

Is the Church Impacting World Culture, or Is Worldly Culture Invading the Church?

Over the past 15 years, the **body of Christ** has made great advances regarding the call of believers to influence every mountain of **culture** for **Christ** for societal reformation (cultural mountains such as religion, family, education, politics, media, arts/entertainment, economics and more).

For too long, the local **church** has functioned as a straightjacket, limiting the expression of **Christ** to merely spiritual things and the life to come. The results have been catastrophic, as the **church** abandoned culture, which has led to propitious moral decay in every cultural mountain.

In response to this unfortunate dualism between the spiritual and natural order, many (including me) have called for a theological paradigm shift that calls the church back into the kind of engagement that validates, equips and commissions believers into their marketplace vocations in accordance with the cultural mandate of Genesis 1:28.

Consequently, there have been some extremes in various directions, as we are all grappling with how to bring the **lordship of Christ** over all creation.

In general, many evangelicals preaching the **kingdom** are in virtual agreement in regard to their goals but have differences regarding the definition of terms, understanding the nature and role of the church, and methodological approaches.

The following are just some of the issues many of us are grappling with:

1. Is the church the kingdom of God?

The kingdom of God rules over all (Ps. 24; 145:11-13; Dan. 4:34). Thus, the kingdom of God is the influence or government of God that emanates from the throne of God, which is in heaven. The church is not the kingdom, but it is the main agent and representative of the kingdom and should function as the salt of the earth and light of the world (Matt. 5:13-16).

In history, many in historic denominations, such as the Roman Catholic Church, have taught that their corporate church body is the kingdom of God, which led to a dichotomy between the sacred and secular. This also resulted in centralizing power into the hands of the church leaders, which in the past has resulted in the Roman Church having political and economic power even greater than the kings of the earth. With this view, the church is the kingdom of God on earth.

Today, many evangelicals in Catholic paradigm countries take the message of the kingdom and apply it to their own local churches in a way that leads to building their own political and economic empires instead of empowering their marketplace leaders to influence culture. Whenever too much power is centralized into the hands of one entity (including the church), corruption and ego-driven tyranny can soon follow!

2. Is the church part of the religion mountain?

Many in the movement say the church is one of the cultural mountains we have to influence. However, others, such as myself, take a position in which the church, as the main representative of the kingdom, is part of the mountain of the Lord (Is. 2:2-3) that should influence every cultural mountain. The church is not the kingdom, but it is in the kingdom as its hierarchy. Thus, the church is called to represent and influence the whole earth.

If the church were in the religion mountain, then there would be confusion between the nature and mission of the church,

between essence and outreach. Thus, it would be strange, in my opinion, to say our local church is in the religion mountain and then turn around and say we have to reach ourselves! No, I believe the true church is in the kingdom mountain that should influence the religion mountain, which would include nominal Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and every other religion of the world not rooted in Christ. Hence, I do not believe the true church is in the same mountain as Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism.

3. The microchurch versus the nuclear church

The term *microchurch* generally means an extension of the local church led by marketplace leaders who connect in their workplaces to make disciples and influence their cultural mountain. In my opinion, the microchurch should only function as an extension or arm of the nuclear (local) church but never take the place of the nuclear church.

For example, there could be two or three gathered in the name of Jesus in the halls of political power to do a Bible study or to band together to enact public policy with a biblical framework. But that does not mean they do not need to belong to a local (nuclear) church for apostolic equipping and pastoral care. Furthermore, Paul traveled with a lot of disciples but never once called his roving band a church (the mobile church concept). No, with his band he always established churches or went to already established local churches to strengthen them. He never called his group of traveling companions a church.

Of course, there may at times be extenuating circumstances in persecuted nations (China, Iran, etc.) in which believers have to find covert ways of banding together for discipleship (in their factories or businesses or prison cells) because a typical church gathering would be impractical. But it is very important that we never make the exception the general rule. Let's follow Scripture for our general rule as well as allow

for exceptions as the Lord leads.

If we make the microchurch an entity unto itself as the ideal, then we will have marketplace leaders who will call their businesses churches and their employees their congregations, and they will have them tithe to their businesses! Marketplace leaders need ecclesial fivefold ministers (Eph. 4:11) to equip and shepherd them, and they regularly need to come up for oxygen and hear what the Spirit is saying to and in their local churches.

4. Commissioning marketplace leaders with ecclesiastical titles

I believe that each of the fivefold ministries will reproduce marketplace (and ecclesial) leaders after their own kind. Thus, an ecclesial apostle could quite possibly reproduce marketplace apostles who will never be in full-time church ministry.

However, I do not think giving politicians and marketplace leaders titles that are understood and used in the nuclear church will do them any good in their callings. Some in our movement commission “apostles of government,” “prophets of economics,” etc., in which they bestow a fivefold title upon them. I think this is fine if necessary, but only if the marketplace leader is connected relationally to a local church and/or ecclesial apostles who are discipling them and if the commissioned marketplace leaders are also equipping the saints (the criteria found in Ephesians 4:12).

In many cases these marketplace leaders don’t even see themselves as separate from their local churches because they are so intertwined with the life and leadership of the church. However, if we just theoretically open a door for giving ecclesial titles to marketplace leaders without qualifying it with the criteria of having a nuclear church connection, then many of these so-called marketplace apostles and prophets may

also fall into the microchurch error of substituting their place of business for a local church and/or setting up themselves as equal or superior to all ecclesial ministers, resulting in thinking the local church is irrelevant.

In conclusion, many good people disagree with my conclusions. We have to leave room for more discussion as we grapple with finding solutions regarding the role and nature of the church in culture. Many of the forerunners in the body of Christ regarding evangelism and outreach have come from a parachurch mindset and have not framed their mission with the centrality of the nuclear church.

Of course, much of the blame lies with a dormant and self-focused nuclear church, which opened the door for nontraditional approaches to ministry. I believe we need to have a balance between the two. We need healthy local churches that are kingdom-focused and not building their own empires in the name of the kingdom of God. We need to go from church-centric to kingdom-centric. But being kingdom-centric also means having a strong nuclear church that is the ground and pillar of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15).

Finally, many marketplace leaders I know with the strongest apostolic and prophetic calls upon their lives do not consider themselves disconnected from the local church but only extensions of the local church in their spheres of influence. Local church pastors should disciple these marketplace leaders with a biblical worldview and then defer to these marketplace leaders regarding how to specifically apply Scripture to their fields of expertise in culture. This decentralization would give both ecclesial shepherds and marketplace disciples a great working relationship and give us the functional balance we are looking for.

At the end of the day, we may disagree somewhat in terms and methodology, but we all desire His kingdom to come and His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven!

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