

Pessimistic Prognostications From The Professor

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The setting was the annual lectureship at Oklahoma Christian University this past March; the subject was "Restoration: A Future of Progress & Joy?" The professor was Evertt Huffard, Dean of HUGSR here in Memphis. The question mark at the end of the title received emphasis throughout Huffard's lecture. His pessimistic forecasting of the future for churches of Christ centered on his four predictions: (1) "Smaller and older congregations will continue to decline and die." He stated 60-70% of the congregations which make up churches of Christ are 100 or less. (2) "White suburban churches of Christ as I see in the future will have more association with Christian Churches and community churches and Evangelical Churches than they will with black churches of Christ." He elaborated further, "We may overcome our sectarian weakness long before we overcome our ethnocentrism." Clearly, he sees our current practice of not having fellowship with Christian Churches, community churches, and even Evangelical Churches as "sectarian weakness." (3) "Strong churches will reclaim a greater and clearer mission in their own community working with other churches in our own community and not just with churches of Christ." (4) Authority of Scripture. Within the body of the presentation he stated, "Our high view of Scripture and our high view of reason have a built in problem." He states that in a post-denominational, post-modern world we have to make grace more readily visible if we are going to "sell" people on "Campbellism."

Getting Out On A Limb

Huffard began his lecture by talking about how the lecture made him think of a time when he "got out on a limb" while working with a local congregation in Memphis. He said he took the lead in explaining to the elders there why the dynamic, young leaders of the future were unhappy with their leadership. He was surprised when the elders considered him to be

the leader of the pack. 100 left the congregation. [The actual number may have approached 250.] He still feels like the eldership "shot the messenger" when they held him responsible for articulating their views. In an attempt to reject the responsibility for the split he said he stayed on for an extra year.

(1) *"Smaller and older congregations will continue to decline and die."*

Huffard Chides His Audience

Toward the end of his speech Huffard chided his audience for not giving him the non-verbal feedback he was expecting. He said, "1900 only 9% of the population of Africa was Christian and by the year 2000 46% of Africa became Christian, of some kind. And, Islam only grew from 32% to 40% of the population. I'm disappointed. I only see two people in here were even half way excited about that. They kinda [sic] went, 'yeah.' What's the matter with you? If you can't be excited about what God has done in Africa in the last 100 years, what are we worried about what happens the next 100 years?" Perhaps someone close to him could point out to him that his counting "Christians, of some kind" is problematic. Many still understand that only those baptized into Christ for the remission of sins, according to the word of God, are Christians (Acts 2:38, 41, 47; 11:26). His numbers include those who never have even been immersed.

Problems With Scripture

Huffard's statement, "Our high view of Scripture and our high view of reason have a built in problem," points up the leading difference that exists between liberal churches of Christ or community churches like those he is "the impetus behind" and churches of Christ.

He declared that incoming freshmen to college have a weaker knowledge of the Bible, but he claims they have a deeper spiritual passion. I Corinthians 2:13 suggests that spiritual "things" are understood by spiritual "words." And, directly to the point Huffard has missed, the apostle is addressing those who considered themselves to have a deep spiritual passion yet their ignorance of the word of God was proof that what they in reality had was "man's wisdom."

Huffard went on to say that "we must realize that people are coming to the Scriptures with a different set of questions and unless we address those changing questions how vital will our movement be?" He brought in the thought of changing the worship to please the world, "We've got to raise the questions of how do we adapt worship to a world that is changing." His comments of Christendom or denominationalism being no more is followed by his urging adherence to denominations. In fairness, he wants to retain certain distinctions yet cooperate and align with denominations.

The truth is that the Bible provides answers to the questions man needs to be asking and is not pliable to the whims or desires of mankind so that no matter what questions man would like to have answered the Bible must provide a satisfactory answer. Isaiah wrote that God's thoughts are higher than man's and God's ways are not those of man (Isa. 55:8).

Conclusion

Huffard painted a dark picture for the future of the Lord's church in coming years. He stated that we need to search and find some way to more effectively evangelize. Those of us in Memphis who have seen his denominational approach of planting community churches are happy to hear him express concern that his way lacks effectiveness. Recently, in his church bulletin he noted that the Frayser Community Church and the Downtown Community Church he started in 1985 and continues to interact with have found it necessary to merge their efforts and for his interns there to decide where they will go. He moaned, "The churches of Christ right now are in a comatose state. Dying.

Steady state. Who are we? Where are we going?"

In positive contrast, we are effectively engaged in preaching the gospel of Christ twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week via a satellite that is capable of reaching North America. A solid plan is in place right now to reach the globe using the mass media of satellite television. Currently, the Gospel Broadcasting Network is seen world-wide 24/7 at www.gbntv.org. The professor may be pessimistic, but we remain very optimistic! We know who we are, what we are doing, and where we are going. Our hope and prayer is that he also will humbly submit to the gospel of Christ.