

U R Here!
Re-Plant Church Planting and Revitalization Conference
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Introduction:

A New Flight Plan for the 21st Century

Session 1: “Who Changed the Map?” The Pharaoh Principle. Ex. 1:1-22.

Purpose: Set the stage by looking at how and why our context has changed. Overview of some historical and philosophical background and what they mean.

Question: What do we need to know? Dealing with knowledge and information.

Session 2: “Reading the New Map.” The Issachar Principle. 1 Chronicles 12:32

Purpose: Understand current culture and current worldviews and how they affect your ministry.

Question: What do we need to understand? Dealing with analysis and preparation.

Session 3: “A New Flight Plan.” The Pauline Principle. 1 Cor. 9:19-23

Purpose: Cultural exegesis and engagement. Learning to think like a missionary.

Question: What do I need to do? Dealing with strategy and practical engagement.

Session 4: “Flying without Fear.” The Peter Principle. 1 Pet. 2:11-17

Purpose: Remind you of the foundations for all that we have said (backwards, yes).

Question: How do we do it? Dealing with attitude, encouragement, and inspiration.

Session 1: “Who Changed the Map?”

The Pharaoh Principle: Ex. 1:1-22

“Then a new king, who did not know Joseph, came to power in Egypt.”

Point of the passage: A change in power meant huge changes for the children of Israel.

Application: Things have changed in our culture, and that means big changes for the Body of Christ.

■ **What happened to the map? Who changed it? Some historical context.**

■ **Christendom and the American Experiment:**

○ *The Rise of Christendom:*

Christendom, then, is the “alignment of Christianity with the state.”

○ *Christendom checked and in decline*

Modernity (life defined and fueled largely by Enlightenment ideals):

Modernity believed in and sought absolute truth through human efforts.
Postmodernism rejects the notion of absolute truth.

○ *Reflections, Lessons, and Consequences of Christendom:*

Positives?

1. A near identification of Western culture and Christianity provided a foundation for common societal mores.
2. Also led to the founding of schools and universities, hospitals, and other benevolent ministries.
3. Also meant unity in fighting pagans or even engaging in war with another Christendom nation. The King represented God and God was on “our side.”

Negatives?

1. Christendom could only be held together by power.
2. Because Europe was “Christian” it was generally argued that the Great Commission had been fulfilled.
3. Such corruption and abuse of power simply meant that the gospel of Jesus Christ and the prevailing culture had become so syncretized as to be unrecognizable.

The current reality: What is the status of Christendom today?

1. The church has moved from the center to the margins.
2. Paradoxically, the non-Western world still sees the West, and America in particular, as a Christian culture and all Westerners as Christians.
3. The good news is that the death of Christendom means the rise, the rediscovery, of Biblical evangelism and missions.
4. The collapse of Christendom does not mean that Christianity has collapsed.

○ *The American Experiment:*

What about the U.S? What was different about the American experiment?

****Protestant beginnings**

America is the result of the three-fold convergence of a Judeo-Christian worldview (which included religious freedom), the pursuit of financial freedom and material wealth, and Modern philosophies growing out of the Enlightenment.

****Enlightenment Philosophies**

The result of the marriage of our Puritan heritage and Enlightenment Deism was the public religion of America. It was grounded in Enlightenment principles, yet informed by Biblical themes.

So, was the U.S founded as or founded to be a Christian nation?

****The Development of Civil Religion**

****Civil Religion Begins to Fade**

Benefits and Dangers of Civil Religion:

Benefits:

1. Like Christendom, served as the glue that held the dominant culture together.
2. Provided some semblance of a common ground to answer questions of authority, morals, and ethics. Common language during times of crisis.
3. Kept the extremes (secularism or theocracy) from dominating the culture.

Dangers:

1. Can confuse Christianity with patriotism, or worse, with nationalism. Witness both the Union and the Confederacy.

2. Actually weakens the gospel of Jesus Christ and the call to discipleship. Generic God, generic prayers, thank God for touchdowns and Oscars. The gospel is not this civil religion.
3. And, we confuse unbelievers, especially non-westerners.

■ **Secularization:**

Secularism is the more aggressive political movement or philosophy that “affirms that the less public religiosity there is, the greater the benefit for society.”

Secularization is the historical process of moving from the Biblical worldview, where God sustains all, to the situation where God and religion are minimized and marginalized.

■ **What are the trends? What is coming to you?**

- Questioning, if not outright denial, of ultimate and absolute authority in general and especially the Bible as the revealed word of God. Which leads to . . .
- “Tolerance” for other spiritual paths – religious pluralism and designer spirituality. And. . .
- “Tolerance” for designer ethics and morality. If there are no absolutes and no ultimate authority, I/we can make our own morality. Eventually, this leads to. . .
- The demeaning of human life and a culture of death. If there is no absolute authority which speaks to the meaning of life, then Darwinianism rules. Eventually, that leads to . . .
- Meaninglessness, despair, and addiction, all of which we try to fill with stuff, with entertainment, with sex, and with food. The scary part is that so many Christians (and pastors) do the same! Consequently, holding to Biblical truth and practice, will lead to . . .

- Marginalization, criticism, ridicule, and maybe even persecution. If you hold to the authority of Scripture, teach it, and try to practice it, you will be in the minority. And also . . .
- Shrinking of congregational size, of resources, or public influence. And . . .
- Shrinking of the usual missions/outreach “fishing pond.” Will talk more about his in session 3. But . . .
- The greatest opportunity in a long time to be salt and light and demonstrate what a committed disciple and community of Christ looks like!

Questions for further reflection:

1. How can I help my people understand what is happening in the world, our nation, our community, and in the life of the church? What do they need to know, understand, question, affirm, forget, re-learn, re-think, set aside?
2. What are some of the “comfortable” elements of civil religion I see in my community and in my church which may confuse American culture with Biblical Christianity?
3. How has civil religion and cultural Christianity affected the message of the gospel in my church?
4. What are some implications for my preaching/teaching, especially on national holidays and election years? How can I remind my congregation to be Kingdom citizens first and still good American citizens?
5. How can I lead my church to think first of the Kingdom and of our church as a Kingdom outpost? What are the implications in and for a flat, globalized world?
6. What are some aspects of secularized society (individualism, consumerism, religious compartmentalization, etc) I have seen accepted by people in my church?
7. How have I seen secularization creeping into my community and even into my church?

Suggested Resources

Ashford, Bruce. *One Nation Under God: A Christian Hope for American Politics*

Dickerson, John S. *The Great Evangelical Recession.*

Friedman, Thomas. *The World is Flat.*

Frost, Michael and Alan Hirsch. *The Shaping of Things to Come.*

Grenz, Stanley. *A Primer on Postmodernism.*

Hunsberger, George R and Craig Van Gelder, eds. *The Church Between Gospel and Culture.*

Jenkins, Phillip. *The Next Christendom.*

Land, Richard. *The Divided States of America.*

McNeal, Reggie. *The Present Future.*

Newbigin, Lesslie. *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society.*

Nichols, Stephen J. *Jesus Made in America.*

Noll, Mark A., George Marsden, and Nathan O. Hatch. *The Search for Christian America.*

Olson, David T. *The American Church in Crisis.*

Wilsey, John D. *American Exceptionalism and Civil Religion: Reassessing the History of an Idea*

- George Barna: www.barna.org.
- The Pew Research Center for Religion and Public Life: www.pewforum.org.
- LifeWay Research: www.lifewayresearch.com