

7 Extreme Teachings of the Modern Church

Almost everywhere I go, believers are attempting to apply the kingdom message to influence the cultural mountains, which are described as the major areas we need to influence in order to transform society: politics, economics, education, family, religion, arts/entertainment and science.

Consequently, with every move of God there are always extremes and/or misunderstandings. Of course, I write this in the context of my own local-church-centered lens, in which I advocate for the supremacy of Christ manifest through the centrality of the local church in each city. (Ephesians 1:22-23 calls the church the “fullness of him who fills everything in every way” [NIV].)

The following are some of the extremes used today in the teaching of the kingdom of God:

1. The marketplace believer is a king while the church leader is merely a priest. There have been many marketplace believers who have separated the priestly ministry of Christ from His kingly ministry into two halves: The kings are the marketplace leaders, and the priests are the full-time church leaders (for example, pastors). One of the outcomes of this teaching is to elevate the marketplace leader over the local church pastor since a king has more authority on the earth than a priest. This teaching also causes the focus of each role to be dualistic; the priest should focus on spiritual things and the king on earthly things.

I totally disagree with this bifurcation, since all believers are called priests in 1 Peter 2:9; all are called to be kings and priests according to Revelation 1:6 (or a kingdom of priests); and all are called to reign as kings in the

Amplified Version of Romans 5:17. Furthermore, all marketplace leaders should be spiritual and led by the Spirit, and all full-time church leaders should exercise authority on the earth as kings in order to manifest His kingdom on earth.

2. The true church is in the religion mountain. I already dealt with this in a previous article, "Four Different Views Regarding the Church and Cultural Mountains." However, in my opinion, the body of Christ is the temple of the mountain of the Lord that is above every other cultural mountain (Is. 2:2; Mic. 4:1) and as the representative of the kingdom of God is called to transform every other cultural mountain as part of the cultural mandate (Gen. 1:28; Matt. 28:19).

Many teach that the church is just one of the seven cultural mountains (part of the religion mountain), which then puts all believers in the same category as the Mormons, Buddhists and Muslims!

3. The believer only focuses on the marketplace and jettisons the church. Some leaders have been so turned off by the nuclear church religious straitjacket that they have gone to the other extreme and committed themselves to improving the quality of life of their communities. As "kings," they believe the whole earth is their parish, and their businesses become the center and sole focus that eventually disconnects them from their local churches.

I have found that many marketplace people who do not have a strong connection to a local church lose their center of gravity and experience huge family problems. Businesspeople need a local-church-based overseer to make sure they stay on track in every area of their lives.

4. The pastor/church only focuses on the community and jettisons the Great Commission. In the late 1800s, church leaders like Walter Rauschenbusch focused so much on the marketplace aspect of the kingdom of God that their message

devolved into a humanistic social gospel of works.

The clear focus of the New Testament is on inner transformation that eventually leads to systemic transformation. The Old Testament is the primary blueprint for the moral and civic laws needed to disciple a nation, which goes alongside the New Testament teaching that a person needs to be born again in the heart in order to see the kingdom (John 3:1-8). The Gospels and epistles clearly teach that only transformed believers can transform culture. God has to work in us before He can work through us for His good pleasure (Phil. 2:12-13).

Hence, it is a huge mistake whenever we go to an extreme and focus only on systemic political and economic transformation to the exclusion of winning souls, making disciples and true inward spirituality. If we neglect the latter for the sake of the former, our message will eventually devolve into liberal humanistic dribble bereft of the power and presence of God.

5. The marketplace leader considers their business their local church. I have heard that several marketplace leaders in the past stopped attending their local churches because, as “kings,” their businesses were their local churches, which also justified their practice of tithing into their own businesses.

There are some extreme situations (for example, China and Iran) in which it is illegal to plant a local church and in which the greatest way to spread the gospel is for a businessperson to have Bible studies and services in the context of their business so they won't get closed down. However, these marketplace leaders have a special grace to have a dual function because of their extraordinary situation; they also have a fully functional church in which they win souls, make disciples and send believers to start other similar businesses and/or house churches.

In the USA, there is presently no reason for a businessperson to call Bible studies in their office a church since most times it is not fully functional and doesn't reflect a family of families from the cradle to the grave like the typical local church should mimic (1 Tim. 5:1-8).

6. The progress of the gospel is only gauged by political progress. The biggest mistake of the Christian Right since the 1980s has been to focus only on politics and elections. Hence, while we won many elections, we lost the broader culture. Politics and public policy initiatives are only one of the several cultural mountains the church needs to influence. Even though I believe the Bible teaches that we should endeavor to see institutional conversion and not just individual conversion, mere changes in the law are not enough if we don't win over the hearts and minds of people. Revival and spiritual awakening without systemic change will only have temporary effects.

Conversely, reformation without spiritual awakening makes us no different than the Muslims who believe the sign of national conversion to Islam is when a people group adopts Shariah law. The gospel drills down much deeper than politics and systemic change; the ax is laid at the root of the trees, and only the gospel can deal with both original sin and bring corporate transformation, per Isaiah 61:1-4, where the individuals who hear the message are the same ones who eventually rebuild the ancient ruins and restore whole cities.

7. Ecclesial titles are given to marketplace leaders. Although I am a great proponent of the fivefold ministry function (Eph. 4:11) in the marketplace (for example, Daniel the prophet was a politician not a priest), I do not think it wise to bestow upon a marketplace leader a title used in the New Testament for church leaders. This is different than laying hands upon them and commissioning them as apostles of government or prophets of economics, which is an adjective describing a function.

Not only is there no New Testament instance of a marketplace leader being given that title in the church, but it is also silly to think that a governor of a state or mayor of a city (and other high-level marketplace leaders) need an ecclesial title to be more effective in the marketplace. Those titles would, in fact, hinder them in the context of a culture where it is more wise to think biblically but speak secularly. (It is also a hindrance to use those titles in most churches!)

I know that most, if not all, of the original 12 apostles were all marketplace leaders, but they were not given the title of *apostle* until they left their businesses and functioned in the church realm. Peter said it was not right for them to focus on anything else but prayer and the ministry of the word (Acts 6:2-4).

Joseph Mattera *is overseeing bishop of Resurrection Church, Christ Covenant Coalition, in Brooklyn, N.Y.*