to say he believed in the trinity but preferred to explain it with the term manifestations rather than persons. Driscoll and McDonald could have simply asked Jakes one simple question: "Do you think the Son existed before the Son came to earth at Bethlehem? But for whatever reason that never happened.

I have no idea what McDonald and the other celebrities had in mind when they staged the Elephant Rooms. But there is no doubt the result let Perry Noble and TD Jakes off the hook. In fact Elephant Room 2 was hardly over before the celebrity pastors were rushing to invite Jakes and other Word/Faith personalities to their mega-church platforms. Jakes was invited

to McDonald's platform, Pastor Steven Furtick another participant of Elephant 2 also publicly called Jakes his favorite pastor. Christine Caine from Hillsong in Sydney Australia also a Word/Faith mega church down under and other famous Word/Faith personalities were suddenly invited to a wide range of mega church platforms including Osteen's Lakeland in Houston. The result was to mainstream W/F Heretics worldwide. I will explain why I feel Word/Faith teaching is heretical.

Mainstreaming Word/Faith Heretics

Word/Faith teaching was brought to us by Kenneth Hagin. Hagin based his views on the writings of E.W. Kenyon and the plagiarizing of Kenyon's writings. Before Hagin began to promote Kenyon's views he was an AOG minister. Hagin's teachings then became known as Word/Faith. Until recent times Word/Faith has generally existed on the periphery of Pan Evangelicalism on a parallel track. But now rather than a close parallel movement it has essentially gained full acceptance. This is alarming for Word/Faith teaching remains throughly heretical. Based on Kenyon's works Hagin taught among other things that when Adam was created he was a fully divine person and an exact replica of God. In the fall Adam lost his divinity and the human race lost the potential of divinity. Word/Faith teaching asserts that when Jesus died on the cross He died physically but more important Jesus died spiritually on the cross and lost his divinity. Jesus then descended into hell and was tormented by satanic beings for three days. Then the Father intervened and restored Jesus lost divinity and Jesus became the first born-again man. Now anyone who is born-again is rewarded with restored divinity on a par with Jesus and even God (that is God with a small g.) This is why Kenneth Copeland and others aggressively claim divinity. This is also why Word/Faith believers claim they can create new realities because they are now born-again replicas of The father even as Adam was before the fall. This teaching is wide spread among the Word/Faith faithful, TBN and etc. This teaching is emphasized by some Word/Faith teachers more than others like Joyce Meyer. But any web search can find this teaching in almost all of them.

The reason I call Word/Faith heresy is because it is changing and editing the work of Jesus completed on the cross. Gary Gilley states: "Faith teachers like to teach that Christians are little gods." Gary Gilley summarizes WF views about Jesus and His death:

1. Christ was recreated on the cross from divine to demonic. Jesus took upon himself the very nature of satan.
2. Your redemption was not secured on the cross but in hell.
3. Jesus was born-again in hell.
4. Christ was reincarnated through his rebirth in hell and those who like Christ are born-again can be reincarnated as well" (Gary Gilley, <http://www.rapidnet.com>)

Consequently this is infinitely much more serious than say holding a different view regarding the time of Jesus return etc. Once again a simple question will do the job. "Did Jesus complete His atonement on the cross or later in Hell?"

Kenneth Copeland and James Robison and Pope Francis

Tony Palmer is a former director of Kenneth Copeland Ministries in South Africa. Later Palmer became a bishop in an Anglican Charismatic group of churches. As an Anglican charismatic Bishop Palmer became a close friend of Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio, the future pope Francis while working with Catholic Charismatics in Argentina. Earlier this year the pontiff invited Palmer to the papal residence and recorded on his I Phone a message to Kenneth Copeland's, annual pastors meeting at Copeland's Eagle Mt. mega church near Forth Worth. On this recorded message pope Francis pleaded in tears for a unity of brothers in Christ with the charismatic pastors. Copeland responded by praying in tongues (uninterpreted) to the group and then asked palmer to record a response (this apparently was all set up) to the pontiff. Palmer then announced to these Word/Faith pastors that "the protest (code for protestant reformation) is over, is it over for you? The over 1000 W/F pastors at the meeting can be seen standing and cheering.

A few days later James Robison also televised this same I Phone message on his daily TV program "Life Today." Shortly after this Palmer arranged for a papal visit for Copeland, Robison and others. Copeland later reported of the meeting: "I am blessed! What Jesus asked the Father for in John 17:21 'that we all be one in Him' is finally coming to pass." Joel Osteen, Word/Faith, prosperity pastor, who recently was also granted a Papal visit, has also entered the Post-Elephant Room ecumenical fall-out of mainstreaming all things Word/Faith. As an aside, Co-Pastor Victoria Osteen recently gave voice to a Freudian prosperity slip telling their Houston Lakewood mega-church faithful: "when you worship Him [God] you are not doing it for God really. You are doing it for yourself." (World Net Daily, 8-31-14).

There are two major forces within world-wide visible Christianity today: The Roman Catholic church (1.2 billion members) and the Sign-gift Word/Faith prosperity larger Charismatic community (584, million, members). The Pontiff is a friend of Charismatics and at the same time a member of the Jesuit order. These two groups comprise the majority of all visible Christians" ("Copeland Rolls the Dice with Rome", Rev. Bob Litchow). Word/Faith teaching is fast becoming the largest protestant presence in Africa.

Postscript: Not many days after the papal visit Bishop Palmer was killed in a motorcycle accident in England. May God grant his family special grace.

Franklin Graham's Three Rivers Festival Hope

Light House Trails has learned that at the August 15-17 gathering in Pittsburg PA, Franklin Graham, who led the organized event, brought Catholic Bishop David Zubik to give the opening prayer **on stage** (my emphasis) During the Bishops prayer he acknowledged that Catholics and Protestants are all the same church." (Light House Trails, (8/27/14).

In a later news release Zubik stated: We felt as long as there was a Catholic component to this crusade those who "respond to Rev. Graham,s invitation to make a decision to Christ who identify as Catholic will be given the opportunity to go to Epiphany Church adjacent to the Console Energy Center for the sacrament of reconciliation." (8/10/14)

These assorted media episodes are very visible and silently without words they shout out: "I am essentially suggesting that this ministry is accepted." This is simply guilt by endorsement. Though some may retort that they only have different styles and message emphasis and we are simply different battalions in the one army of The Lord.

All of these events noted above appear to have little specific planning at least as far as we know. Indeed the mega churches are all about becoming bigger and more visible in the culture. Perhaps some of it is simply keeping up with the Jones and striving for market share. But in any case the sheeple are just going along for the ride wherever the celebrity pastors and authors will take them. The apostle Paul referred to professing Christians in Galatia who were calling for gentiles to be circumcised as “false brothers” (Gal. 2:4).

These “false brothers” believed in the death and resurrection of Jesus. But still Paul called them anathema (accursed). They only wanted to add circumcision to the salvation message. Seems small compared to praying to Mary, and re-offering Christ as a sin offering each time in the Catholic Mass. Conversely, however, the Catholic Church in their Post-Reformation Council of Trent still today calls anyone who holds to “faith alone” as anathema. False teachers have always folded ecumenical leaven into the whole loaf. But a little leaven leavens the whole loaf. What is happening today in platform ecumenism is the leavening of false teaching into an ecumenical loaf.

As the cardinals were in holy conclave in Rome Rick Warren called for prayer for God's choice of a Pope. After Pope Francis was chosen, self appointed celebrity NAR Prophet Kim Clement gave his oracle: “This man has been appointed to join the hearts of the Protestant faith - Catholic - those who are Spirit-filled.”

This invisible gravitational pull toward ground level ecumenism surely will continue and at an increasing pace. It will not come by denominational negotiations, but will just move unofficially. It will happen for the most part by the actions of postmodern evangelical media personalities. It will happen for example as it did with Francis Chan, a Neo-Calvinist media star who was invited to IHOP for a major conference. This becomes a public legitimation for all the people that Chan represents and vice versa.

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