

If Not Us... Who?

— W.W. McEad —

Whether we are all fully aware of it or not, IFCA International is at a defining moment in its history. The response of our constituency to the things taking place in our Fellowship today will have far reaching implications for the direction and pursuits of IFCA International for decades to come. Those implications will, I believe, also have a dramatic and far reaching impact on the continued vitality and relevance of independent Bible churches in America.

In presenting his vision for the future of IFCA International, including the VISIONAMERICA church planting initiative to the Annual Convention in 2007, Executive Director Les Lofquist expressed his heart in the form of a challenge. Noting that the accomplishment of that vision was not something he could do alone, he said, "... in the months and years to come, as the story is progressively laid out and lived out, I am praying that you will help to make it 'our story' as we do it together for the glory of the Lord Jesus."

A CHALLENGING QUESTION

In his second inaugural address, President Ronald Reagan spoke of "new opportunities for growth, a more productive, fulfilled and united people, and a stronger America—an America that will lead the technological revolution, and also open its mind and heart and soul to the treasures of literature, music, and poetry, and the values of faith, courage, and love."

President Reagan then issued a poignant challenge to the American people. He reminded the nation of an almost unbroken 50 years of deficit spending and the fact that the nation had come to

"a time of reckoning, a turning point, a moment for hard decisions." He then said, "I have asked the Cabinet and my staff a question, and now I put the same question to all of you: If not us, who? And if not now, when? It must be done by all of us going forward with a program aimed at reaching a balanced budget." Reagan concluded by saying, "The time has come for a new American emancipation—a great national drive to tear down economic barriers and liberate the spirit of enterprise in the most distressed areas of our country. My friends, together we can do this, and do it we must, so help me God."

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Certainly, America faced serious economic challenges then. As serious as they were, however, the moral and spiritual challenges faced by this nation today are significantly more serious. Politicians, pundits and talk-show hosts may talk about the need for moral and spiritual reforms in the social fabric of our nation, but they really have no lasting answers. The fact is that there is no humanly devised plan that is able to stanch the progressively deepening moral decline and the growing spiritual bankruptcy of our society. Let's face it. Apart from the direct intervention of God, there is no hope for America.

AMERICA'S REVIVALS

America's history reveals that she has experienced some great revivals in the nearly two and a half centuries that she has been a nation. There are three periods which are generally recognized and referred to as America's Great Awakenings.

The "Great Awakening" in America was led by Jonathan Edwards who was joined by George Whitefield and others. Occurring from 1730 to 1760, it was characterized by a strong emphasis on the need for a personal religious experience and a commitment to holy living. Many people were brought to Christ and they, as well as many who had been saved previously, began to develop the regular habit of personal Bible study.

The years between 1800 and 1830 are generally regarded as the period of the Second Great Awakening in America. Led by such men as Charles Finney, Lyman Beecher, Barton Stone and Peter Cartwright, it was characterized by preaching that strongly emphasized the need for a personal salvation. That message was proclaimed in a wave of revival meetings conducted in churches across the country. It engendered an attitude that later reappeared in the fabric of American life in social causes related to prison reform, temperance, women's suffrage, and the push to abolish slavery.

The Third Great Awakening began in the late 1850s and continued into the 1900s. It gave rise to a further wave of social activism. The worldwide missionary effort of the evangelical church was greatly benefited as the ranks of missionaries at home and abroad swelled. After the Civil War, D.L. Moody and Ira Sankey were key figures in American revivalism, conducting mass evangelistic rallies in

cities across America. Moody established the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago for the training of evangelists and other Christian workers. This institution was among a large number of Bible oriented educational organizations which sprang up during this period of spiritual revival at the end of the Nineteenth Century. Many of these became important contributors to the growing fundamentalist movement.

These periods of spiritual revival in America's history were all accompanied by a dramatic surge in cultural changes because great numbers of people were reached with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and brought to faith in Him. The purveyors of liquor and other vices were adversely impacted as large segments of the population had a spiritual awakening and forsook their old ways in favor of the righteous habits of holy living. Marriages were reconciled, families strengthened and people became serious in their desire to follow God. The fabric of American society benefited from such changes.

If history teaches us anything at all, it teaches us that the way to transform a society is to turn loose upon it the transforming power of the Word of God. History has also repeatedly demonstrated that the way to effect lasting cultural transformation is not found in the highest offices in Washington, nor in the halls of Congress. In this election year, we do well to remember that when it comes to cultural transformation, the best we can hope for from

Washington is a temporary restraint of the deep seated and vile corruption which pervades our society because of the sinful pursuits of our citizenry.

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It was Jonathan Edwards who said that God grants light when the darkness is the greatest. It can be demonstrated that in America's history it was during those times when there was pronounced apathy and even antagonism toward spiritual things, terrible immorality and gross unbelief that God poured out his blessing of grace and called many thousands to Himself.

REVIVAL NEEDED TODAY

Today America is struggling to keep its head above the sewage tide of homosexuality, abortion, acts of sexual perversity against and between children, pornography, attacks on the biblical models of marriage and the home, wickedness and corruption in high places (even in the pulpit), and all manner of ungodliness wherever one turns. It is a dark time when men and women increasingly judge a holy God by the standard of their own fleshly

desires instead of judging their fleshly desires by the holy standard of God's Word.

To be sure, the Church of Jesus Christ is still a significant force for righteousness in our society. I do not dismiss the fact that, were it not for the biblical preaching and ministry of local churches spread across this land, we would face an even more desperate situation today and an even bleaker prospect for America's future than we do. Praise God for faithful preachers and church leaders and common believers who take the Great Commission personally and seriously. Thank God, America, for those valiant Christian soldiers who have not abandoned their post in the face of the foe.

The sad truth is, however, that their brave constancy is not enough to stem the tide of the enemy that is amassed against us. We are losing ground as the population of this country continues to grow. There is a phenomenal growth of the cults and false religions. At the same time, more and more good churches crumble and close under the enemy's assault. It is not hard to understand that fewer churches mean fewer opportunities for the lost to hear the saving Gospel tidings. Fewer churches mean fewer points of resistance against the evil tide. Fewer churches mean greater darkness across the land!

To some degree, the desperate plight of the nation is not due to the increased strength and numbers of the enemy. The hand of the Lord is mighty and no enemy can stand against it regardless of their number and strength. No, the problem lies in the fact of the Church's abandonment of an offensive strategy which takes seriously the G

Commission. The disciples of the First Century had every reason to adopt a defensive posture after the death of the Lord Jesus and the threat of persecution. They opted instead to take the offensive, making a bold thrust deep into enemy territory, without regard to personal comfort and convenience. As a result, the churches multiplied throughout the land and were strengthened (Acts 9:31).

In America today we must not quake before the enemy and circle the wagons, gathering together within the walls of church buildings, acting as a beleaguered fighting force bereft of its will for battle. We must stop the practice of praying for the Lord's soon return in hopes that we will no longer have to be offended by the sights and smells of the growing corruption of our society. The church cannot continue to carry on with what has become "business as usual" in America because "business as usual" is not accomplishing our "business" in this nation. America is in critical need of a Church that will come out from behind the sanctuary walls and mobilize for a great spiritual offensive aimed at claiming new territory, establishing beachheads in new communities, and branching out from

those communities into even further reaches, wherever people are in need of spiritual deliverance and liberation from bondage.

VISION AMERICA MEANS HOPE

If there be any hope for America, if there be any salvation for our society as a whole, there must be a deliberate, effective and immediate move to reverse the tide. It is time for another awakening in America. This awakening must be driven by fanning the flickering flame of Great Commission activity in the Church in America. We must lay hold of God and believe Him for something more than what presently exists, because what presently exists is not sufficient. There must be a renewed sense of urgency in planting new, reproductive churches across the nation.

IFCA International's strategic effort in church planting known as VISION AMERICA places this Fellowship on the threshold of new opportunities for Great Commission activity and growth. It is the means for a more productive, purposeful and united Fellowship, and a stronger Church in America. It is our strategy to lead to a spiritual revolution by bringing the transforming power

of the Gospel to millions of Americans for whom Christ died, by creating a wave of hope through planting new churches. More churches mean more opportunities for the lost to hear the saving Gospel tidings. More churches mean more points of resistance against the evil tide. More churches mean more light across the land!

It is, for us as a Fellowship, "a time of reckoning, a turning point, a moment for hard decisions." It is time for us to answer the question: If not us, who? And if not now, when? **If not us, and if not now, then for what purpose do we exist as a Fellowship of independent churches and individuals? Is there a nobler purpose? Is there a purpose more urgent? Is there a purpose more biblical?**

"The time has come for a new American Awakening - a great national drive to tear down the strongholds of the enemy, knowing that even the gates of hell cannot withstand the Church that Christ builds. Brethren, comrades-in-arms, let us rise up together and plant the kind of churches that will bring the message of spiritual freedom to every area of our country. My friends, together we can do this, and do it we must, so help us God. In the months and years to come, as the story is progressively laid out and lived out, will you will help to make it "our story" as we do it together for the glory of the Lord Jesus!"