

What's Love Got To Do With It?

How churches must respond to increasing attacks from radical opposition

When a national organization representing the gay community targeted pastor John Hagee's Cornerstone Church in San Antonio two years ago, Hagee responded with Christian love, and whatever negative publicity the group intended to stir up failed. But as the cultural battle over homosexuality escalates, the incident exemplifies how the church can and should respond to any radical opposition. In the end, love always wins over hate, and light always extinguishes darkness.

In this case, a soft answer turned away wrath. It started when Soulforce launched a 2009 campaign targeting churches that oppose the gay lifestyle. The group wrote Hagee and informed him they'd be coming to his church on a certain Sunday. Hagee replied to the Soulforce's leader and not only welcomed them to attend any of Cornerstone's worship services, he also said he'd like to meet with them in a reception immediately following the morning service. What Hagee did after this was nothing short of brilliant—or maybe I should say Spirit-led.

The group of 40 from Soulforce sat quietly through what was otherwise a routine service. Afterward they met over lunch with about 40 of Cornerstone's church leaders and elders. Hagee began by welcoming them and saying they might never agree about their differences, but that he sincerely wanted to listen to their concerns. He invited the group's leader—a Baptist minister's son who'd come with his live-in partner and the children they'd adopted—to meet with him in a side room. The rest of the group visited with the other leaders and Hagee's vivacious wife, Diana. Hagee asked his leaders to greet each person in the delegation individually and let each

speak his or her mind freely. Meanwhile Hagee told the Soulforce leader that he appreciated the respectful way they attended the worship service. He listened to his concerns and at the end prayed for the group.

There was never any major media coverage other than to state the two groups had met.

Contrast that meeting to what happened on May 15 this year when radical activists invaded a Sunday service set aside to honor Israel and spouted and distributed pro-Palestinian propaganda. As Hagee began his sermon, a woman in the balcony stood up and tossed hundreds of hot pink pamphlets below that charged Cornerstone with funding the killing of Palestinian children. Later another protestor shouted that Israel is guilty of apartheid. Five minutes later, yet another claimed Hagee was lying about Israel's right to exist and screamed, "How much land have you stolen?"

In each case, the protestor was quickly escorted out by Cornerstone's security. But by then Hagee recognized the orchestrated effort to disrupt the worship service, and he said so to the congregation. He said he'd finish his message, even if it took until 6 p.m.—to which the crowd of 5,000 cheered wildly.

In all, 11 activists throughout the sanctuary tried to stop the service at different times. But as Hagee told me, the congregation did what the Bible instructs: "Clap your hands ... and shout to the Lord." Each protestor was drowned out with applause, taken away and issued a criminal trespass citation. A couple had outstanding arrest warrants and were sent to jail. Hagee later discovered some of the protesters were officers in a local tax-funded arts organization, which he's now working to have defunded from the State of Texas and the City of San Antonio.

Though not every case warrants this, pastors can follow

Hagee's lead by having trained security equipped to handle unexpected disruptions. He suggests getting armed and active-duty policemen in the congregation who have authority to arrest troublemakers. In Hagee's case, the protesters were shocked—they expected to humiliate the church into silence. Instead it energized the congregation and has actually caused the local community to rally around the church for its response.

Hagee believes churches that stand for Israel—and I'd add any biblical principle that runs against the grain of an ungodly culture—can expect to have similar protests at their churches sooner or later. He said that day was a battle between light and darkness, "and light blew the darkness out the back door."

Steve Strang is the founder and publisher of Charisma. You can follow him on Twitter *@sstrang*, friend him on *Facebook* or sign up to receive The Strang Report at .