

State of the Church



Looking to the Past for Insights into the Future by Pastor Douglas Shearer

Revival Is in the Air

Whether or not we tap into it and help propel it forward has much to do with two important factors:

1. the kind of church we attend; and, as is always the case,
2. the sacrifices we're willing to make once it begins.



Most of us who came to Christ during the 1950s and early 1960s can remember a widely circulated take on revivals that was "fashionable" among some high-profile pastors and theologians of the time ...

Revivals come in waves
under the sovereign hand of God,
and little or nothing can be done
to initiate one.

That very take has once again resurfaced, accompanied today, some sixty years later, with a second take, which, like the first, tends to mute any expectation of an imminent revival ...

The prophetic scriptures indicate
there will be no revival
in the Last Days.

An erroneous assessment,¹ but, nevertheless, widely believed.

To be honest, I have a hard time believing that anyone making either one or both of these claims has ever himself witnessed a revival up close and real. If so, he probably witnessed it only as it was winding down, bedeviled with the burn-out, fatigue, and doctrinal errors that often plague a revival in its final stages.

Laying out My Credentials

I'm 77 years old, soon to be 78. I've been a pastor for over 50 years, including 28 years as a senior pastor. During those many years, I've witnessed the evangelical church negotiate its way through one change after another: changes in governance, structure, direction, emphasis, and style - changes extending ...

- all the way back before the revival of the 1960s and 1970s, the so-called Jesus Movement, called by some the "Fourth Great Awakening;"
- through the Jesus Movement itself;
- through the twenty-year pushback against the excesses and errors of the Jesus Movement, a pushback that spanned the entire decade of the 1980s, lasting well into the 1990s;
- through the ever-mounting hostility the church has encountered since at least the mid-1980s; and, finally,
- to the church's withdrawal from the public square during the 1990s and its current loss of evangelistic fervor.

I could, of course, expand considerably on the changes I've witnessed over my long stint in pastoral leadership. But I won't. I mention this much only to lend a modicum of credibility to the assessments I'll be making in this article.

I want to stress here at the very beginning that my article is based only on my own personal experience. That and that alone! It's not the result of many long hours tucked away in the dark recesses of a seminary library.

I want also to stress that the events I describe here are painted in broad brush-strokes only. Try not to be offended. The fine details and nuanced descriptions that a whole book warrants are missing. Please keep this in mind as you read through this article.

A Guiding Insight Taken from the Last 60 Years

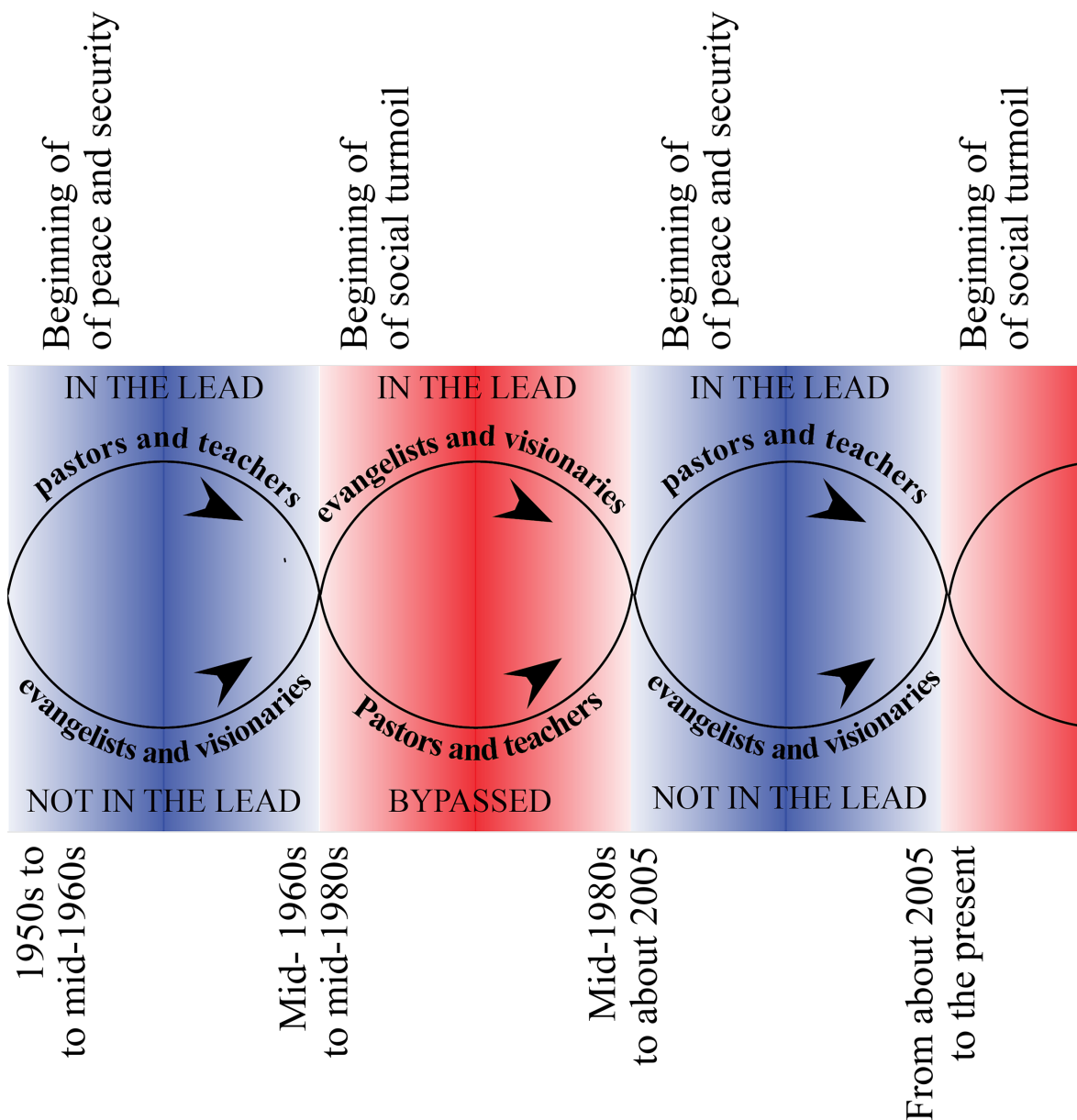
There are four eras delineated in the graphic below: (1) first, an era of peace and security, meaning an absence of social and cultural turmoil, extending throughout the entire 1950s and into the first half of the 1960s; (2) next, an era of social and cultural turmoil extending from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s; (3) following that, another era of peace and security extending from the mid-1980s to about 2005; and, finally, (4) another era of social and cultural turmoil extending from about 2005 into the present.

Here's what I want you to take note of: during the two eras of peace and security, pastors and teachers have been at the helm of the church, quite unquestionably; however,

during the 1960s and '70s, an era of social and cultural upheaval, evangelists and visionaries² took control, with revival breaking out.

Here's the point: because we're once again living through an era of social and cultural turmoil, even more acute and unsettling than the previous one, we can expect evangelists and visionaries to once again begin moving into church leadership, with revival breaking out.

Another point I will be making: (1) during eras of peace and security, churches led by evangelists and visionaries tend to disappear altogether;³ but (2) during times of social and cultural upheaval, churches led by pastors and teachers don't disappear; they continue, but the revival bypasses them, leaving them high and dry, graying, and stagnant.



PAST → Revival

1950 - 1965 Pastors and Teachers in the Lead

I remember well the church of the 1950s and early 1960s. It was the church that introduced me to Christ and nurtured me through my first few years. It taught me the meaning of discipleship and helped me to form long-lasting relationships with other believers, relationships that continue to the present.

We met formally at least three times each week: a Sunday morning worship service that stressed solid pulpit preaching; a Tuesday evening Bible study where scripture was actually exegeted; and, finally, a Thursday evening prayer meeting that usually lasted an hour and a half, sometimes more. In addition, there were "morning watches" that took place three to five times per week from six to seven in the morning.

We were expected to read at least three or four chapters of the Bible every day; memorize hundreds of verses; and, lastly, learn basic doctrinal truths and be prepared to argue in support of them. Clearly, we were not biblical illiterates. Moreover, we were expected to share our faith regularly. Anyone who didn't was not considered a serious Christian. That's just the way it was. It was standard fare. It was "de rigueur." We didn't question it. Most of us just did it.

One Debilitating Weakness

For all its strengths, however, the established evangelical church of the 1950s and early 1960s suffered from one very debilitating weakness, a weakness ...

1. that left her unable to reap the vast harvest of souls made possible by the social and cultural upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s, and
2. that led, at least in part, to the stagnation and biblical illiteracy that today plagues the church.

Simply put: church leadership at the congregational level was wholly invested in pastors and teachers. Evangelists and visionaries were, by and large, excluded. They were either relegated to the periphery of the church and told not to "rock the boat" or they were urged to "ply their trade" in para-church organizations.

Pastors/Teachers as Leaders The Impact Was Decisive!

Pastors and teachers, by the very nature of their calling and ministry, are focused primarily on the protection and well-being of the flock. They ordinarily make predictability and routine the order of the day. In short, they are risk-averse! They are not given to

dramatic flourishes or a revolutionary call to arms. It's too disruptive!

1965 - 1985 Evangelists and Visionaries Take Over

But with the flood-tide of chaos and violence that began engulfing the country in the mid-1960s, dramatic flourishes and a revolutionary call to arms were exactly what the emerging "boomer" generation was looking for. It was a generation awash in sweeping social and cultural changes: civil rights; the Watts Riots in 1965; the Vietnam War protests; the Summer of Love; Haight Ashbury; Woodstock; the assassinations of President Kennedy in 1963 and of both Bobby Kennedy and Martin Luther King in 1968; the Black Panthers;



Protests at UC Berkeley

the Kent State murders; the kidnapping of Patty Hearst from her dormitory on the UC Berkeley campus by the Symbionese Liberation Army, just two blocks from where my wife and I were living at the time; the bloody Chicago riots that occurred during the 1968 Democratic Party Nominating Convention; Watergate. And the list goes on and on. There was no end to it. I know. I was there.

The pastors who were leading evangelical churches at the time, buttoned-down and given to staid convention, were caught completely off guard. Most of them found the "tune in, turn on, drop out" flower children too unwashed and unruly to bother with. And it was the other way around as well. The young counter-culture militants found nothing appealing about the established church. It didn't resonate with their sense of revolutionary fervor. It's not that it aroused their hostility; it's that it seemed so "out of touch" and pathetically irrelevant, with its paid professional staff and its weekly routines.

The Established Church Is Bypassed

Several weeks before he retired in 1992, Pastor Lee Toms, Senior Pastor of Arcade Baptist Church in Sacramento, one of the city's largest churches, confided in me how much he regretted letting the Jesus Movement pass him on by during the 1960s and '70s. At the time, he felt put-off and a bit intimidated. Tragically, his story was the story of far too many other pastors who were leading established evangelical churches back then.

Evangelists and Visionaries Take Over

But while pastors and teachers were too risk-averse to tap into the revolutionary fervor roiling the boomer generation, evangelists and visionaries, up till then excluded from congregational leadership and relegated to its periphery, were quick to do exactly that.

It wasn't long before "Jesus houses" and "communes" were springing up everywhere: in

store-fronts and warehouses; in blighted neighborhoods; in abandoned fraternity houses on major college campuses; and, of course in the living rooms of on-fire, excited believers. Though not seminary trained and often theologically naive, they were quick to spot the potential for revival that their pastors either didn't see or, more likely, refused to see.

Jesus Houses Morph into Churches

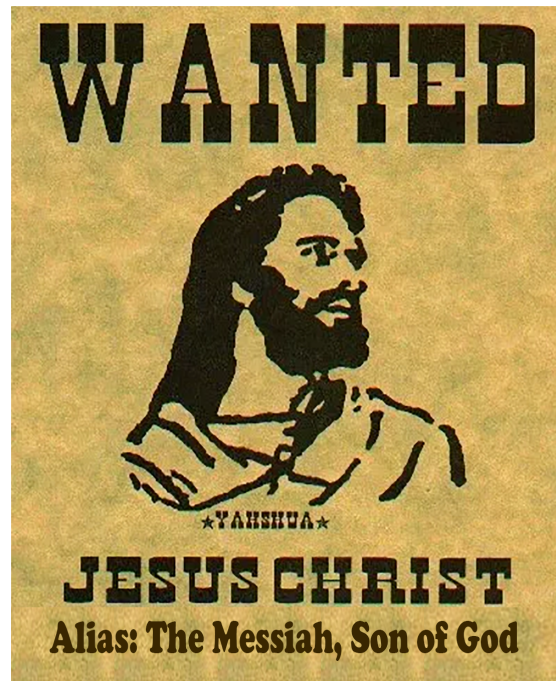
Within several years these disparate groups, composed almost entirely of counter-culture boomers who saw Christ as a fellow-revolutionary, began morphing into actual church congregations - *led not by pastors and teachers, but by evangelists and visionaries, most of whom had never before led a church.*

A different kind of church began to take shape. Not given to routine! Not risk-averse! Whose leaders were not validated by seminary degrees! Organic! Hands on! Participatory! Spontaneous! A church wholly committed to evangelism and guided by an intoxicating sense of urgency and mission! The Jesus Movement was underway!

The Jesus Movement was unlike all past Twentieth Century revivals. It was not restricted to the backwaters of "Americana," hidden away in the Appalachians, or entrenched in the Old Bible Belt. It flowed onto major college campuses and cut through to the very heart of academia. It fed upon the revolutionary zeal that gripped almost everyone at the time, which meant that it wasn't restricted to a single part of the country or to a single social or cultural stratum.

In 1972, I was pastoring a church on the West Coast along with my friend Doug Krieger. It was just a few blocks from the college I'd attended ten years earlier, UC Berkeley. The church began meeting in an abandoned used car garage on University Ave, a couple of blocks west of Shattuck Ave. It was later relocated to Telegraph Avenue in a refurbished coffee bar within sight of the campus. From the very start, street people, students, and even some professors began attending. New converts were being baptized 24/7 in Ludwig's Fountain, just steps from the Administration Building and the Student Union - where "Holy Hubert" preached almost every day, rain or shine.

The church we began in the summer of 1972 started with only thirty-five adults; but within just two years, it grew to over four hundred and fifty adults - *almost all new converts.* We established "Jesus houses" throughout Berkeley, but focused especially on the south side of the campus. One of the largest houses was on Warring Street, just



two short blocks from Memorial Coliseum, Cal's historic football stadium. There were 28 bedrooms and 18 bathrooms. Over forty new converts and three families with children were crowded into it. We divided ourselves into two groups, with one group holding down jobs to financially support the house and the other group sent out daily to share the gospel. That gives you some idea of just how much the gospel meant to us and how willing we were to do whatever we could to disseminate it.



An old fraternity house we took over on Warring Street in Berkeley

As more and more converts moved into the house, My wife Sita and I saw no alternative but to move into the house ourselves, taking along with us our three children. We felt our actual presence was needed to provide some small measure of order and stability.

Soon, a second house was opened up next-door, purchased with cash on the line by two over-joyed gay brothers who had just given their lives to Christ. Almost as many new converts moved in there. Sita, pregnant with our fourth child, cooked each day for 78 persons. She was helped by three other remarkable women living in the two houses.

We then opened a third house on College and Durant, just down the street from UC's Boalt Law School. It housed close to twenty full-time UC students. We next purchased an entire apartment complex for married couples who had decided to move close together for the sake of building community and growing together in Christ.

The church was radical! It was communal! And, most importantly, it was wholly committed to sharing the gospel! We met almost every day, worshipping and studying the Bible. All this in the space of less than two years.

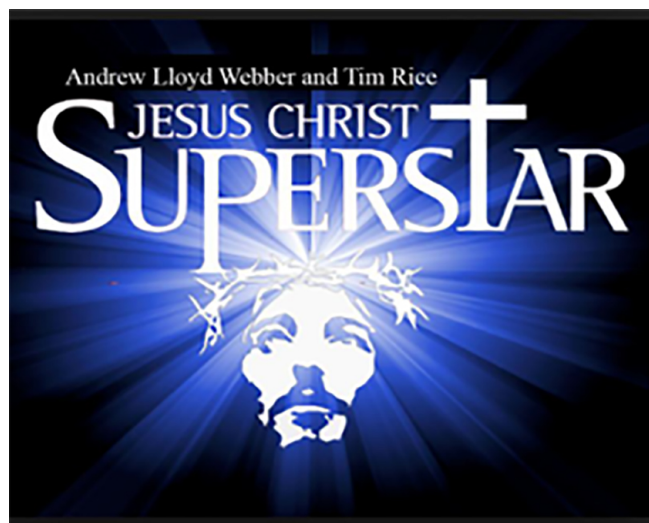
The church we raised up wasn't unique. Other "Jesus people" churches were at work alongside us, including Resurrection City under the leadership of Mario Murillo and Randy Sager. And they too were out in the streets sharing the gospel and discipling new converts.

The Arts and the Media

The arts and the media were likewise caught in the grip of the revival. The pop culture embraced it almost completely. Jesus was becoming avant-garde; the gospel was going "big time!" Imagine! Courted by the arts and media! Pastors and teachers were suspicious. But not evangelists and visionaries! And it was evangelists and visionaries who were now in the lead, *not pastors and teachers!* If pop stars wanted in on the action, so be it. Just let it happen! Don't mute its impact! Let it flow! That was the

prevailing mantra.

In 1971, *Jesus Christ Superstar* opened in New York. Hard to believe! A rock opera about Jesus Christ, put to music by Andrew Lloyd Webber and opening on Broadway! However panned by religious conservatives and buttoned-down pastors, it was a huge hit among Americans generally, and served to open minds and hearts throughout the country to the gospel message! The next year it was staged in London; and in 1973 it opened in Paris.



Yvonne Elliman, who played Mary Magdalene in the Broadway production, sang *I Don't Know How to Love Him*. It captivated audiences and held them transfixed throughout all the 1970s. It began with the words ...

I don't know how to love him,
What to do, how to move him,
I've been changed, really changed,
In the last few days when I've seen myself
I seem like someone else

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Judy Collins and Joan Baez, both civil rights activists and Vietnam War protestors, began singing *Amazing Grace* at their concerts and in small group gatherings. Collins began singing it both because it resonated in her own heart and because it was the only song everyone in her audiences knew by heart. Baez sang it because it was the song most requested at her many concerts. In 1971, Judy Collins recorded it, and it soon peaked at the top of the music charts in the U.S., Canada, and Great Britain.

The gospel was being shared without letup in every imaginable setting, not just on Sunday mornings, or in midweek Bible Studies, or at evangelism rallies organized by para-church ministries. And what's perhaps most intriguing of all: both Christians and non-Christians alike were spreading it. And if you weren't there, you no doubt find that hard to believe. But I *was* there. And I can testify to it.

It was in 1969 that Simon and Garfunkel first sang their smash hit "*Bridge over Troubled Waters*." Simon had written it during the summer while Garfunkel was in Europe filming *Catch-22*. It picked up on and amplified the hopes, dreams, and aspirations of the entire counter-culture generation. It also cast a glittering light on the burgeoning Jesus Movement. And though Simon did not at first cop to it, he eventually acknowledged that it was based on a gospel song made popular by the *Swan Silvertones* in their 1958 song "*Mary Don't You Weep*." Garfunkel said that when he and Simon performed

it in June of 1972 at Madison Square Garden, "*the atmosphere was biblical.*" His very words!

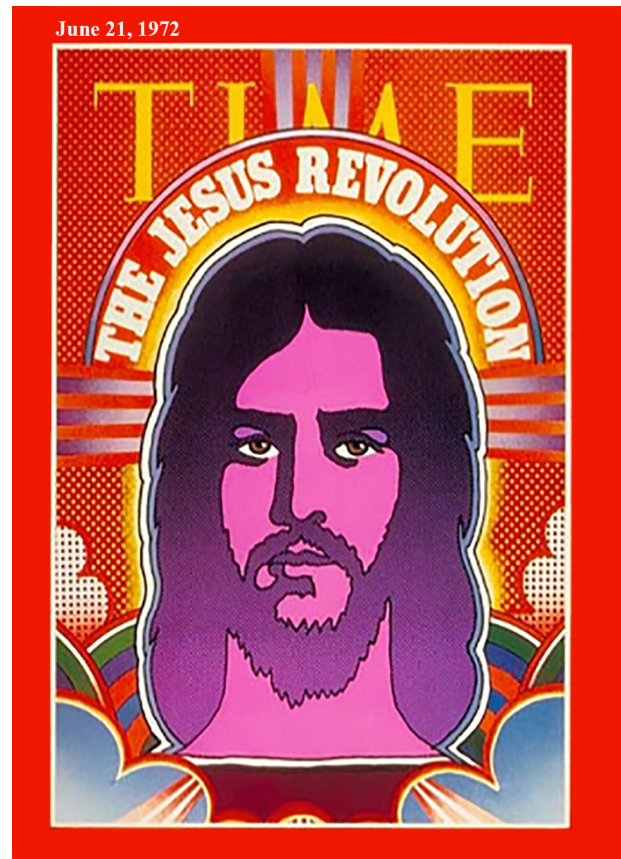
The lyrics for the chorus were taken almost word for word from Claude Jeter's line "I'll be your bridge over deep water if you trust in me," meaning, of course, "trust in Jesus." Everyone who heard *Bridge over Troubled Waters* for the first time, whether saved or unsaved, knew right away it was a gospel hymn - with Jesus the "Bridge over Troubled Waters." Once again, I know because I was there! Imagine! A gospel song composed and sung by two Jews! *That was the Jesus Movement!*

In 1972, Time Magazine featured a picture of Christ on its front cover. It would not be the last time! Newsweek, Life, and other weeklies soon followed suit - all to highlight the swelling significance of the Jesus Movement.

The Times article noted the yawning gap between the new "Jesus churches" then springing up all across the country and the established church, including the established *evangelical* church. One of the persons interviewed for the article pointedly observed that a new breed of Christians was turning to Christ, "a flood of counter-culture hippies that most establishment pastors want little to do with."

Jesus Christ the Revolutionary

The Times article was framed as a "wanted poster." It read in part ...



WANTED: JESUS CHRIST

Alias The Messiah, the Son of God, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Prince of Peace, etc. A notorious leader of an underground liberation movement. The following charges have been levied against him: practicing medicine, winemaking, and food distribution without a license;

- interfering with businessmen in the temple;
- associating with known criminals, radicals, subversives, prostitutes, and street people; and
- claiming to have the authority to make people into God's children.

APPEARANCE: Typical hippie type - long hair, beard, robe, sandals. Hangs around slum areas, few rich friends, often sneaks out into the desert.

BEWARE: This man is extremely dangerous. His insidiously inflammatory message is particularly dangerous to young people who haven't been taught to ignore him yet. He changes men and claims to set them free.

Not the kind of daily fare that most pastors and teachers of the time wanted fed to their congregations. Far too fanatical and extreme for them! But exactly the fare evangelists and visionaries were now serving up.

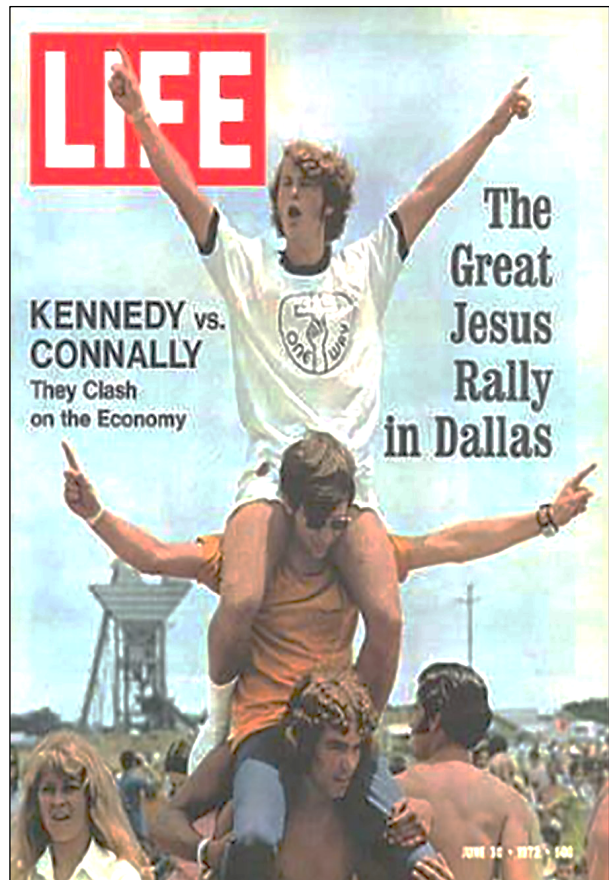
The Jesus Movement Breaks into the Institutional church

In June of 1972, the same month Simon and Garfunkel sang "Bridge over Troubled Waters" to a spellbound crowd at Madison Square Garden, eighty thousand believers converged in Dallas, Texas, for a weeklong gathering called *Explo '72*. It marked the first time "Jesus people" from the counter-culture joined with youth from more traditional Christian churches. Both Billy Graham and Bill Bright were there and helped to stage it.

The revival, which had begun outside the established church, was now breaking into it. For the first time, pastors and teachers were embracing evangelists and visionaries and welcoming them into leadership roles. For a moment - but sadly, only for a moment - the usual "hold each other at arms-length" tension was put aside.

Another Surprise: Jews Begin Turning to Christ

Then, another unexpected bombshell: thousands of Jews began turning to Christ, including Bob Dylan, who, along with the Beatles, personified the revolutionary, counter-culture ferment of the '60s and '70s! The turning point for Dylan came when the girl he'd been living with gave her life to Christ. She immediately moved out, telling him that she was committed to a new set of values founded on the Christian Faith. The strength of her commitment caused Dylan to begin examining for himself the claims of Christ. Dylan



later immortalized her as the "Precious Angel" ...

Who was the one
To show me I was blinded
To show me I was gone.

And that wasn't all! In 1973, Moshe Rosen, born to an orthodox Jewish family, founded Jews for Jesus. Its avowed purpose was to "make Jesus-as-Messiah an unavoidable issue for Jews worldwide." Today, Jews for Jesus employs more than 200 people, and estimates its adherents at 30,000 nationally and 125,000 worldwide. Thousands of Jews have given their lives to Christ through the ministry of Jews for Jesus.

Jerusalem's Capture in 1967 Its Impact on the Revival

I was 26 years old when the Six Day War broke out in the Middle East. I was married with one child and in graduate school, enrolled in the Ph.D. program at the University of California, Davis. Everyone on campus was mesmerized. Classes were cancelled, including one I was teaching. A kind of breathless hush fell over all of us, not just believers, *but everyone*.

We all huddled around our TVs and listened to Abba Eban, Israel's foreign minister, describe hour by hour what was taking place. And when on the sixth and final day of the war Israeli troops broke through to the Western Wall in East Jerusalem, a sense of prophetic fulfillment swept over all of us. Again, not just believers, but everyone! And if you weren't there, you might find that hard to believe. But I was there! And it happened!



Israeli Soldiers at the
Western Wall

Israel restored to nationhood in 1948! And now in 1967, Jerusalem once again her capital! Everyone, whether Christian or not, knew it was an event of staggering significance. For some, its significance was rooted in Matthew 24; for others it was intuitive: a God instilled chord that started vibrating in their hearts as Jerusalem was being captured.

Jerusalem's capture invested the revival, which in 1967 was just getting off the ground, with unmistakable End Days overtones. It's what fostered the sense of urgency that became the hallmark of the entire Jesus Movement. The climax of redemptive history was at hand! The Second Coming was at the door!

- JERUSALEM'S CAPTURE - An Alarm Bell Heralding the Second Coming!

That's how we all saw it! But not most pastors and teachers leading established churches at the time, including evangelical churches! Had it been up to them, the End

Days would never have been made an on-going theme of the revival. And that's exactly what's happening today! Much too risky! Much too black and white! No room for equivocation! Its implications far too consequential! Far too threatening to the good order and stability they craved! But, once again, pastors and teachers back then were not its leaders. They had been brushed aside. Evangelists and visionaries were now in the lead; and for them, preaching the imminent return of Christ was a self-evident proposition.

The Late Great Planet Earth

Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth* was the first block-buster book on prophecy ever to be printed by a secular publishing house. It was released for sale on May 11, 1970, and immediately Americans in record numbers began purchasing it. The New York Times listed it as the most popular non-fiction book of the entire decade, with over 10 million copies sold. By the end of the 1980s, that number had swelled to more than 28 million; and in 1999, an estimated 35 million copies were in print. To date, it has been translated into more than 50 different languages.

Yes, many of the predictions Lindsey made in his book, especially in its first edition, proved to be erroneous; and, yes, the interpretive model Lindsey used to frame it was questionable. But that misses the point altogether. Hal Lindsey's book catapulted End Day prophecy beyond the ranks of the Christian faithful, making the End Days a common topic of conversation for almost everyone

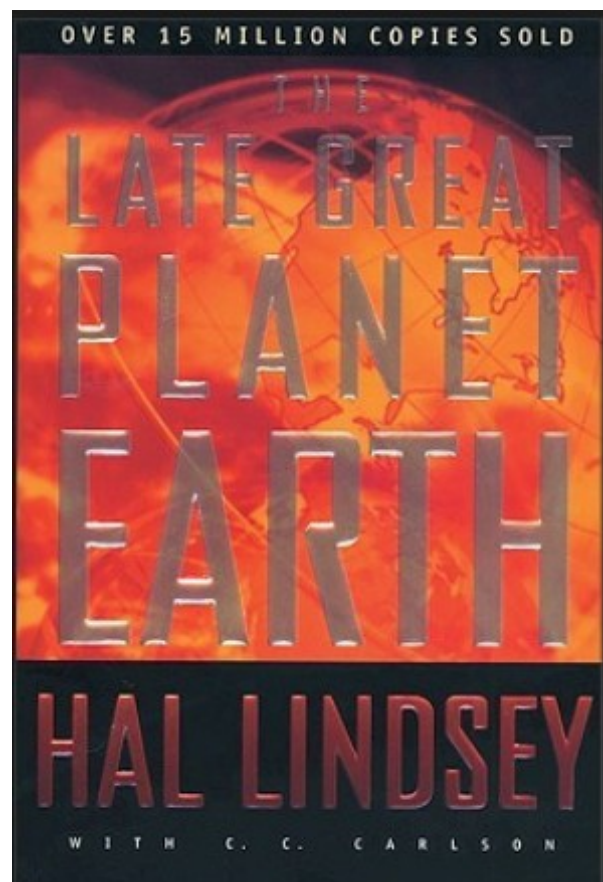
- from around the water cooler at work to college classrooms to street talk. For me, its impact was up close and real: my own sister and her husband turned to Christ while reading Lindsey's book.

The End Days became ...

- the backdrop against which evangelists preached the gospel and
- the call to arms that visionaries proclaimed to the faithful.

The Palpable Reality of God's Word

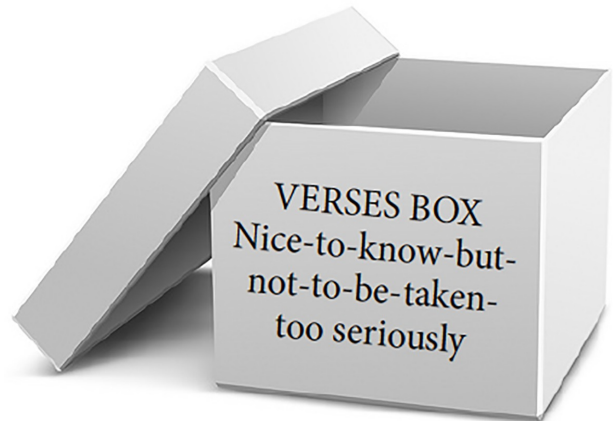
Jerusalem's capture aroused more than mere excitement among the faithful! To see and feel the palpable reality of both Israel's rebirth and Jerusalem's capture was to see and feel the palpable reality of God's word. It brought to life certain commandments and doctrinal imperatives most of us had tucked away in a box of verses labeled "Nice



to know but not to be taken too seriously.”

What happened was simple, but not obvious to anyone who wasn't there: we were driven to an awareness ...

- that God didn't want us to play games with his Word;
- that he didn't want us to pick and choose for ourselves what passages we were being called upon to live out;
- that the Bible included discipleship imperatives that we were taking pretty much with a grain of salt.



In short, what changed for us was our take on God's Word. Each commandment, each verse, each passage of scripture was now infused with import and gravity. It's exactly what had been lost in most established evangelical churches of the time; *and it's exactly what has been lost in today's evangelical church as well!*

The passages we began to walk out included ones that stressed ...

- the importance of personal witnessing: that believers, *all* believers, are
- *required* to share their faith; that it's not a task reserved for a special few;
- that anyone not redeemed by faith in Christ stands in jeopardy of eternal damnation: easy to acknowledge intellectually, but hard to *really* believe and act upon;
- that the gospel is a matter of extreme urgency;
- that God makes demands, not requests;
- that God requires TOTAL commitment;
- that God requires us to embrace hardship and tribulation;
- that the cost of discipleship is exceedingly high;
- that believers need to live in close proximity to one another: that it's impossible to press into Christ alone;
- that we need to take our Christian Faith beyond merely a Sunday morning worship service and a midweek Bible study! We need to proclaim it in the public square.

We began to actually walk out verses that up till then we had hedged about with qualifications, nuances, and various addenda all designed to blunt their plain, literal meaning ...

- Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit ~ Matthew 28:19.
- So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be my disciple ~ Luke 14:33.
- I count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ ~ Philippians 3:8.

- For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad ~ 2 Corinthians 5:10.

Was It Any Wonder!

The change in our take on God’s word seared these verses and others like them into our hearts and minds, especially verses that stressed witnessing. Is it any wonder, then, that we were out daily sharing our faith? Thousands, and tens of thousands, even hundreds of thousands of us! *That’s how the capture of Jerusalem affected us.* I know! I was there! And, quite frankly, I’m a bit fed up with so many pastors and Christian leaders *who weren’t there* playing down the impact of Jerusalem’s capture on the revival. It’s a common assessment in today’s evangelical church. Revisionist history is always written by persons with little or no first-hand knowledge of the events they’re writing about.

We No Longer Felt at Home in This World

The prophetic scriptures eradicated the grey areas in our commitment to Christ and made it more of a black and white proposition. It deepened our walk with God and sharpened our sense of mission and purpose. It pried us loose from the transitory “here and now” and lifted our vision to the eternal. It taught us that this world is not our home; that we are strangers and sojourners.

That’s what impelled so many us to give up our careers, our homes, and our education. That’s why so many of us put our lives on the line, moving into blighted neighborhoods and taking our families with us - all to spread the gospel. It’s a simple truth: the Jesus Movement was galvanized, energized, and steeped in premillennial End Times teachings. And anyone who thinks otherwise wasn’t there.

The End Days became the backdrop against which evangelists preached the gospel and the call to arms that visionaries proclaimed to the faithful.

1985 - Present Pastors and Teachers Regain Control

Sacrifice and Doctrinal Errors Wear Down the Revival

Just as pastors and teachers are not given to dramatic flourishes or a revolutionary call to arms and are therefore unlikely to either start or take the lead in a revival, so too are evangelists and visionaries not given to emphasizing the importance of doctrinal truths or watching out for the protection, safety, and daily well-being of the flock. The result is all but inevitable ...

1. Sooner or later doctrinal errors begin to emerge, often leading to abuses and the formation of cults.
2. As that happens, a revival, any revival, begins to wear down - which is exactly

what took place with the Jesus Movement, beginning in the mid-1980s and extending well into the 1990s - continuing even to the present.

Burn-out

Revivals are costly! Very costly! It's a cost measured in terms of marriages and families put at risk; lost financial solvency, lost friendships; lost educational opportunities; and, of course, lost careers and jobs. The sacrifices are very real! Make no mistake about it. But ...

- just how costly the sacrifices, and
- just how grave their consequences ...

... its measure isn't taken right away!

Time, however, brings it all to light; and when that happens, second thoughts began to surface. Some survive the second thoughts. Others don't - and begin scrambling desperately to regain some of what they've sacrificed - whatever it might be: a neglected marriage, neglected children, a lost job, financial solvency, etc. In short, "burn-out" sets in. And so it was with the Jesus Movement.

My Own Second Thoughts

When in 1972 I resigned a high profile, high-paying job working as a senior staff analyst for the Joint Legislative Budget Committee and pulled my wife away from all her friends and my children away from their quiet neighborhood schools and moved them all to "Berserkley" to start a "Jesus church," the excitement of it all kept buoyed me up for quite some time. Both my wife and I were sure we'd be able to bear the cost; that the sacrifices would be well worth it. But over the next several years, as the consequences of the sacrifices we'd made became clear to us, we were battered by second thoughts. We both got through; but at times it wasn't easy. Moreover, there wasn't a single friend of ours who, during those years, didn't encounter the same second thoughts. Some got through; some didn't.

Doctrinal Errors and Cults

But there was more than just second thoughts. There was a whole array of doctrinal errors that began to crop up as well. For the most part, the errors turned upon five key issues: the deity of Christ, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, short-cut sanctification teachings, demonic deliverance, and the nature and extent of church authority.

SACRIFICE
and Doctrinal Errors

Doctrinal errors almost always lead to abusive excesses; and abusive excesses, in turn, to the formation of cults. And by the mid-1980s - no doubt about it - abuses were becoming widespread throughout the Jesus Movement. Especially abuses that revolved around the issue of church authority! It all served to exacerbate the "burn-out" that was dragging down the revival as the 1980s drew to a close.

Healing and Restoration

"No-holds-barred, damn-the-torpedoes, full-steam-ahead" evangelists and visionaries were no longer able to hold onto the leadership heights they'd commanded during the twenty years from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s.

The call now was for healing and restoration, the stock and trade of pastors and teachers, not evangelists and visionaries. A "steady-as-she-goes" mind-set was once again becoming the dominant theme of most evangelical churches, *including most of the "Jesus churches" that had arisen during the revival years.*



Healing and Restoration

By the mid-1980s, evangelical churches were becoming sanctuaries for the burned-out and distraught refugees of the Jesus Movement; and by the late 1980s and early 1990s, it was being "hawked" to soccer-moms as a secure haven to safeguard their at-risk children. But that was only its "terminus a quo," its starting point. Its "terminus ad quem," its end point, is what we find today: hermetically sealed, walled off fortresses, built to protect believers from the vicissitudes of life and to hold the morally promiscuous and drug addled rabble at bay!

Looking back on it, I'm amazed at how quickly it all occurred ...

- One moment it was Lonnie Frisbee, Duane Pederson, and Jack Sparks; and the next moment it was Bill Gothard and "Basic Youth Conflicts."
- One moment it was Keith Green and "Last Days Ministries;" and the next it was Bill McCartney and the "Promise Keepers."
- One moment it was David Wilkerson and the Times Square Church preaching a message of salvation in Christ to drug dealers, addicts, pimps, and prostitutes; and the next it was Bill Hybels and Willow Creek preaching a "seeker sensitive" message to self-absorbed suburbanites living in the wealthy Chicago suburb of South Barrington, Illinois.

Pastors Now and Pastors Then The Big Difference

By the mid-1990s pastors and teachers were taking over the Jesus churches that had been founded by evangelists and visionaries during the '60s and '70s. For the most part, they were not graduates of reputable seminaries and Bible colleges. They were drawn from *within* the "Jesus churches" themselves. Their "bona fides" were grounded not in any certificate they'd earned, but in their own personal charisma and the goodwill they'd garnered within their respective congregations. Though some of them were articulate and forceful speakers, very few were theologically sophisticated. And therein lies a difference between them and the pastors and teachers who led evangelical churches during the 1950s. Here also is the origin, at least in part, of the biblical

illiteracy that now plagues the evangelical church.

Death of The End Times Vision

It wasn't just "burn-out," abuses, and doctrinal errors that derailed the revival. It was also a dramatic change in historical circumstances.

As the 1980s unfolded, the balance of power between the Soviet Union and the United States shifted dramatically in favor of the United States. It was becoming increasingly apparent that the Soviet Union was on the verge of economic collapse. In 1988, a series of meetings, following up on the Reykjavik Sum-

mit the previous winter, resulted in a nuclear disarmament treaty signed by Reagan and Gorbachev. Three years later, in 1991, the Soviet Union was formally abolished. For the first time since 1917, the hammer and sickle was lowered over the Kremlin and replaced by the Russian tricolor.

Everyone began talking about the rosy future stretching out ahead and how to distribute the so-called "peace dividend" that was expected to be the by-product of cuts in military budgets both here and in Europe. Against that backdrop, the End Days vision, which since 1967 had energized and propelled the Jesus Movement, began to lose its credibility.

It wasn't, however, just the collapse of the Soviet Union that undercut the credibility of the End Days vision. The failure of many of the date-specific predictions Hal Lindsey and others had touted in their publications and conferences also contributed. And that's always the case with date-specific predictions. As recently as 2011, Harold Camping predicted the world would end that year on May 21st. It was a wholly ridiculous prediction that served to put another nail in the coffin of biblical prophecy.

The Bottom Line

With the demise of the End Days vision, evangelists could no longer clothe the gospel message they were preaching with a sense of profound urgency; nor could visionaries use it to proclaim a call to arms to the faithful.

Social and Cultural Change

The church's dramatic turn inwards, away from both evangelism and vision, was also accelerated by several extraordinary changes in American culture, each one of which reflected a profound weakening of the Judeo-Christian consensus.

For those of us in our twenties and thirties at the time - and there aren't many of us left - the events that heralded those changes are unforgettable ...

- In 1969, no-fault divorce legislation was passed and then signed into law by Governor Reagan in California, compromising the sanctity of marriage.
- That same year, 1969, the Stonewall Riots occurred, marking the beginning of



the Gay Rights Movement.

- In 1973, Roe v. Wade was adjudicated by the Supreme Court, making abortion legal throughout the U.S.

The counter-culture youth quickly seized on these and other events like them and began to openly embrace attitudes and behavior that every previous generation had always deemed immoral and self-destructive. Though the Judeo-Christian consensus did not immediately collapse, "cracks in the dam" were becoming patently obvious; and for anyone with even an iota of foresight major breaks were looming.

Postmodern Relativism Legitimizes Immorality

Then, during the late 1980s, immorality began acquiring a modicum of intellectual respectability. The secular elites began grounding it in the "postmodern" thought that had become so very chic in academic circles during the 1960s and early 1970s. Its impact proved decisive; and by the end of the 1980s, moral relativism began exploding into pop culture. The dam had finally collapsed. Flood waters were cascading downstream and inundating every last vestige of the old moral order.

Christians in the Cross Hairs

By the end of the 1990s, *tolerance* and *inclusion* had become the two reigning ethical imperatives, replacing the older Judeo-Christian ethic that had always been the very warp and weft of American life. *And that put evangelical Christians* in the cross hairs of not only avant-garde intellectuals, but an ever-growing number of ordinary Americans as well, especially the youth, especially the youth on college campuses. It was no longer "politic" for an evangelical Christian to claim exclusive legitimacy for his faith or to call certain behavior "sinful" and deserving of condemnation - most especially homosexuality, which in 1973 was no longer listed as a mental illness in the DSM II.

Absolutist claims of any kind were deemed not just wrongheaded and intellectually vacuous, but wicked and evil in their own right. The tables were being turned. What was "evil" was being called "good" and what was "good" was being called "evil."



The Church Turns Inward



Reset the Gospel Message!

Throughout the 1990s, evangelical leaders began searching for ways to make room for the changed worldview that was taking hold in America. The question they posed to themselves was simple:

How to alter the Christian message
to accommodate inclusion
and moral relativism?

Three “solutions” surfaced - with most evangelical pastors buying into at least one of them, including many I've known and walked with for over forty years ...

1. *Shift the focus.* Shift the focus of the Christian message away from *Christ as Savior from sin to Christ as friend, comforter, and mentor.* Stop stressing the egregious nature of sin. In addition, play down the claim that Jesus Christ *alone* is “the way, the truth, and the life.” Don't necessarily speak against it, just don't bring it up. Let it lie dormant. And, finally, curry the favor of the government by sponsoring a whole array of good works projects - from helping to rehab homes in blighted neighborhoods, to park cleanups, to providing housing for the homeless, etc. This is the solution favored by most of the pastors I've known, including even some I've helped to mentor.
2. *Redefinition.* Reinterpret verses and passages in the Bible that define sin and highlight God's wrath. Focus instead on God's love for all mankind - and play up the theme of “injustice,” especially injustices arising from racial and gender discrimination. This is the solution favored by so-called Christian homosexuals and “social justice warriors.” It's especially popular among the youth, most especially the youth on college campuses.
3. *Postmodernism.* Suggest that the Bible is an ongoing narrative that speaks differently to each successive generation of Christians; that, once again, its only real focus is God's love. This is the solution Rob Bell, Tony Jones, Brian McLaren, etc. have favored.



It's hard to imagine any of these errors gaining a foothold in the evangelical church of the 1950s. Pastors and teachers back then were far too squared away doctrinally to allow that kind of mischief to run wild in their churches. It's not that doctrinal errors were unknown; it's that pastors were sufficiently astute to keep their flocks from being seduced by them. The cults that sometimes crystallized around doctrinal errors were quickly marked and their adherents ostracized. But the pastors and teachers of today are not the pastors of the 1950s. Simply put, most pastors today are either too theologically naive to spot them or too frightened to speak out against them.

PRESENT → Stagnation

Pastors and Teachers in Leadership

At present, pastors and teachers are clearly at the helm of the church. "Steady-as-she-goes" is their guiding principle! "Protect the flock" is their lodestar! However, I suspect that unless they're willing to make a few significant changes, their leadership won't last much longer.⁴ *Certainly not among the youth!* We're living through an

era fraught with social and cultural unrest - far more dramatic and profound than even the upheavals that swept through the 1960s and 1970s. Their leadership doesn't resonate to the revolutionary fervor that's in the air.

Most pastors and teachers, as they are wont to do by the very nature of their ministry and personalities, opt for a defensive strategy during times of social and cultural turmoil - *meaning they build higher walls*. They're apt to turn the church into a fortress, fencing off believers from the very souls the Bible calls on them to reach with the gospel. What inevitably follows is a pronounced loss of evangelistic fervor.

That's the story of the evangelical church of today - indeed, of the last twenty to twenty-five years. And has it worked? Absolutely not! Teens and young adults are abandoning the church in record numbers. There's no real evangelism. There may be lots of talk about evangelism, lots of talk about the need to share the gospel; but the bottom line tells the real story. Pathetically few new believers are being baptized. The church is stagnating and congregations are graying. More and more pastors are resorting to outright gimmickry to hold intact their congregations - light and sound shows that rival anything you'd expect to find on a Hollywood set.

Hostility Arrayed against Christians

Hostility arrayed against Christians has become a simple fact of life these days. Back in the 1960s and 1970s, a moral consensus still blanketed America. To be sure, it was under siege; but it had not yet collapsed. Everyone knew where the moral "boundaries" were; and when they were crossed, we all knew it - everyone, even the student radicals of the time. I know! I was there! I was involved!

How involved? I was asked to be the graduate student coordinator for "Students for a Democratic Society," SDS, an activist organization composed of young college students committed to the radical political agenda of the New Left. Herbert Marcuse, Jerry Friedberg, Mario Savio - they all acknowledged the moral boundaries of the Judeo-

In the
Lead
Pastors
and
Teachers

Christian ethic. Sometimes in the breach; but nevertheless acknowledged. Once again, I know. I was there. I lived through it.

Not so much anymore! Our country is being torn apart by a culture-war that has left our youth adrift in an ethical void unparalleled in our nation's history. And here's what's truly tragic: the awful nature of that war is not fully grasped even by parents whose sons and daughters are being destroyed by it, including Christian parents. All too often, they console themselves with the barren hope that "they'll grow out of it." Don't count on it.

Notwithstanding all the radical hype of the 1960s and '70s, no one back then thought to vilify Christians. Yes, there were many persons who rejected the gospel message and who mocked Christians for witnessing to them. But out-front Christians were not socially blacklisted or threatened with violence. Government sanctions reflecting an anti-Christian bias? Not a hint of it! Not even a faint whiff! Nothing! Once again: I know! I was there! I was at UC Berkeley! A student! On campus!

But today there is a war being waged against Christians ...

1. today, believers are being socially blacklisted and threatened with violence;
2. today, legislation has been enacted that reflects a decided anti-Christian bias;
3. today, executive regulations are being imposed to curtail the spread of the gospel.

And what's been the response of most pastors and teachers?

Withdraw from the public square
and build higher walls!

The Scandal of Biblical Illiteracy among Christians

Another feature that goes into defining the state of today's church is the biblical illiteracy that has become so commonplace among believers. Though most pastors of the 1950s were decidedly risk-averse and inordinately given to routine and stability, they nevertheless taught solid biblical truth - at least the majority of them. As a result, most believers at the time were not ignorant of important Christian doctrine.

That is no longer true!

Following the demise of the Jesus Movement after the mid-1980s, many of the pastors and teachers who took over were theologically naive. Very few were adequately trained graduates of reputable bible schools and seminaries. The results have not been good.



For the time will come when they will no longer endure sound doctrine.

~2Timothy 4:3

Several years ago, the Gallup Organization, a research firm well-known and widely acclaimed for its accurate surveys, looked into the level of Biblical literacy among Americans. Some of what their findings revealed are actually humorous, though at the same time unsettling: 12% of the respondents believed that Joan of Arc was Noah's wife; over 50% said that Sodom and Gomorrah were husband and wife; and, to top it all off, a "considerable number" of the respondents were convinced that the Sermon on the Mount was preached by Billy Graham.



Perhaps that's to be expected among Americans generally, most of whom are secular and don't attend church. But what about *professing* Christians? What about professing *evangelical* Christians? Gallup's survey disclosed that even after narrowing the focus of the survey to *Christians only* and then to *evangelical Christians only* the results were not significantly different: *the level of biblical literacy was abysmal.*

George Barna, an equally skilled demographer, corroborated Gallup's findings with a survey of his own: his survey found that 82% percent of all Americans believe that the phrase "God helps those who help themselves" is found in the Bible. But what about evangelical Christians? Yes, evangelicals did fare better, *but by only 1%*. Other findings from the Barna survey are just as mind-boggling, including one showing that a majority of evangelicals believe the Bible teaches that "the most important purpose God calls on believers to pursue is the care of his family."

Both surveys lend credence to an alarm that Albert Mohler, one of the church's most esteemed theologians, has been sounding for at least thirteen years: *biblical literacy among evangelical Christians has sunk to an all-time low.*

He first began sounding the alarm with an article he wrote entitled "The Scandal of Biblical Illiteracy." He had it published in the Christian Post in October of 2005. In it he lamented: "Choose whichever statistic or survey you like, the general pattern is the same: America's Christians know less and less about the Bible." He went on to ask pointedly, "How can (Christians) be biblically shaped in their understanding of human sexuality when they believe Sodom and Gomorrah are a married couple?" Is it any wonder, he mused, that "Christians show a growing tendency to compromise on the issue of homosexuality?"



Albert Mohler

But it's not just at the congregational level that biblical illiteracy is taking hold. It's also taking hold at the seminary level. In 1992, Professor David Wells, published a thought-provoking and, at the time, very controversial book, *No Place for Truth*. It was subtitled *Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* In it he warned that biblical illiteracy was becoming not just an occasional failing at the congregational level, but also a kind of zeitgeist among students at the seminary level - a state of mind that discounts the importance of biblical theology.

Dr. Wells tells of a discussion he had with a student enrolled in one of the classes he teaches at Gordon Conwell Seminary: "Introduction to Basic Theology." It's required of all in-coming freshmen. At the end of the first day of class, the student approached Dr. Wells and asked, "Why is this class required of me? I have no interest in it. I'm pursuing a degree in Christian counseling and this class seems irrelevant." As it turned out, many other students enrolled in the class thought exactly the same. It was this very encounter that prompted a shocked and troubled David Wells to write his book *No Place for Truth*.

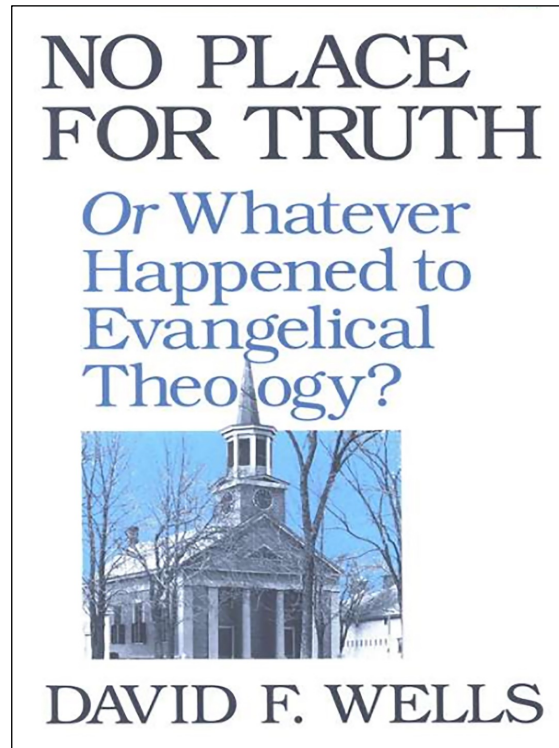
The biblical illiteracy that today plagues the evangelical church makes it all but impossible to call believers into the real meaning of the Christian life - all but impossible to pry them loose from their pursuit of the "good life." For many evangelicals, that's what being a Christian is all about, the "good life."

- That we are called to fix our eyes on the eternal, not the temporal;
- that we are not to invest ourselves in the "here and now";
- that we are "strangers and sojourners" in this world;
- that in making this world our home and settling down in it, we compromise our witness and undermine our walk with God ...

... very little of that is being taught. And those who think otherwise are only kidding themselves.

A Change of Direction

As early as the mid-1990s, I began to notice a startling change in the theological direction of the evangelical church. More and more pastors were opting for a Calvinist take on the scriptures. It marked a radical shift in the theological direction of the church.



too Busy
With Life

Calvinism had not been part of the warp and weft of the Jesus Movement. *Not at all! Not even along its periphery.* To be quite frank, many of the evangelists and visionaries back then were too theologically naive to clearly spell out the distinguishing characteristics of Calvinism.

What's for sure, however, is that none of the leaders I knew during the revival years believed that only a privileged few can be redeemed; that the rest of mankind has been predestined by God to eternal damnation. No. We witnessed to everyone without ever thinking that doing so might be pointless. We didn't share the gospel simply because doing so is an ethical imperative. Never! We shared it believing that no one lies beyond the pale of possible redemption. No one! Our mantra was "Go wherever! Do whatever! Never give up!"

But that has changed! Calvinism is fast becoming a preferred take on the scriptures. Especially among pastors of unaffiliated, non-denominational churches. Surprisingly, that's true of many pastors who today are leading "Jesus churches" founded back in the 1960s and '70s. Mostly by Arminian leaning evangelists and visionaries! Calvinism has even gained a foothold among some Baptist churches - including Southern Baptist churches.

Some have turned to Calvinism sincerely believing that a correct reading of the scriptures warrants it. These are the "true believers" - even to the point of locking into "limited atonement." For others, it's not really driven by deep-seated theological convictions. It's simply a refreshing turn back to the scriptures.

For many pastors, Calvinism is simply a reassuring pushback against the postmodern thought that today is an American frame of reference. Its rigorous logic and internal consistency safeguards them, so they think, from being swept into a sea of relativism. And let's be honest: it's a credible fear. After all, some evangelicals have completely surrendered to postmodern thought. Witness Brian McClaren, Tony Jones, Doug Pagett, and the entire "emergent church movement."

But that reassurance has come at a cost. Calvinism makes evangelism superfluous. For Calvinists, the drama of personal salvation is a fiction - because the outcome has already been determined. Yes, many Five Point Calvinists make a real effort to underscore the need for evangelism, but not because it will make any genuine difference in the lives of those they're evangelizing. Only because it's an all too obvious moral imperative woven into the fabric of the New Testament!

A Small Dose of Reality

For most evangelicals these days, the public square is fraught with danger. Why go there to preach a message ...



A change in direction

- that's likely to elicit hostility?
- perhaps even actual violence?
- perhaps even criminal sanctions?

Why? Really! Why?

Is there any real need to take that risk? Especially if it amounts to nothing more than preaching to the already chosen and the irrevocably damned? Ultimately, isn't it all in God's hands? Why not just focus on taking care of ourselves and building higher walls? If the lost wish to hear the gospel, let them come to the "box." Won't God guide them to it? Let's be honest here. Calvinism plays into the hands of anyone looking for an excuse to avoid taking the gospel into the public square? Of course it does!

Another Small Dose of Reality

Today's evangelical church has become a walled-off fortress. Evangelicals are in lock-down mode. It's not just that evangelism has been pushed to the back-burner; it's been pushed off the stove altogether. Yes, there are exceptions, but that's exactly what they are - exceptions! Here's the truth ...

Calvinism perfectly
suits a walled-off church.

The Alarm Clock Has Been Turned Off

Beginning in June of 1967, an alarm clock began ringing. Loudly! Incessantly! Not just within the Christian community, but throughout the entire nation. Everyone, it seemed, could hear it. It rang throughout the entire twenty-year span of the Jesus Movement. It was ear-splitting. There was no escaping it.

It was Jerusalem's capture by
the Jews in the Six Day War.

For most evangelicals, it set a seal on Israel's restoration in 1948. It confirmed for them the prophetic significance of that event: that it heralded the Second Coming and the end of redemptive history! That time was short. Very short!

Unquestionably, the Jesus Movement was steeped in a premillennial eschatology. That's what infused it with its note of extreme urgency. An urgency that's totally missing in today's church. And I do mean totally.

The Alarm Clock Stops Ringing

The alarm clock, however, stopped ringing sometime during the mid to late 1980s. Partly because the Cold War ended, ushering in an era of peace and security. *An era in which pastors and teachers thrive and evangelists and visionaries wither.*

But also because of the burn-out plaguing so many believers as the Jesus Movement spun to a close in the late 1980s.

- A blaring alarm clock is far too disruptive and unsettling for believers in need of healing and restoration.
- It's far too unnerving for soccer moms looking for a safe haven to shelter their at-risk children.
- It's far too threatening to the good order and stability that most pastors and teachers seem always to require.



The Alarm clock has been turned off

I remember vividly the first time I caught sight of just how "turned off" the alarm clock was. Back several years ago, Dr. Earl Radmacher, past President of Western Theological Seminary in Portland, Oregon, invited me to speak at a conference of Christian leaders on the meaning of the word "power" in Romans 1:16. I had sent him an article several weeks earlier arguing that what Paul meant in Romans 1:16 was not God's intrinsic power, but the "power of God to save." It was that article that prompted his invitation.

The next year I was invited back to speak on the End Days. A strikingly different topic. It was held on the campus of the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Dallas, Texas. After I finished speaking, I asked the pastors there, "How many of you teach on the End Days in your own churches?" It was a good-sized audience and my teaching had been well received. I expected, therefore, that many of them would raise their hands. To my surprise, not a single hand was raised. Teaching on the End Days, they told me, would unnerve their congregations, perhaps even putting their jobs in jeopardy. That's honesty! Some of them went further, arguing that the whole topic is no longer credible in light of the many erroneous date-specific predictions made back in the 1970s and early 1980s.

But there was even more: an eschatological claim emerged in the 1990s to *justify* turning it off: *amillennialism*. Amillennialism is a take on the prophetic scriptures that strips Israel's rebirth and Jerusalem's capture of any spiritual significance. The rebirth of Israel amounts to little more than a fluke of history.

And, of course, that was no coincidence. Calvinism was already changing the theological direction of the evangelical church. And amillennialism is its kissing cousin. To be sure, not all Calvinists buy into amillennialism. Charles Spurgeon in the 19th Century rejected amillennialism as does John MacArthur today. Surprisingly, even R. C. Sproul has called it into question. The 1967 Six Day War stunned him. On the last day of the war, as the Jews broke through to the Temple Mount, he phoned a Calvinist friend and blurted out breathlessly, "What's the significance of all this? Jesus said that Jerusalem would be trodden down by the gentiles until the times of the gentiles have ended. What does all this mean?" His friend, a dyed-in-the-wool amillennialist, replied, "I am going

to have to rethink my take on the whole matter of Israel and the End Days."

Yes, a few Calvinists do indeed repudiate the claims of amillennialism; and yes, those few are hardly insignificant nobodies. Quite the contrary, they're theological giants in the Calvinist world. Nevertheless, most Calvinists are convinced that amillennialism is imbedded in Reformed doctrine.

The alarm clock
has indeed been turned off.

Burn-out, the need for healing and restoration, erroneous predictions, historical circumstances, and a resurgent amillennialism have all conspired to turn it off.



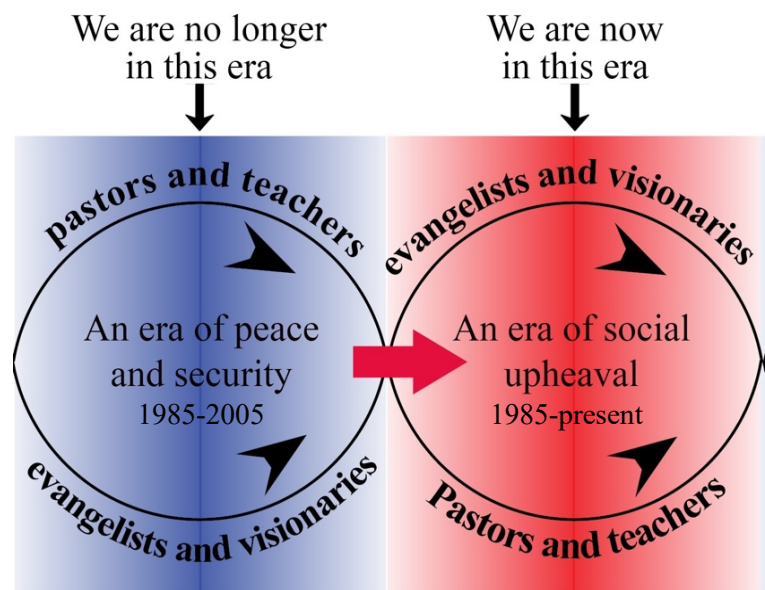
An Era of Social and Cultural Turmoil

There's no doubt that America is today caught fast in an era of social and cultural turmoil. Far more radical and profoundly dangerous than the struggles that gripped the country back in the 1960s and '70s!

What we have now is a genuine *culture war* - a "kulturkampf." It's not a war taking place along the margins of American society. What's at issue today is the Judeo-Christian consensus. Basically, the glue that has always held Americans together! The ethical principles that have historically provided the basis for working through whatever conflicts have arisen among us! Even during the Civil War, with all the terrible carnage each side inflicted on the other, the Judeo-Christian ethic was never what was at issue. Quite the contrary. What was at issue was the failure to live up to that ethic.

The Shift Is Coming

With revolution in the air, a shift in the leadership of the church is imminent - a shift



A shift in leadership is taking place

from pastors and teachers on the one hand to evangelists and visionaries on the other. It happened back in the 1960s and '70s, and it will happen again today - especially among the youth. Indeed, for those with eyes to see, it's already happening. The evidence of that shift is right in front of us, though most pastors and teachers don't have eyes to see it. All they see are the doctrinal missteps that have followed in its wake. But as real as those missteps are, they shouldn't cause any of us to overlook what's actually taking place - once again, a shift in leadership - *with the youth following the newly emerging leaders and the rest staying behind in stagnant, graying congregations.*

Bill Johnson ***A Harbinger of What's Coming***

Whatever you may think of Bill Johnson, founder of Bethel Church in Redding, California, there's no doubt whatsoever that he has tapped into the revolutionary fervor that so many believers these days are resonating to, *especially young believers.*

Do I think his teachings line up with scripture? Certainly not all of them! And I haven't been remiss in pointing out where I think he's straying from the truth, especially to a good many of my friends who have aligned themselves with him - some of whom, as a result, have accused me of being divisive and mean-spirited.



Bill Johnson

My purpose here, however, is not to pick through Bill Johnson's doctrinal errors. I have only one simple point to get across: Bill Johnson reflects the same kind of shift in church leadership that took place back in the 1960s and '70s. He's a visionary who has committed himself to what he calls revival. In his very own words: *"I moved to Bethel Church in Redding in 1996 after the leadership there unanimously supported my one condition: I was born for revival and would pursue revival - this was not negotiable."*

Pastors and teachers may rail against his claims from behind the walls of their locked down fortresses, but for many believers, especially young believers, doing so seems weak and pathetic. For many, it smacks of nothing more than envy. It's unattractive! It's unappealing! Quite frankly, it's a "turn-off" for most believers, especially, once again, for young believers.

Get Used to It

Bill Johnson is among the first of many others like him to come. Che Ahn and Lou Engels are already pulling together large followings of young believers. Just two years ago, Lou Engels held a rally in the Los Angeles Coliseum that drew 56,000 mostly young Christians. Other events like it have also drawn large crowds of young believers

- much like Explo '72 during the halcyon days of the Jesus Movement. But unlike Explo '72, the media are paying scant attention to it.

All three, Johnson, Ahn, and Engles, are closely linked to the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR), a loose-knit ministry composed of Christian leaders espousing an aberrant End Times vision. A vision that's perhaps best articulated by Johnny Enlow in his book *The Seven Mountains Prophecy*.⁵



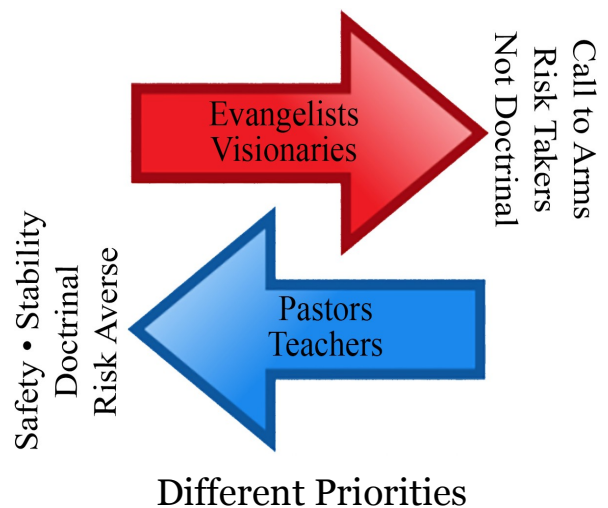
Yes, all three are off-base doctrinally. And in some instances, seriously so. And will the others who follow them be any more likely to make correct doctrine a primary concern? Not really. It didn't happen back in the 1960s and '70s, and it's not likely to happen these days either. It's simply not in the makeup of evangelists and visionaries to pay much attention to doctrine. Especially when they're "on a run." Especially when their followings begin to grow - and the excitement of a genuine movement begins to take hold in their hearts!

Far Worse

The slide into doctrinal error this time is likely to be far worse than back during the Jesus Movement? Why? Because of the biblical illiteracy that now afflicts the church. Back in the 1960s and '70s, biblical illiteracy was not the plague that it is today. But today, it's exactly that: a plague. That means believers these days - *both followers and leaders* - are far more susceptible to serious doctrinal errors than back then. Moreover, it's not likely that those errors will be restricted to just a few denominations and church networks. Denominational walls have broken down, making the proliferation of serious errors far more uninhibited today than back during the Jesus Movement.

A Simple Fact I've Observed over the Years

A working relationship between pastors and teachers on the one hand and evangelists and visionaries on the other would go a long way toward helping to keep an actual revival from straying off course into a "doctrinal ditch." However, that's a "rara avis," a rare bird. It doesn't happen that often. The two usually don't work well together. Neither trusts the other. Both prefer their leadership to stand on its own, without any real input from the other.



And it's not simply that their ministries and callings differ, though that, of course, is true. It's also because their basic personalities so frequently clash. It's a simple fact obvious to anyone who's "toiled" in church ministry for very long: the kinds of persons attracted to pastoring and teaching are *very* different from the kinds attracted to evangelism and vision.

1. The one often believes the other is incapable of seizing the moment; that they're sticks-in-the-mud; that they can't see the forest for the trees; that they're introverted and inordinately cautious and wedded to doctrinal purity.
2. The other believes their counterparts are careless risk-takers, with little or no concern for the well-being of the flock; unable and perhaps even unwilling to lend any real importance to doctrinal accuracy; likely to send believers off on "wild goose" chases that in the end produce little more than broken dreams and broken hearts.

It's almost as if the two - pastors and teachers on the one hand and evangelists and visionaries on the other - head up ministries that are mutually exclusive - *some might say inherently so*. That's not the way God intends it; nevertheless, it's what so frequently occurs.

"*Don't bother me,*" seems to be what the one is forever saying to the other. And there's a lot of actual history to back up that take - even in my own experience.

In the Fall of 1973, Doug Krieger, my fellow co-pastor in Berkeley, was called out of town for several months. In his absence, I decided to invite a pastor/teacher from another church to help out. Our church had grown enormously. We were packed out, with newly baptized believers crowding into our "Jesus houses" almost every day. He was an excellent teacher, a graduate from a well-known and highly reputable seminary.

Doug, however, called me from the East Coast to warn me against inviting him into leadership. His warning was simple and straight to the point: "*Water and oil don't mix.*" But I was desperate for help - and was convinced that I'd be able to work with him. So, I pressed ahead with the invitation.

As it turned out, Doug was right. It wasn't long before the pastor/teacher I'd invited into leadership was insisting that we slow down our evangelism, claiming that we were growing too fast; that we had become too radical; that we were spending far too much time in the streets sharing the gospel with the lost. Humorously, some of his concerns focused on a "jug band" we'd organized for our Friday evening outreaches. "Jug bands produce jug people," he told the congregation.

Eventually, his constant harangues wore us down. He managed to pull leaders from other affiliated churches over to his side. Together, they accused us of "of being outside



DON'T
BOTHER
ME

the Spirit's flow" and of "spoiling the all-important unity." Doug and I were thrown into a state of shock. Dismayed and worn down, we decided the best course for us was to leave Berkeley!

The new leaders sold all the Jesus houses we'd established; dissolved the "jug band;" pretty much eliminated all evangelism; and sold the coffee bar where we had been gathering for our worship services. Over the next several years, with evangelists and visionaries now gone, the church lapsed into an irreversible stagnation. It became a haven for gray hairs and introverts. All this at

the very height of the Jesus Movement. Hard to imagine! Doug's warning has haunted me over the last 45 years: "You can't mix "oil and water." Pastors and teachers should be able to work together with evangelists and visionaries; but they hardly ever do.

Young believers are fleeing established evangelical churches headed up by pastors and teachers. I'm sorry if saying that hurts; but it's a fact, a simple truth that we need to muster the courage to acknowledge. It's not that young believers can't be taught the importance of doctrinal truth. That suggestion is little more than a red herring. That's not what they're fleeing from. What they're really fleeing from is the *absence of a transcendent overarching vision that lends meaning to their lives and lifts them out of the "here and now."* A vision that injects hope and the promise of victory in a world that's coming

apart at its seams. A vision that unites them into an organic whole that's palpably real – that they can feel and touch. A vision that gives them *a mission they can get their arms around* - something more than merely sitting through a Sunday morning sermon and attending a mid-week "sit and talk" conflagration. A vision that challenges them to *actually engage*, not just with their mouths, but with their hands and feet as well; a vision that actually puts them in charge of whole ministries, ministries that for the most part are committed to evangelism.⁶ Not just logistical tasks: ushering, organizing the church calendar, handling the finances - little more than props to support the leaders and help them to "keep on with the keeping on." A vision that promises to empower them! That assures them that they haven't been left alone and defenseless in a world that looks more and more like it's being overrun by demonic hordes.

And that's exactly what Bill Johnson, Lou Engles, Che Ahn, and others like them are propagating. Simply put, they're saying that the end of redemptive history is at hand;



Hard to make them fit

that we're standing on the cusp of the Second Coming. And *they point to Israel's re-birth to prove it*. They're telling their followers that the Holy Spirit is even now empowering believers with the supernatural authority they need to prepare the way for Christ's return; that, so empowered, the church will "bring heaven down to earth" - with Christ sitting as king over the whole world and with the church ruling alongside him. That's their vision in a nutshell. And it's a powerful vision. Not doctrinally correct at all; but still powerful. Still appealing. It's a vision that calls on their followers to actually *engage*; to "learn how to heal the sick; how to speak a prophetic word over the lost; how to bind demons; etc.

It's especially important to note that Bill Johnson has not established his "School of the Supernatural" merely to give his followers goose bumps or to use for their own personal approbation. It's meant to empower them *for a mission*: to take the earth for Christ. And that distinction is critically important.

It's a doctrinally off-base postmillennial vision that's based largely on the teaching of C. Peter Wagner. It's the kind you might expect from evangelists and visionaries who refuse input from pastors and teachers.

But pastors and teachers are at fault as well. Perhaps even more so. They refuse the help of evangelists and visionaries. They think they can cast vision without drawing on actual visionaries for help. But they can't. *They don't know how*. The vision they cast is usually pathetic. It often amounts to little more than a constant barrage of "That's not right!" "That's wrong!" "That's destructive!" "That's dangerous." A relentless salvo of disapproval, deprecation, and suspicion! All proclaimed from atop the walls of their fortress churches!

That's not vision! What they teach may be right, but it's also wrong. It's not the whole story. It's just the down-side of the story. The up-side is missing. Unless pastors and teachers can muster the courage to invite evangelists and visionaries into a real partnership with them, they'll never get it right. The historical circumstances for revival are at hand; but churches that make no room for evangelists and visionaries - *on an equal footing* - will miss it altogether. Exactly what happened back in the 1960s and '70s. Exactly what Pastor Lee Toms confessed to me so many years ago. Did his church cease to exist? No. Not at all. It was simply bypassed.

Time to Make Some Changes

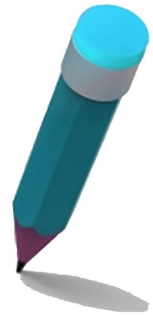
The Bible clearly reveals that pastors, teachers, evangelists, and visionaries should work together. If they don't, Paul tells us, the church won't measure up to "the fullness of the stature of Christ." What I intend to do in this my final section is sketch out what can be done both to facilitate revival and to keep it from falling into a doctrinal ditch.

I begin with established evangelical churches headed up by pastors and teachers. I honestly believe that the chance of success is better starting with them than with evangelists and visionaries. Evangelists and visionaries have already worked up a

"head of steam." It will be hard to pull them back from the vision they've already cast, however fraught with error it might be. A good many pastors and teachers, on the other hand, have a sneaking suspicion that "things aren't working out," and, as a result, they may be ready to make some significant changes.

And that's not all. Many millennials and gen-zers come from broken homes and, as a result, suffer from wounds that are far more effectively handled by pastors and teachers than by evangelists and visionaries. Bill Johnson, Che Ahn, and Lou Engles, though they garner large followings of young believers, will eventually find that the ministries and churches they establish are unable to hold them in the long-run. They aren't equipped to minister effectively to the stubborn, nettlesome problems that the millennials and gen-zers are bringing with them. Here we have another good reason for beginning with churches led by pastors and teachers.

*Time To
Change*



Axiomatic

Here's an important axiomatic principle: pastors and teachers are unable during times of social and cultural turmoil to reach the lost; they don't reso-

sonate to the revolutionary fervor that's so much in the air. Their churches seem pathetically irrelevant and out-of-touch. On the other hand, evangelists and visionaries aren't able to hold the hordes of followers they draw to themselves. There's too little focus on sanctification. The personal needs and shortcomings plaguing their lives – addictions, marriage difficulties, child rearing, obsessive fears, etc. - aren't adequately dealt with. A pretty good reason for pastors, teachers, evangelists, and visionaries to overcome their mutual antipathies and learn how to work together effectively. It's exactly what Ephesians Four spells out but is so infrequently put into practice.

It's all but

AXIOMATIC

Acknowledging Their Need for Change

Obviously, pastors and teachers first need to acknowledge their need for change; that the churches they're overseeing are in trouble, plagued with paralyzing stagnation. I'm not going to cite the data that indicates just how abysmal church growth has been over the last fifteen to twenty years - the ever-growing number of "Dones" who have dropped out of the church and who have no intention of returning. That kind of information is readily available to anyone who wants to look into it for himself.

Yes, there are a few churches that are increasing in numbers; but, by and large, they're

managing to do so only by "sheep stealing," not by winning and baptizing new converts. That's especially true among many newly established Reformed churches. It's largely a zero-sum game; and if it's the entire "pie" that's shrinking - *and it is* - then it's actually a negative-sum game.

For the most part, it's millennials who are abandoning the church; and as gen-zers graduate from high school and enroll in college or get a job, they too will drop away from the church. In short, it's our youth that we're losing. I sincerely believe that if we're humble enough to learn how Bill Johnson, Che Ahn, and Lou Engels have cast a vision that taps into the revolutionary fervor that millennials and gen-zers are resonating to.

That things aren't going right! Pastors and teachers must acknowledge the truth of this assessment. It's the foundational sin qua non of moving forward.

Acknowledge the Need for Evangelists and Visionaries

Next, pastors and teachers must acknowledge that they need to cast vision *and that, by and large, they're unable to do so*; that without the help of evangelists and visionaries, it won't get done. They must also agree to invite them into leadership and give them an equal voice in the decisions that are made. In short, pastors and teachers on the one hand and evangelists and visionaries on the other must learn how to work together; and that won't be easy. It will test everyone's spiritual maturity. Sound biblical doctrine not only should but actually *can* be married to evangelism and vision - and I mean "no holds barred go-for-broke" evangelism and the vision that infuses it with a sense of urgency.

The Vision

No doubt the exact vision that's cast will embody many of the same features Bill Johnson, Che Ahn, and Lou Engels have used in the vision they've cast. However, the nature of some of those features will be decidedly different and will reflect the doctrinal input of pastors and teachers. Put another way: the framework will look the same, but what it contains will be different, meaning it will be far more grounded in Biblical truth.

- It will be a transcendent vision, one that fastens a believer's eyes on the eternal, not on the "here and now."
- It will make the salvation of the lost the overriding mission of the church. It will stress that this earth is a great sinking ship; that nothing can be done to save her; that she's already foundering; that the task of the church is not to save the ship, but to get the passengers off it and into Jesus Christ, the lifeboat
- It will lay out the inevitability of conflict in this life, especially demonic conflict.
- It will infuse a sense of urgency, meaning it will restart the "alarm clock."
- It will call on believers to make sacrifices and lay out the rewards ("brabeion") for those who do.
- It will underscore the need to be empowered, meaning it will highlight the use of healing and other signs and wonders that verify the authenticity of the gospel.

- It will engage young believers and get them involved in evangelism at the very start of their Christian walk.

Bill Johnson, Che Ahn, Lou Engels, etc. have cast a *postmillennial* vision, a vision that makes social reformation the mission of the church, not the salvation of the lost. That's a primary difference between the vision they cast and the one we must cast. Theirs is a vision that will eventually fail. The church is not commissioned to revamp social and cultural institutions. And any attempt to do so will result in disappointment and cynicism.

The Doctrine of Limited Atonement

Can we be honest here? The need to preach the gospel is seriously muted whenever it's taught as nothing more than an ethical imperative. That's not enough. After all, why preach the gospel to the already chosen and the irrevocably damned? Especially when witnessing in the public square puts a person at risk of inciting hostility and perhaps physical harm. Especially when doing so threatens a person's job, his family, and his standing in the community.

Actually, I have never met a full-blown five-point Calvinist. Usually when pressed, they back off from limited atonement. When we shared the gospel back during the Jesus Movement, we did so believing that it was not a futile effort. I find it humorous when a Calvinist claims the gospel can be preached effectively while believing it's nothing more than an ethical imperative. The truth of "their evangelism" is usually quite revealing: it's almost always non-existent. Why? Because whether unconsciously or not, whether inadvertently or not, they slough off evangelism by falling back on limited atonement. Keep your Calvinism, but back off from limited atonement.

Restarting the Alarm Clock

It's vital that we restart the alarm clock; that we forthrightly acknowledge that we're living in the End Days - *and use Israel's rebirth in 1948 and Jerusalem's capture in 1967 to prove it*. That's what we did back during the Jesus Movement. And it infused the entire revival with a sense of terrible urgency, a sense that's entirely missing in today's established churches. especially Reformed⁷ churches. It's not sufficient to simply declare that we're living in the End Days. A declaration alone is insufficient to shake believers awake from their Laodicean slumber. Many amillennialists these days are willing to acknowledge that at the very least Israel's restoration does indeed herald the End Times. It's the latest tweak they've made in their interpretation of the prophetic scriptures. We can work with that. But whatever, the clock must be restarted and the alarm turned back on.

Revival is Coming Or Call It Whatever You Want

Let's not quibble here. It's far too late in the day to indulge in that kind of nonsense and call it worthwhile. The social and cultural upheaval that today is rocking our nation is not likely to get better. That means a shift in church leadership is inevitable. In fact, as

I've stressed before, it's already underway.

Pastors and teachers leading established evangelical churches can either bury their heads in the sand and ignore it or they can face up to the challenge it poses, make the appropriate corrections, and exploit the potential those changes provide for reaping a vast harvest of souls.

I hope pastors and teachers will mull over what I've written in this article and take to the Lord. Yes, it's very seldom that revival breaks out in established churches. Usually they're too wedded to the status quo. But there's no iron clad rule written in stone that prevents that from actually happening. It can indeed happen if pastors and teachers awaken to their own short-comings and acknowledge their need for evangelists and visionaries.

FOOTNOTES

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- ¹ An accurate exegesis of Matthew 24 clearly indicates otherwise. Just such an exegesis is provided in my book *Facing the Storm*. You can purchase it on Amazon.com. [Press this link.](#)
 - ² I have used the word “visionary” in place of the word “prophet” here in my article. That’s because the word “prophet” is often used in certain Christian circles in a very truncated sense. A sense that does not comport with Paul’s meaning in Ephesians Four. Paul has much more in mind in Ephesians Four than simply (1) predictions of what lies ahead in the future or (2) God’s plan for a specific individual’s life. The prophetic ministry is meant by God to raise vision; to remind believers that God’s mission for the church extends far past personal concerns and needs. It revolves around the ultimate purpose and mission of the church. It’s the “Big Picture.”
 - ³ Though clearly there are some exceptions: David Wilkerson’s Times Square Church is a good example. David Wilkerson was a visionary. Though he founded Times Square Church during an era of social turmoil, it not only survived into the following era of peace and security, it actually thrived.
 - ⁴ Once again, it’s not that their churches will cease to exist; it’s that they will stagnate.
 - ⁵ It’s not the purpose of this article to look into this particular error or any of the other errors NAR is guilty of perpetrating. I briefly discuss the *Seven Mountains Prophecy* in my book *Facing the Storm*.
 - ⁶ It’s my considered opinion that young believers need first to prove themselves in evangelism before being disciplined into other ministries. Evangelism is a proving ground for faithfulness; and any young believer who draws back from sharing the gospel and actually becoming a soul-winner will *not* be up to the challenges that he will inevitably encounter in the teaching, pastoring, and prophetic ministries. Paul’s instruction to Timothy is well worth noting: “*Do the work of an evangelist*” (2 Timothy 4:5). No doubt, Timothy was a bit hesitant and introverted. But Paul knew that his ministry needed to be proven in evangelism. We say that the salvation of the lost is the church’s single most important mission; and, yet, so few evangelical leaders these days are themselves effective soul-winners.
 - ⁷ Reformed churches are Calvinist churches.