

Holy Demolition

While our nation faces its toughest financial crisis since the Great Depression, the church is wandering in a wilderness of disturbing uncertainty. Ministries that enjoyed success two years ago are announcing layoffs. Some churches have been squeezed to a breaking point because donations are down.

There's no reason to fear if our trust is in the Lord. God can provide manna in the desert even when banks and politicians fail us. He can use this perfect economic storm to purify our movement—and to test our foundations.

In late 2008 three once-popular charismatic churches fell on hard times. Without Walls International Church in Tampa, Florida, once attracted 23,000 worshipers, but it shrank drastically after co-pastors Randy and Paula White announced in 2007 that they were divorcing. In November their bank filed foreclosure proceedings and demanded immediate repayment of a \$12 million loan on the property.

In Duluth, Georgia, near Atlanta, sheriff's deputies arrived at Global Destiny Ministries on Nov. 14 and ordered Bishop Thomas Weeks III to leave the property. Weeks, who divorced popular preacher Juanita Bynum in June, owed more than \$511,000 in back rent to the building's owners. He was escorted out while a church service was in progress.

In another part of Atlanta, leaders of the Cathedral at Chapel Hill announced that their church is officially for sale. The gothic building—which once had a membership of 10,000—lost its credibility a few years ago after lurid sex scandals triggered a mass exodus. The church's founder, Bishop Earl Paulk, turned his 6,000-seat church (valued at \$24.5 million) over to his son, D.E., who has now abandoned orthodox Christian doctrines.

Why are these ministries suffering? It's not just the credit crisis. I believe judgment has begun in the house of God.

Before Weeks was charged with assaulting Bynum in a hotel parking lot in August 2007, he told the men at a Global Destiny marriage conference that they should use profanity during sex to heighten their experience. He also brought couples on stage to play a game in which men were asked to name their favorite female body parts.

God's answer to that kind of blasphemy? Eviction.

Many parishioners walked out of Earl Paulk's church 16 years ago when it became known that he and other staff members were involved in wife-swapping. Paulk created a bizarre culture of secrecy to cover the immorality, which included his affair with a sister-in-law-and resulted in the birth of D.E. (who thought he was Earl Paulk's nephew until last year). The church has had only a few hundred members in recent years.

Today, D.E. has embraced the inclusionist doctrines of Oklahoma pastor Carlton Pearson, who left the faith in 2003 and was labeled a heretic by a group of African-American bishops. The younger Paulk now preaches that all people, not just Christians, are saved. A pulpit that was already defiled by diabolical perversion is now the breeding ground for unthinkable deception.

God's answer to that? Eviction.

How did our movement reach this level of disgrace? I hear the sound of bricks and steel beams crashing to the ground. The wrecking ball of heaven is swinging. It has come to demolish any work that has not been built on the integrity of God's Word.

All of us should be trembling during this season of testing. There is more wreckage to come. God requires holiness in His house. He is loving and patient with our mistakes and weaknesses, but eventually, if there is no repentance after continual correction, His discipline is severe. He will not be mocked.

God is not married to our buildings, nor will He prop up our flimsy success. If He allowed foreign armies to burn Jerusalem and its glorious temple, He will also write "Ichabod" on the doors of churches where there is no repentance for compromise.

I pray the fear of God will grip our hearts until we humble ourselves. Let's re-examine our priorities as we enter 2009. Let's throw out the wood, hay and stubble and build on a sure and tested foundation. It is the only way to survive the meltdown.

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