

A Cultural Exchange

America needs to hear the voice of the black church today.

With the success of such movies as *The Passion of the Christ*, the gospel is touching people we Christians never expected to reach. God seems to be creating a “new pulpit” from which His Word will be preached.

The unprecedented harvest we face as a result will require a new kind of church to disciple those He draws to Himself. This “new church” must have a proven track record of serving the suffering while remaining in step with the culture, and it must be strategic in its thinking as well as leadership-driven.

These attributes are already operative in the nation’s best black churches. America has to be wise enough to use the black church as a resource.

Think about it this way. In 1619, one year before the Pilgrims arrived on these shores, boats such as the *Amistad* came carrying African slaves to the New World.

The slaves originally were not consumed with visions of the kingdom of God. Their goal was to survive, and their dream was to return home.

Yet many of them had life-changing encounters with Christ. Those who accepted Jesus became unlikely missionaries in our land, strategically placed by God in a hostile environment that would drive them into intimacy with the Lord.

This intimacy is still notable in African-American culture today. Black adults are nearly twice as likely as any other ethnic group to read the Bible during a typical week. Blacks are more likely to evangelize and share their faith. Black adults are 50 percent more likely than white adults to strongly affirm that the Bible is totally accurate in everything it teaches.

As a result of these and other trends, there are more black megachurches (2,000 or more members) than any other ethnicity. The black church's influence upon America is not something new, however. Blacks historically have made a major spiritual impact on our nation. Let's look at a few facts:

- * During the Great Awakening of the 1740s, blacks came to Christ by the thousands.

- * The Christian abolitionist movement gave rise to the sentiments that helped spawn the Civil War.

- * Negro spirituals gave birth to gospel, jazz and blues—some of the few original American music forms.

- * Blacks were major players in the post-Civil War reconstruction period, even to the point of helping to found the Republican Party.

- * Azusa Street's revival of 1906 influenced both the holiness and the Pentecostal movements .

- * Martin Luther King Jr. helped restore America's vision of liberty, equality and civil rights.

This list illustrates that reluctant “African missionaries” have brought major course-corrections to our nation.

For the last few years, researcher George Barna and I have studied the black church’s approaches to ministry. We discovered that many of the black church’s excellent methods of ministry are based on principles that can be transferred. Our view is that the black church may be one of God’s secret weapons for turning our nation around.

White, Hispanic and Asian churches desperately need to be exposed to the best practices of their African-American counterparts. In addition, successful black pastors and leaders should begin mentoring pastors from other ethnic groups. We need what I call a “kingdom cultural exchange.”

A newsletter I received recently suggested that some of the greatest leaders of the church in the last days would come from the African-American community. It said: “Those who were the most oppressed are going to teach the world about freedom. Those who have had their families so destroyed are going to teach the world about family.”

America needs to hear from the black church, just as we must learn from Hispanic, Asian, Native American and white churches. The apostle Paul said the body of Christ “builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Eph. 4:16, NIV). We need each other!

Let’s put away all the stereotypes and accept each other. It’s time for life service, not lip service.

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