

What the Pentecostal Voice Can Do

This isn't the first time culture has been at a moral crossroads. Earlier generations have had to strategize and provide leadership to stand for righteousness and godliness. Look at how Martin Luther shook the world in his day. John and Charles Wesley are said to have spared England an uprising as bad as the French Revolution. And William Wilberforce and his crew ended slavery in the British Commonwealth based on their Christian convictions.

In the United States, it was clergy during the Great Awakening who established the moral underpinnings that helped set the direction of our new nation a few decades later. And, of course, Christian abolitionists were at the forefront of ending slavery in our country.

In the 1940s, many conservative, Bible-believing clergy recognized the liberal shift in theology and political posturing of what became the National Council of Churches. Subsequently, Billy Graham participated with Harold Ockenga, arguably the most prominent evangelical pastor of his time, to form *Christianity Today*, the National Evangelical Association (NAE), and Youth for Christ International. Later, they founded Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary on the East Coast, while strengthening Fuller Theological Seminary on the West.

I recently renewed my membership to the NAE. Though I respect the good work it has done through the years, the NAE has remained relatively silent about Obamacare and its impact on churches and individual Christians who don't approve of providing abortion services on health insurance. The NAE has had a muted voice in the debate over gay marriage. And other than reminding people to "vote values," it's essentially been silent in recent elections. It seems global warming is more

important to the NAE than core Christian principles.

Other organizations exist to advance biblical values, yet the NAE once stood as *the* voice for America's born-again community. So what happened? As Christianity has declined culturally, so has the NAE's prominence. Yet the Bible-believing church is crying out for another awakening to shake our nation. Is it possible that we need a new voice?

In the 1950s—the last time this sort of great outcry for a return to orthodoxy took place—Pentecostals stood at the margins of evangelical Christianity. (And the term *charismatic* wasn't even used then.) Today, in both numbers and in megachurches, we no longer exist as the tail—we are the head. But aside from the abbreviated NAE leadership of Ted Haggard, Pentecostals/charismatics have yet to lead a Christian movement with socio-cultural-political impact. Is this the time?

We must build a firewall against moral relativism, cultural decadence, spiritual apathy and ecclesiastical lukewarmness. We must champion life, preserve the family and protect religious liberty. As my friend Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, says, "We must reconcile the vertical and horizontal planes of the cross: sanctification with service, conviction with compassion, holiness with humility, the image of God with the habits of Christ, orthodoxy with orthopraxy, Billy Graham's message with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s march, salvation through Christ with prophetic activism."

How can we accomplish this? I believe the Spirit-filled community plays a crucial part in:

- Developing a Christ-centered, Bible-based righteousness and justice movement.
- Recapturing justice (alleviating poverty, sex trafficking, etc.).

- Engaging white, African-American and Hispanic believers to reform culture through compassion-based evangelism and prophetic activism.
- Empowering those same Christians to stand independent of political manipulation, possibly by registering as independents and committing to never vote for a political candidate who doesn't stand 100 percent for life, family and religious liberty.

This isn't a political issue, and the new voice emerging within American evangelicalism must understand this in its effort to engage and reform a "post-Christian" culture.

It's time for the Spirit-filled community to stand up and take the lead. God can use us to usher in a Third Awakening, just as He has done with others before. If it's not us, then who? And if not now, when?

What do you think? Post your comments below.

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