

Mega Church Confessions and The Seventh-day Adventist Church

Over the last 30 years, thousands, including hundreds of Seventh-day Adventist ministers and lay persons, have made pilgrimages to the Willow Creek Church (WCC) in Chicago. They all wanted to know how this church became a mega church. One writer said, “Few would disagree the WCC has been one of the most influential churches in America over the last thirty years.” Hanging outside the pastor’s door was this sign. “What is our business? Who is our customer? What does the customer consider value?”

This business approach changed the way churches operated all over America. Over the years, many western Protestant churches had drifted into liberal theology. Alarming apathy and loss of membership was the result. So when this new method came along with apparent success, lots of churches attempted to copy it.

What about this customer driven method? It certainly works for Wall Street. But it changes Jesus command to His disciples from “teaching them to obey what I have commanded you” to “find out what they want.” Was this Aaron and the golden calf all over again? Not if you listened to accolades coming from *some* Adventist pulpits and magazines.

The impact on Adventist churches has been astounding. Drama, disco music, clowns, puppets and anything else that Madison Ave. and Hollywood had to offer became the “cutting edge.” Add to this the emotionalism of the charismatic phenomena and you have an intoxicating appeal. In many place in North America and Western Europe, these “cutting edge methods” began to replace the serious proclamation of the Three Angels’ Messages. Church growth became the end and worldly methods became the means.

Just recently Willow Creek released its findings from a “multiple year qualitative study of its ministry.” According to Pastor Bill Hybels, “some of the stuff that we have put millions of dollars into thinking it would really help our people grow and develop spiritually... wasn’t helping people that much. Other things that we didn’t put that much money into and didn’t put much staff against is stuff our people are crying out for.”

Their shocking discovery was that spiritual growth doesn’t respond to elaborate church programs, marvelous drama worship services, magnificent buildings or large staffs. Instead, it is dependant on prayer, Bible reading and relationships. WCC should be credited for saying, “we have made a mistake.”

But what about Seventh-day Adventists? All the time and energy and money that has been spent on these “cutting edge” methods has delivered about zero. It is not just the absence of numbers that is worrisome, it is the worldliness! Except for showing up to church on a different day, there is no noticeable difference between *some* of our churches and secular Christianity.

Our challenges are two fold:

First, instead of seeking the “cutting edge” of the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy many Adventist leaders went to these mega churches. Yes, one can learn from all kinds of sources. But that learning should be measured by Inspiration not the other way around. If we had been faithful to the Word we could have avoided trying our best to drink from this “broken

cistern.” May God have mercy and pity on all of us for ignoring Him, the fountain of all wisdom.

In the lust to be like the mega churches many have been in danger of losing sight of who Adventists are and why we are here. Don't think for a moment that the Devil doesn't also knock at the door of Adventist churches - masquerading as Jesus!

Let us be clear. If we wish to guard ourselves from the apostasies of the past and future we must protect the basics of Christianity. Here they are.

- The Bible must be our instructor. Its words are our life.
- Each member must be born again, a new creature in Christ.
- Each member must practice the self sacrificing love of Christ.
- Each member must be passionate to save the lost.

There are no short cuts here. These principles, when practiced by the churches, will always bear fruit in Christ likeness and numbers.

Our second problem is that our churches are often occupied with minor matters. Why not just admit the truth. We are in desperate need for the out pouring of the genuine Holy Spirit. I am weary of imitations.

Here is magnificent counsel and promise.

“If all were willing, all would be filled with the Spirit. Wherever the need of the Holy Spirit is a matter little thought of, there is seen spiritual drought, spiritual darkness, spiritual declension and death. Whenever minor matters occupy the attention, the divine power which is necessary for the growth and prosperity of the church, and which would bring all other blessings in its train, is lacking, though offered in infinite plenitude.” E.G. White, Acts of the Apostles, p. 50

Is your church prospering? Is it possible to have been so occupied by minor matters that God's methods have been slighted? Notice that what occupies our attention makes the difference between our churches prospering or dying. Amazing!

What would happen if each church applied the counsel given in the book called Christian Service? What would happen if the New Testament's Acts of the Apostles became every churches inspiration?

Willow Creek had the courage to examine itself against its own philosophy. Shouldn't each of our churches do the same? What would happen if we brought the light of the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy to shine on our plans and actions? Shouldn't we take our “mistakes” as seriously as Willow Creek is taking theirs?

Here is Heaven's most noble challenge to Seventh-day Adventists. Give the Three Angels' Messages to the world in this generation! This is our mission. That is why we are here! (Education, p. 262)