

EIGHT CULTURAL TRENDS THE CHURCH NEEDS TO UNDERSTAND

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Editor's note: Whilst the article was written for the American Christian community all cultural trends mentioned are also visible in Australian culture to a greater or lesser degree. Publication of the article does not necessarily indicate that the Australian Prayer Network endorses all points the author makes but is put out in order to provoke prayerful consideration of the issues raised and how we should respond to them as God's people.

With the United States tilting towards the left, the church must prepare for a new normal in our lives and ministries. The body of Christ has to realize it is no longer business as usual. Every conservative and liberal pundit I am reading say virtually the same thing: During the last election, our nation has experienced a dramatic cultural shift similar to the 1960s! Unless the Body of Christ is able to bring about a genuine countercultural shift, the following are some of the possible projections we will experience in the next decade.

Increased Limitations on Freedom of Religion

The present move towards secularism in our nation will produce a climate of hostility towards freedom of speech in both the religious and public sectors. Many cultural gatekeepers will attempt to censor what is preached from the pulpit and on the airwaves. This will be done under the name of hate speech that can supposedly incite bullying and domestic terrorism. The result? A ban against exposition of Bible passages from pulpits and on the airwaves in which God condemns certain sexual practices and lifestyles (Leviticus 18; Romans 1) that our secular society not only tolerates but also celebrates. Can't happen in America? Consider that in our neighbouring Canada, preaching against certain sexual lifestyles is already legally censored in local churches and over the airwaves.

More Scrutiny of Religious Leaders and Institutions

Congress and the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) will continue to closely watch religious leaders and institutions they deem countercultural to the kind of neutered, syncretistic humanistic society they desire. As Karl Marx deemed religion "the opium of the people" that should be eradicated, those that tend towards socialism deem traditional nuclear families and activist Bible-believing churches a threat to their desire for the secular state to regulate and rule every aspect of culture, human life and society. Since the beginning of time there has always been a war between God and autonomous men who try to build their own towers and empires that reach to heaven so they can control their own destiny (Genesis 11:1-8; Isaiah 14:12-14; Daniel chapters 2, 4, 7; Obadiah vv. 2-3; Psalm 2).

Decreasing Tax Exempt Status for Religious Leaders, Churches and Ministers

Today, New York City churches must fill out a form every year just to maintain their tax-exempt status (as required by the New York City Department of Finance). Churches that somehow didn't receive the application in the mail or who failed to fill it out in time must start the process of receiving tax-exempt status all over again. I am sure hundreds or even thousands of churches miss the deadline every year; filling out this application gives the city more up-to-date information on every single church and is probably the first step towards gradually taking tax exemption status away from as many houses of worship as possible. One person from the Department of Finance visited our church three times last year to investigate our tax exempt status. They demanded to know how our building was used every day, what we do with our property and if other people or organizations are renting our facilities. We were able to prove that we use our facilities every day for church non-profit use. You'll see more of this activity approved by Congress and local municipalities in order to collect more tax monies to make up for the huge budget deficit.

Increase of Evangelical Leaders Supporting Universalism, Same Sex Marriage and Gay Theology

More and more people-pleasing preachers who desire cultural acceptance - rather than choosing to suffer with Christ (Hebrews 11:25-26) will move away from biblical orthodoxy. These leaders will teach a form of syncretism in which they preach that He automatically saved all people. Some will teach the universal gospel of inclusion or ultimate reconciliation in which even the devil will ultimately be saved. More preachers will also affirm same-sex marriage and teach that people are born with gay genes. Thus it is not a sinful lifestyle because God created them that way. There will be more out and open churches and ministers who preach the gospel, sing the same songs as evangelicals, but espouse gay theology and perform same-sex weddings. This phenomena will increase as the culture continues to escalate its celebration of homosexuality.

Increase of Terrorist Threats from American Citizens – not just foreigners

In the past 30 years there have been 62 mass shootings in our nation. This is the fruit of a generation that is brought up in a culture of death that celebrates a women's right to suck a baby's brains out (in partial-birth or post-birth abortion) in the name of freedom and progress; who are brought up playing hours and hours of violent video games; and brought up in broken, dysfunctional families. Unfortunately, mass bloodletting has already been legally taking place since Roe v. Wade in 1973, resulting in about 40 -50 million unborn babies being slaughtered. The natural progression is to have illegal bloodletting by the very citizens who are told to tolerate and celebrate a women's right to terminate her child! Having many violent young people arise out of the ashes of this culture of death is something we are going to have to continue to deal with if we do not have another Great Awakening that transforms our nation!

The Rise of Hyper-Grace Churches Espousing Antinomianism

Antinomianism is a heretical teaching that has been around since the birth of the church. It teaches that Old Testament law is not in effect since the advent of Christ which introduced grace. Since the 1970's many in the Body of Christ have gone from preaching positive confession to positive thinking to extreme seeker-sensitive messages (never preaching anything related to repentance, judgment, the cross and hell). Now we have extreme grace churches that teach once a person is saved they are in grace and can live any way they want without forfeiting their salvation. There are even popular preachers who go as far as saying that Christians can do without reading the Old Testament since all we need is the New Testament which is built upon better promises. This is in spite of the fact that when Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 ("that all scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work") he was referring to the Old Testament since the New Testament epistles were not yet universally viewed as scripture or even fully written.

All the original apostles and writers of the New Testament only had the Old Testament as scripture and largely based their sermons on it. For example, Peter's message after the baptism of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost was based on Joel 2:28-32. Stephen's speech before the Jewish council (Acts 7) was based on God's meta-narrative of redemptive history with the nation of Israel as found in the Old Covenant. Paul's sermon in Acts 13 is replete with Old Testament scripture. James used Amos 9:11-12 as his text to render his salvific decision regarding the Gentiles in Acts 15. In addition, the four gospels as well as the books of Romans, Hebrews and Galatians and other epistles cannot be understood unless a person is familiar with the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament written by Moses). The book of James was largely based on the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, especially the book of Proverbs.

The book of Revelation cannot be understood without studying Old Testament prophetic literature. Paul the Apostle even went as far as saying that the Old Testament was written for New Testament believers so they may have hope and learn from its narrative and turn away from evil (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:6-11). Further confusion comes from the epistles of Paul and Hebrews that seem to teach that Old Testament law was done away with in Christ, which leads some to the conclusion there

is no place for the law of God in the church. However, Paul made it clear that, while we are not saved or justified by the law (Romans 3:21), Christians are expected to uphold the standard of the moral law by their lives (Romans 3:31; 8:4).

The law doesn't save us, but the moral law is the standard by which Jesus measures holiness, both inward and outward (Matthew 5:27-30; Hebrews 8:10). This means the Ten Commandments are used as a way for God to convict us of sin for the process of holiness and sanctification to be worked inside of us. Jesus even said that He didn't come to abolish the law but to fulfil it (Matthew 5:17). The Ten Commandments have been quoted or alluded to hundreds of times in the New Testament, proving that the moral law is still our standard in church. For example, in Ephesians 6:1-3 Paul quotes the fifth commandment. He also constantly admonishes the saints not to lie, commit adultery, commit idolatry, covet or steal from one another in passages such as in Ephesians 4:25,28; 5:3-6.

The New Testament scriptures teach us that the Old Testament sacrificial system has been done away with (Hebrews 8:13) because Jesus, as the Lamb of God (John 1:29), took away the sins of the world thus nullifying the need to sacrifice animals, receive circumcision, and keep the ceremonial law for forgiveness of sins (Hebrews 9:13-14; 10:1-14). But never in the word of God does the standard of the Ten Commandments get put aside as our moral ethic (Romans 3:31). We need to take heed to Jude 4 and Romans 6:1 which teach against a lawless Christianity (antinomianism) that distorts the grace of God to mean that Christians can live any way we desire.

Increased Natural Disasters Due to Extreme Weather and Seismic Shifts

Second Chronicles 7:14 teaches us that if God's people seek His face and turn from their wicked ways that God will heal the land. The opposite is this: if God's people do not seek the Lord and repent then there will be repercussions that can affect the land or nature itself. In Amos 4:6-11, God warns His people that He will use the weather and natural disasters to rebuke them. The curses of Deuteronomy 28 related to national disobedience also include judgments related to using nature to punish disobedience and rebellion. As the United States continues to slide towards the way of Sodom I believe there will be more and more instances of severe weather wreaking havoc as well as natural disasters. Of course the humanists will blame severe weather on man-made global warming. Ideally, the church will alter the course of history with much prayer, fasting, identificational repentance for the sins of our nation, and in working to change the laws related to our culture of death as shown in legalized abortion and senseless violence shown in the media.

Increasing Ideological Differences Split Americans into Two Nations

America is a divided nation. Increasingly, our 50 states are only united in name. There are political, ethnic, philosophical and economic differences that are so severe it is stifling the ability of Congress and elected officials to get anything done. Both liberal and conservative media continue to perpetuate and consolidate this bifurcation, which is leading to greater polarity instead of greater unity. It wouldn't be a stretch to rename our country "the Divided States of America" as our disunity is the greatest it has ever been since the Civil War broke out in the 19th century! Some prophetic people I have spoken to even foresee the day when riots will break out in many cities when the candidate of their choice isn't elected. In the past, even Great Awakenings failed to stop bloodshed because both sides were so entrenched that people resisted the Holy Spirit. The First Great Awakening in America led to the consolidation of the 13 original colonies resulting in the Revolutionary War against England in the 18th century. The Second Great Awakening led by Charles Finney consolidated the division between North and South over slavery resulting in the Civil War.

I am concerned that if our nation ever experiences a total economic collapse with mass unemployment it may result in mass rioting and a sort of "un-civil" war that has been fomenting the past several decades because of the culture wars. I wouldn't even be surprised if we began experiencing large secessionist movements with many wanting their states to break away from the nation! Perhaps the only chance for change could be when the church reaches the next generation with the gospel and when principled statesmen of various ethnicities are elected to office who have the guts to make the changes necessary, irrespective of the political consequences. It is time for the

church to seek the Lord and engage the culture more than ever before. Ultimately, only the Lord can raise the dead and take what's wrong and make it right!

Source: by Joseph Mattera