

Moving Toward The Kingdom And The Seven Deadly D's

by Gene Heacock*

Abstract

The purpose of this work is to present the biblical theme of the Kingdom of God as the central model for Christian leadership, congregational life, mission, and cultural transformation. The Kingdom offers an alternative paradigm in contrast to established evangelical forms grounded in human wisdom and understanding.

Through biblical paradigms and statistical research, the author describes the condition of early 21st century American Christianity. Through the use of systems thinking and cultural diagnosis, he defines what he terms the “seven deadly D’s” of American church life. The Kingdom of God is presented as the only theological, systemic approach to remedy these maladies.

The significance of this work is in recovering the model of the Kingdom of God as the necessary biblical corrective to modern evangelical leadership formation and church practice. This includes implications for the rethinking of Evangelicalism, a new approach to theology, and the formation of multidimensional leadership. This will assist 21st century Christian leaders in dealing with complexity, diversity, changing spiritual paradigms, and interdenominational unity. It offers hope as new fuel and a Kingdom model as a cognitive construct as well as recommendations for application.

This paper will introduce the reader to the condition of the church in the United States today. The author will use the term “system” to describe it. The term is used both in its popular sense and in the specific meaning as it relates to systems theory and change.¹ He will then describe the process in which he rediscovered the Kingdom of God, and propose that the Kingdom of God is the only comprehensive theological systemic solution to the seven deadly D’s of church life. He will explain what they are and contrast them to the teaching of Scripture as the necessary corrective. Scripture is “the word of the great King,”² and God’s design to remedy the church from the condition described as the seven deadly D’s. Only the King can solve the problems within his Kingdom.

There are many reports ranging from mission agencies³ and public surveys⁴, to futurist predictions, that indicate the church in America is waning in vitality and influence. This writer’s pilgrimage forced him to ask, “Why is

* Gene Heacock (D.Min, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary) is Executive Director of the Sandberg Leadership Center at ATS.

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American Christianity in the condition it is in, and how did it get that way?" He knew he had to first deal with the Kingdom of God within him before he could deal with the larger issues of the church. God began a deeper work of grace within him and increased his passion and devotion for Jesus. He then directed his attention to the church in America. He began to seek God's will through the revelation given in Holy Scripture. He needed to learn how to listen for God's voice and follow his leadership. His reflection led him to identify what he called the seven deadly D's of church life in America. This writer's conclusion is that only the Kingdom of God has the needed theological corrective to conquer these seven deficiencies. The Kingdom is a comprehensive systemic approach.⁵ It includes the doctrine of creation.⁶ It provides spiritual power and spiritual dynamics to convert and sanctify believers.⁷ It is transformational.⁸ It gives a corporate paradigm for Christians to cooperate in mission and in the public square cooperatively.⁹ It is Christ's model for relational unity in the midst of great diversity (John 13:34, 17:21). The Kingdom is God's design for personal discipleship¹⁰ and cultural diagnosis.¹¹ The Kingdom's thrust is always missional.¹² The advancement of the Kingdom includes spiritual warfare.¹³ The Kingdom provides the relational aspects within community.¹⁴ The Kingdom provides a new model of leadership.¹⁵

God's Kingdom is advanced during revival that results in great cultural and societal change.¹⁶ It includes repentance¹⁷ and is a source of great hope for God's people.¹⁸ The King is invited to come to Earth to transform the Earth through prayer (Matthew 6:10). In united believing prayer, the great historical awakenings have occurred.¹⁹ The Kingdom offers great hope in the world today.²⁰

Moving Toward the Kingdom – Defining the Kingdom

This writer's interest in the Kingdom grows out of his conviction that Jesus Christ came to Earth as God in the flesh and his Word is supreme. Where one sees Christ, one sees God; when one hears Christ speaking, one hears God speak. The focus of Christ's teaching and the disciplining of his followers was on the Kingdom of God. In Jesus Christ's earthly ministry, he spoke directly about the church only two times (Matt. 16, 18) yet taught on the Kingdom of God dozens of times.²¹

In modern times, we as Christians have focused so much on the visible church that we have often neglected the invisible Kingdom. Often, the visible church has been substituted for the Kingdom. This is reductionistic; the church becomes myopic and sometimes idolatrous.²² This writer's conviction is that the deeper needs of spiritual vitality, the transformation of the individual, an entire

culture, and the expansion of the Gospel to reach all nations, can be found in the Kingdom of God as transforming presence. This model is needed in the 21st century.

This writer is convinced that in the Kingdom one can find the solution to the greatest needs within Western Christianity today; namely a “new” approach to theology, a theological track for transformational leadership, a new paradigm of the Holy Spirit, and the need for a new reconfiguration of denominational cooperation for the 21st century. This writer realizes that these “new” thoughts are actually old thoughts found in Jesus’ teaching and ministry. He was a wise steward of the Kingdom who knew how to bring out old truths as well as new (Matthew 13:52).

When Jesus spoke about the Kingdom, he used a loaded term pregnant with Old Testament history, meaning, and promise. Jesus spoke from a Hebraic worldview. That worldview is holistic and capable of handling the tensions of the Kingdom. Modern readers have attempted to over-define, redefine, or compartmentalize the Kingdom. This writer is proposing that the Kingdom is a comprehensive term capable of handling multiple definitions, dimensions, and tensions. The Kingdom touches not only the individual, but also culture, commerce, recreation, literature, ecology, justice and racial harmony. The expansion of the Kingdom has had a leavening effect upon all of history. One author describes history as being “under the influence,”²³ and documents how Christianity has transformed civilization throughout history. This is the expansion of the King’s *shalom* (the Gospel) to all nations. Christ’s last instructions to his disciples at his ascension were related to the Kingdom’s dynamic work on earth (Acts 1:8).

Throughout this work, this author will use the term “Kingdom of God” to mean the rule of God, as he follows Ladd’s definition that “the Kingdom of God is basically the rule of God.”²⁴ Ladd also has noted that “God’s kingdom, His *malkuth*, is His universal rule, His sovereignty over all the earth”²⁵ and that “the Kingdom of God is His Kingship, His rule, His authority.”²⁶ The terms “reign” and “realm” are often associated with understanding where the Kingdom is, how it operates, and when it will come in totality.

Alva J. McClain presents eight historic and theological positions in his attempt to define the Kingdom. They are the “national, millennial, celestial, ecclesiastical, spiritual, moral, liberal social, and the modern eschatological kingdom.”²⁷ Howard Snyder also identifies eight expressions. They include “the Kingdom as future hope, inner experience, mystical communion, institutional church, counter system, political state, Christianized culture, and earthly utopia.”²⁸ Both McClain and Snyder also recognize the challenge of defining the

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Kingdom. McClain quotes Louis Berkoff: "No one can make a serious study of the subject without discovering that the Kingdom of God is a many-sided conception, and that its presentation in the gospels is complex rather than simple. The study of its various aspects leads to a difference of emphasis; and this gives birth to a large number of, often disparate, views."²⁹ Snyder will approach these disparate views by proposing a resolution. The Kingdom can have multiple definitions, which he labels "polarities." They may appear to be contradictory but Snyder insists that they are actually complimentary. They are opposite poles held in tension with one another but all are equally true. Snyder will propose a multidimensional model that looks like a gyroscope, to balance these tensions.³⁰

As noted, this writer will use the term "Kingdom of God" to mean the rule of God. That rule includes God's rule over all things and his design is to reconcile all things to himself (Colossians 1:19). Therefore, the rule of God would include the material, spiritual, the seen, and the invisible. God's rule requires a Christian worldview, a doctrine of creation, and the conviction that God is at work in history. Kingdom rule is to have a transforming influence upon culture. The Kingdom model invites God's diverse subjects to cooperatively work together on earth as they await Christ's return.

This writer recognizes the historic viewpoints regarding the multiple definitions of the Kingdom. His focus is on the spiritual dynamics.³¹ of the Kingdom rather than an over-definition of "the Kingdom." Throughout this article, the Kingdom of God will be proposed as God's solution for many of the seen and symptomatic issues of the visible church in a somewhat simplistic fashion. This writer realizes the complexities of modern life and the historic cycles of Christianity's advancement and regression. He is aware of unique forms of spiritual warfare that we as Christians face in the church in America today. He does not propose the Kingdom of God as a Pollyanna panacea, a cure-all for all of modern life or for all of the ills of the contemporary church. Nor does he set up the contemporary church like the proverbial straw-man to bash down for what it is not. His attempt is not to use the Kingdom as a wrecking ball to knock the church down, but rather to plant seeds for thought and to cultivate the future church's leadership growth. John Stott eloquently stated that "vision begins with a holy discontentment with the status quo."³²

This writer, like many, is not content with the spiritual state of Christianity and the church in America. While there are wonderful and notable exceptions of church life and the expansion of the gospel, it has been repeatedly stated that 85 percent of the churches in America have plateaued, declined, or are dysfunctional.³³ Not only have the church's statistics reached epidemic

proportions; spiritual transformation and growth in sanctification within the lives of Christians is often superficial. There is little difference between the moral behavior of Christians and non-Christians. The spiritual tide is out and the wind of the Spirit, in many places, is barely perceptible. As Lovelace has stated, "spiritual warfare in its most basic definition is the advancement of the Kingdom of God over the Kingdom of darkness."³⁴ We as Christians are presently groping in spiritual darkness. We are in need of light. We need God's transforming presence through massive spiritual awakening. Revival is God's solution.

Today, Christians have a need for spiritual transformation, yet many Christian leaders propose human-centered managerial, organizational, and methodological solutions. Leadership often has been defined as the following of principles rather than following a living person. Some believe that leadership is the same in business, sports, government, and the church. They all follow the same principles, as "no matter what the profession, the principles of leadership remain the same."³⁵ This writer is concerned that this emphasis may divert evangelicals away from a God-centered solution. The core problem is spiritual and theological. Most of the solutions proposed today are prescribed symptomatically rather than systemically. Only the Kingdom of God offers a truly biblical, systemic solution for spiritual change. It includes repentance, the truth of God's Word, reconciliation, and inviting God's transforming presence through the person of the Holy Spirit. The Kingdom's expectation is that the whole world will be touched by the expansion of the Gospel. God's incarnational presence will change every area of one's life.

This writer will include Lovelace's definition of revival to mean the advancement of the Kingdom of light over the Kingdom of darkness.³⁶ This writer is convinced that there is a cause-and-effect relationship between historic awakening, the advancement of the Kingdom of God, and social change. The intangible element of hope is the vital link in personal renewal and cultural transformation. Many of the movements of revival today offer dualistic solutions. At times revival is reactionary and not proactive. In addition, revivals often have not focused on the transformation of an entire culture. True awakening (Divine intervention) is when an entire culture experiences a massive paradigm shift that changes the history of a nation.³⁷ True revival "is when the people of God become saturated with the presence of God."³⁸ True revival is "when the power of God's light push[es] back the forces of darkness."³⁹ This writer contends that we as Christians must pray and prepare for true awakening, not just individual revival or revivalism. His conviction is that there must be an entirely new type of leader who holds Scripture and theology in high regard and who is engaged in personal renewal. These leaders rely on God's power to

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transform them. They then multiply that change into society to advance the Gospel globally.

Proper understanding of the Kingdom of God will provide a theological framework for transformational leaders. These leaders are equally committed to scholarship and the dynamic operation of the Holy Spirit. The focus of this article is the call for God-centered, Kingdom-oriented, multidimensional, transformational leadership in the 21st century. In short, it is Kingdom leadership. The need for a new type of Christian leader is overwhelming and the task of preparation is multifaceted and multidimensional. This author's conviction is that traditional methods of preparation and approaches toward training must be re-examined if one is to train this new type of leader. A new *approach* to theology is needed, not new theology. Kingdom leaders think about theology, and its interaction and application, as it is incarnated within the greater culture. Systemic theology deals with the spatial, racial, and systemic issues in a post-modern culture in a biblical, holistic fashion. It is called "systemic theology" in contrast to classical "systematic theology." Theology can become flat and one-dimensional rather than dynamic, interactive, and relational. It can be compared to reviewing a company's stock portfolio of assets and liabilities versus meeting the owner personally. The Kingdom of God emphasizes the dynamic operation of meeting the owner, the King, in a dynamic partnership.

This writer is deeply committed to the methodology of Jesus' leadership. He was relational and lived in community. He modeled a multidimensional approach to leadership. He was prophet, priest, and King. He knew how to lead in the unseen and the seen simultaneously. These multiple levels must be recovered to recapture a Kingdom mindset for 21st century leaders. This writer is concerned that many evangelicals have lost a proper emphasis on the unseen dimension, something this writer calls "intangibles." Intangibles deal with unseen dimensions of things such as hope, unity, perseverance, and spiritual dynamics. Evangelical tradition has much to offer in this area. Many have lost contact with God's supernatural presence. The Holy Spirit's work is often ignored or assumed, rather than invited. These intangible elements are often assumed, missing, or misused. This loss has robbed Evangelicalism of its spiritual birthright.

Evangelicals often have become so caught up in visible success that they forget about the invisible realities of character, and the unseen dimensions of ministry.⁴⁰ It is these invisible and intangible elements that produce energy to move ahead. Hope, unity, and repentance are intangibles. They are needed for God's people to progress and to gain forward movement. Christianity is a movement not an organization. It is this writer's interest to see the Gospel

expand. He wants to understand how these intangible dynamics of the Kingdom catalyze change in the world and bring about transformation. This is what rivets this writer's attention to Jesus' words in the New Testament regarding the Kingdom of God. It is also this writer's conviction that a biblical understanding of the Kingdom will help 21st century leaders discover a new paradigm of the Holy Spirit. It is this writer's hope to discover how the Kingdom operated within the first century so such knowledge can guide those in the 21st century into a new reconfiguration of unity and advancement of the Gospel into the whole world.

The Kingdom of God offers a comprehensive theological framework and solution for all of these identified areas. The Kingdom is God's design and it is the necessary corrective to combat the maladies that are faced at a pastoral level, because it is a systemic solution. This writer will propose several conclusions regarding the Kingdom, and then will examine the seven deadly D's. It will become clear that the Kingdom provides a biblical, systemic solution for the multiple maladies that plague the church in America.

This writer's conclusion regarding the Kingdom as God's rule is as follows:

- Kingdom rule is comprehensive over all of creation; therefore there is no secular world.
- Kingdom rule provides a theological framework and worldview; therefore the Gospel is to touch all of reality.
- Kingdom rule is righteousness revealed; therefore Kingdom subjects are to be transformed into this righteousness.
- Kingdom rule is power released at conversion; therefore Kingdom subjects will reveal growth in heavenly values.
- Kingdom rule is *shalom* and relational peace; therefore Kingdom subjects seek organic unity.
- Kingdom rule is progressive and expansive; therefore Kingdom subjects grow in transformation and are missional throughout the Earth.
- Kingdom rule is comprehensive; therefore all of reality is evaluated by the King's standards.

The Seven Deadly D's and the Kingdom

What are the seven deadly D's of church life in America? Simply stated, they are:

1. **The Great Divide** between the secular and the sacred, resulting in the loss of the Kingdom.

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2. **The Great Disconnect** of the Gospel from worldview, resulting in a weightless Gospel.
3. **The Great Divorce** between belief and behavior.
4. **The Great Deception** between decisions and conversions.
5. **The Great Division** between the church as an integrated, whole body of Christ into a steady decline of increased fragmentation and rampant spiritual confusion. This has resulted in division regarding the church's role in public life.
6. **The Great Diversion** of programs versus making disciples; the great omission in the great commission, which has been the removal of the word of obedience.
7. **The Great Delusion** that the church in America is healthy.

These seven maladies are the result of a complex set of root causes over the last century, many whose origins are found in the Enlightenment. They include theological, cultural, and spiritual issues. They are very broad, including Western empiricism, cultural pluralism, post-modernism, and higher education. Within Evangelicalism, leadership paradigms, consumerism, mega-church models, and generational issues have caused debilitating spiritual loss. This compartmentalization of the Christian faith has resulted in moral compromise, spiritual schizophrenia, and the lack of spiritual vitality. The church has lost much of its theological framework and much of its spiritual depth.

The Great Divide

While Kingdom rule is comprehensive over all of creation, the Great Divide between the sacred and the secular is real. Many have documented this Great Divide, including A. W. Tozer, Leonard Ravenhill, Harold Ockenga, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, H. Richard, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Carl F. H. Henry in the mid-20th century. They have all called for repentance of the religious status quo and the need for cultural change⁴¹

Following the writers listed above, the prophetic voice of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the reformation perspective of Frances Schaeffer were heard. In the 1970s and 1980s, alarming statistics from George Gallup, Jr., were presented and the prophetic voices of Jim Wallis, Tom Sine, Ron Sider, and John Perkins were heard. At the beginning of the 21st century, God has raised up voices from within American Evangelicalism such as Henry Blackaby, Charles Colson, David Wells, James Engle, Howard Snyder, and others from outside America, including Os Guinness, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, and leaders from the developing world. Christianity is in need of deep change and renewal. The

information is available, but an ear to listen and a willingness to learn repentance is the key to transformation. The great delusion that the church in America is fine can easily be refuted by Shaw, who writes that “evidence that the winds of secularization have grown stronger is seen in the statistical growth of those who identify themselves as ‘nonreligious.’ Os Guinness has called this ‘the most dramatic change on the entire religious map of the twentieth century.’ The net result of secularization in the modern world has been to make religious ideas less meaningful and religious institutions more marginal.”⁴² Unfortunately secularization has a great impact upon the church as well. George Gallup notes that “comparing church and non-church Americans in a number of categories (cheating on taxes, inflating resumes, and similar deceitful behaviors), the pollster found ‘little difference in the ethical views and behavior of the church and the unchurch’ ... even among conservative Christians.”⁴³

There is a systemic spiritual issue in the church in America that cannot be solved without dealing with root causes in a repentant, holistic, systemic approach. However, because the outward condition of the church is overwhelming and the symptoms of moral decline are so alarming, most approaches have been designed symptomatically rather than systemically. A Kingdom mindset and systemic approach is needed for massive spiritual change.

The comprehensive call to reform the church systemically in both theology and spirit can be recovered through the discovery of a comprehensive model. How would a rediscovery of the Kingdom of God remedy the root causes of the seven deadly D’s? The Great Divide between the secular and the sacred is a direct result of a loss of the Kingdom of God. The great King of the Kingdom is the creator of all things; all things belong to him, were created by his command, are part of his domain, and are under his sovereign control. There is no secular world; this mindset is a creation by a world in spiritual rebellion, and the creation of language and worldview that attempts to put a wedge between the seen and the unseen. Alistair Petrie proclaims the magnificent vision of God’s sovereign leadership, stating “God is Lord over history, nations, kingdoms, and all the peoples of the earth. Jeremiah 10:7 refers to God as ‘King of the nations’, and Psalm 22:28 declares that ‘dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations’ ... whatever happens on His land comes under His ultimate sovereignty. The quality of our stewardship, which God has entrusted to us, determines how He acts toward us and within our lives.”⁴⁴

It is out of this biblical worldview and a Hebraic understanding that the Kingdom of God is best understood in contrast to the Great Divide. It is this understanding that will combat the fallacy of thought of the Great Divide. The Kingdom of God points to a Hebraic holistic view of both God’s role as the

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creator of all matter and the sustainer of all things.⁴⁵ The Kingdom of God is the interpretive, theological bridge between the Old and New Testaments.⁴⁶ Scripture continues to point us to this transcendent God who rules over all of creation, over all powers seen and unseen, over history, nations, rulers, tragedies and war, blessings and curses, as well as individual destinies. He rejoices in his creation because “the Earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof” (Psalm 24:1). He reveals himself in the canvas of creation that causes one to run into the sanctuary and cry, “Glory!” (Psalm 29:9). God has revealed himself as both transcendent and imminent. This great King cannot be separated or bisected into secular and sacred.

The Great Divide has become the source of both great apathy and misery in the world, as many Christians have embraced this ungodly division with tragic consequences. It is what Martin Luther King, Jr., described as an “other worldly religion.”⁴⁷ According to King, it is a gospel that has no concern for racial equality or economic justice. He says that “I have watched churches ... commit themselves to a completely other worldly religion which makes a strange biblical distinction between body and soul, between the sacred and the secular.”⁴⁸ Marvin Wilson reminds us of our Hebraic roots, as he notes that “according to Hebrew thought, there was neither cosmological dualism (the belief that the created world was evil, set apart from and opposed to the spiritual world) nor anthropological dualism (soul versus body). To the Hebrew mind, a human being was a dynamic body-soul unity, called to serve God his Creator passionately, with his whole being, within the physical world.”⁴⁹

Abraham Kuyper reminds one that the world is owned by God, as he says “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all does not cry ‘mine’.”⁵⁰ It is also apparent that God’s rule is challenged. According to C. S. Lewis, “There is not one square inch of neutral ground in the universe; it is all claimed by God and counter-claimed by the enemy.”⁵¹ The Puritans recognized God’s sovereign ownership, but they were realistic in recognizing that regaining God’s rule over the world was a painstaking process echoed in the words of John Owen. “We regain the Kingdom of God one inch at a time.”⁵² The creation of a theological framework and a vocabulary that accepts secularization as a fact of life in the modern world has attempted to remove the Lordship of Christ over every area of life. This mindset has radically affected the spiritual life of the typical American Christian in a profound and negative way. This has resulted in its macro-systemic expression in the creation of the spiritual-cultural rebellion of the 20th century. On a micro-personal scale, this has resulted in pseudo-Holiness, cultural absorption, and cultural escapism within the individual’s lifestyle.

James Davison Hunter has suggested that the loss of the sacred canopy,⁵³ which he describes as “a broader cosmology”⁵⁴ has opened up the culture wars within American society. He suggests that the core of the culture wars is rooted in the lack of a biblical worldview within the broader society.

The integral relationship of one’s private spiritual life and the expression of that faith in the public arena is an area of growing tension and confusion among American Christians. If the Great Divide is accepted as “normal,” the believer will often become confused, compartmentalized, and fragmented. This loss of clarity can also affect individual motivation to penetrate society as salt and light. The Great Divide can also result in a corporate defeatist mindset and a loss of hope that society can change through supernatural intervention. This has dimmed the believer’s hope that God’s Kingdom (spiritual awakening) can come to earth again in his or her own day.

Lovelace suggests that the loss of this “broader cosmology” has resulted in an anti-supernatural mindset that has affected Christians greatly. He argues that many modern evangelicals doubt the possibility that true revival leading to massive spiritual awakening and cultural change is possible. Lovelace asks, “Can waterfalls flow backwards?”⁵⁵ He means, can God change the current cultural decay in America? This will require a massive spiritual paradigm shift among evangelicals.

The Great Divide is illustrated in the use of vocabulary that separated the Old English word “wholly” into two separate words now used as “holy” and “whole.”⁵⁶ This has resulted in a hundred greater evils in understanding the Great Divide. Unfortunately acceptance of the terminology and mindset of a secular world has caused a redefinition of salvation as an escape from the world. Once again, one can gain understanding from the Hebrew roots. According to historian Timothy Smith, “The Hebrew sensibility, as contrasted with that of Hellenic Platonism, stressed the wholeness of human beings, the unity their psychic and physical existence, and the bonds that link social experience to inward spirituality.”⁵⁷

The Great Divide between the secular and the sacred attempts to dethrone God of his rightful authority. God is not welcomed in the public square. Not only has this mindset been created in the general public’s mind, but gradually over time it has influenced many evangelicals. This dualistic approach has undermined the consuming passion to see the immediate and long-term leaven of God’s presence invade every facet of life. The Great Divide is often represented by the church’s perception of its role in the world and the role of the pastor. The Kingdom of God will not allow this division.

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Once the secular mindset has been firmly established within the church and its leaders, it often is perpetuated by religious control, compartmentalization, and dualistic thinking among Christian leaders and lay people alike. This mindset affects the external, overall mission and vision of the church, as well as the internal morale and expectations of church leaders. Often the church's focus is internal rather than external.

Eugene Peterson describes the typical mindset of many of the 110 million adherents in America who occupy houses of Christian worship on any given Sunday. Peterson will push the extreme reality of the permanence of the Kingdom of God as the consummate call for every believer. He will stand up against the status quo with a bold declaration. He has noted that:⁵⁸

As a pastor, I don't like being viewed as nice but insignificant. I bristle ... with the comment, 'This was wonderful, Pastor, but now we have to get back to the real world, don't we?' I had thought we were in the most-real world, the world revealed as God's, a world believed to be invaded by God's grace and turning on the pivot of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection.

If he realized that I actually believe the American way of life is doomed to destruction, and that another kingdom is right now being formed in secret to take its place...yes, I believe that the kingdoms of this world, American and Venezuelan and Chinese, will become the kingdom of our God and Christ, and I believe this new kingdom is already among us.

If the Great Divide is perpetuated, we as Christians reduce the rule of God to a building, a tradition, or a certain hour of the week. In this way, it is possible to treat God more like a pagan, regional deity of the Old Testament than the sovereign, transcendent Lord of all. Peterson (1989) writes that "I am being subversive. I am undermining the kingdom of self and establishing the kingdom of God. I am helping them to become what God wants them to be, using the methods of subversion."⁵⁹

The maintenance mindset among many clergy and lay leaders is one of the root causes of Christian cultural isolation, cultural absorption, and eschatological escapism. This has resulted in ritual religious dualism and enculturation rather than cultural transformation. A good starting point in dealing with the secular versus the sacred of the Great Divide is for leaders to rediscover their true identities and mission through the Kingdom of God. Peterson once again recognizes that this secular mindset within the church can

be a product of sin that is encultured within the church. The church can actually be one of the greatest obstacles to Kingdom growth. The church can become so encultured and sinful that it no longer responds to God's call to be the salt and the light.

The call for a new Kingdom orientation, Kingdom dynamic, Kingdom relationships, and Kingdom mission is clearly needed. The heart of the Great Divide is theological and spiritual. There is a need for theological and spiritual reformation, and revival, among Christian leaders, pastors, churches, and mission agencies.⁶⁰ This change also will require different preparation and strategy for Kingdom leaders in seminaries in contrast to the standard approach for professional ministry training in the church. Kingdom leaders need preparation to participate in the expansion of the Kingdom, not in the maintenance of a religious organization. This will force seminaries to reconsider the multidimensional aspects of leadership and a transformational, theological framework to be an impetus to see the Kingdom of God come on earth. The standard approach to leadership is insufficient, because traditional preparation for ministry training is often one-dimensional and does not include the Kingdom of God. According to Peterson, many pastors and church leaders are naïve regarding the reality of the need for, and regarding the challenge of bringing about, deep change in the church today. Peterson writes that "we think the church is already the kingdom of God and, if only better organized and motivated, can conquer the world. But nowhere in Scripture or history do we see a church synonymous with the kingdom of God. The church in many instances is worldlier than the world. When we equate the church and the kingdom and the identity turns out to be false, we feel 'taken in'. Little wonder that anger and cynicism are epidemic behind the smiling veneer of American pastors."⁶¹ Few evangelical leaders are prepared to deal with the unseen dimensions of ministry and the idolatry within the church. The training of subversives is the work of the Kingdom.

The Great Disconnect

Kingdom rule provides a theological framework and worldview. Therefore, the Gospel is to touch all of reality. The next deadly D that the Kingdom of God must address is the crucial issue of worldview. Worldview is the lens and framework through which individuals process information and ideas, culture and values, choices and lifestyle. Alexander Solzhenitsyn has documented the loss of worldview as one of the markers of cultural decline within Western civilization.⁶² His great concern was the loss of absolutes and the loss of moral courage to stand against the mainstream of society. Robert C.

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Sproul expands upon the importance of worldview and its effects upon people, as he notes that “students of history realize that no society can survive, no civilization can function without some unifying system of thought.”⁶³ Sproul expands the idea of a unifying system of thought by asking, “How do the parts fit together to make a whole? Some kind of glue is required in order for the parts to stick together ... the glue is found in a unifying system of thought, what we call worldview.”⁶⁴ Worldview shapes people’s values and provides them with a framework to interpret reality. An entire culture is shaped through worldview. It determines what is true and what is of utmost importance. Worldview is more important than worship style, church model, methodology, or denominational affiliation.

Most Christian leaders assume a worldview for themselves and the people they lead. Charles Colson clarifies the importance of worldview in light of cultural transformation, as he writes that:

We are either contributing to the broken condition of the world or participating with God in transforming the world to reflect his righteousness. We are either advancing the rule of Satan or establishing the reign of God.

Evangelicals have been particularly vulnerable to this narrow view because of our emphasis on personal commitment. On one hand, this has been the movement’s greatest strength, bringing millions to a relationship with Christ.

But this emphasis on a personal relationship can also be Evangelicalism’s greatest weakness because it may prevent us from seeing God’s plan for us beyond personal salvation. Understanding Christianity as a total life system is absolutely essential.⁶⁵

Colson’s analysis is that the overemphasis on a personal relationship with Christ, and the abandonment of Christian worldview, have left much of Evangelicalism impotent to engage the greater culture and to catalyze deep transformation. He clarifies the need for greater integration of thought and social action among evangelicals. Colson further writes that “to engage the world, however, requires that we understand the great ideas that compete for peoples minds and hearts. A debilitating weakness in modern Evangelicalism is that we’ve been fighting cultural skirmishes on all sides without knowing what the

war itself is about. We have not identified the worldviews that lie at the root of cultural conflict – and this ignorance dooms our best efforts.”⁶⁶

Christian worldview must be returned to Kingdom leaders as part of the theological track needed in preparation for revival and awakening. Worldviews are shaped in the soul in this life as preparation for the next life. When heaven’s values become a vital part of Kingdom subjects here on earth, the potential for great spiritual and social change exists. Without a proper worldview, the Gospel’s power is confined, especially if there is a wide-spread acceptance of the secular-sacred divide. The Gospel becomes over-personalized and leaders focus almost exclusively on salvation. The weakness in this approach is that the Gospel has little connection to everyday life. This is what Mark Shaw describes as a “weightless gospel.”⁶⁷

The weightless gospel is a gospel that reduces Christian faith to personal salvation and life in the local church. Fundamentalist, evangelical, Pentecostal, and charismatic churches often have had an inadequate worldview of the comprehensive nature of the Gospel to redeem all things. This has been true about many on the radical fringe. There are many revivalists who lead the church in renewal prayer, but do not have a doctrine of creation. The term “weightless” describes the lack of substance that connects the Gospel with all of reality. Os Guinness originally coined the term in his critique of modern Christianity, which was borrowed from Nietzsche’s description of everything being in flux, in a state of meaninglessness, substance-lessness, and nothingness. Shaw applies this description to the lack of theological underpinnings exhibited within much of Western Christianity. Shaw describes four major categories of weightlessness.⁶⁸

1. Weightlessness in relationship to cultural change.
2. Weightlessness in relationship to moral transformation.
3. Weightlessness in relationship to unity in the church.
4. Weightlessness in relationship to holding converts.

According to Shaw the effects of the weightless gospel include:

1. Loss of converts and “easy-believism.”
2. Little social or cultural impact.
3. Lack of moral transformation in converts.
4. Lack of unity in and between churches.

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The result of this weightless condition of the Gospel can be most simply described as the idolatry of the church. The connection between weightlessness and idolatry is this—the visible church replaces the invisible King. Therefore, the needs, demands, and goals of the church are seen as real and the call of the King and the Kingdom go unnoticed. The church itself, which is to be a means to an end, often has become the end. The visible church often can dominate people's thinking and blur their focus on, and worship of, the unseen God. The visible church can become idolatrous and it has become an obstacle that keeps people from focusing on the invisible God. Herbert Schlossberg argues that "any institution can become idolatrous, but it appears to be a particular hazard with institutions of religion ... it is only a short step to the religious institution's becoming an active agent in the promotion of idolatry or even to become an idol itself as people confuse the means of worship with the object of worship."⁶⁹ Schlossberg further asks, "What more could anyone ask of religion? Well, it might be said that a religion should have God at its end. But anyone with a hierarchy of values has placed something at its apex, and whatever that is, is the god he serves. The Old and New Testaments call such gods idols and provide sufficient reason for affirming that the systems that give them allegiance are religions."⁷⁰ The Great Divide results in the idolatry of the church. The Kingdom of God is the necessary corrective to this idolatry.

One of the marks of a church that was "weighty" is described in 1 Thessalonians 1:9 in the turning away from idols. Idolatry was an issue in the New Testament church and it is a real and pressing issue within the contemporary church as well. This idolatry can result in Christian cultural captivity reminiscent of the spiritual bondage of the Israelites during Moses' day.⁷¹ The realization of one's cultural and spiritual captivity can become the seedbed for a mighty intercession if it is acknowledged and repented. Shaw links the importance of worldview, a weighty Gospel, and the need to return to the theology of the Kingdom of God.

The connection between the loss of a Christian worldview and a weightless gospel is clear. The need to recover the Kingdom of God as a theological framework and corrective is needed. The needed leverage to conquer the secular-sacred dualism can be addressed in understanding that the Kingdom of God began in the Old Testament writings and in Hebraic thought. Its worldview is systemic, not individualistic, and vitally connected to the Earth and to culture.

The doctrine of creation, a biblical theology of culture, and a renewed study of the cultural mandate must be explored to prevent future generations of leaders from succumbing to the illusion of the Great Divide. To pray "thy

Kingdom come on earth” (Matthew 6:10) is more than a request for individual spiritual blessing, but rather a comprehensive recovery of God’s power, grace, and presence for all of Creation.

The Book of Order of the Presbyterian Church USA describes God’s consummate concern for the reclaiming of all things in this way:⁷²

God created the material universe and pronounced it good. The covenant community understood that the material world reflects the glory of God. The prophets warned, however, against offering the material as a substitute for offering the self to God.

In Jesus Christ the Word became flesh, and God hallowed material reality. Jesus presented his body as a living sacrifice. In his ministry, he used common things like nets, fish, baskets, jars, ointment, clay, towel and basin, water, bread, and wine. Working in and through these material things, he blessed and healed people, reconciled and bound them into community, and exhibited the grace, power, and presence of the Kingdom of God. (1.3023-3033)

The Great Divorce

Kingdom rule is righteousness revealed. Therefore, Kingdom subjects are to be transformed into this righteousness. The call to live in relationship and submission to the great King of the universe requires submission to his standards of righteousness. Unfortunately much of Evangelicalism has suffered the same kind of moral erosion as the surrounding culture. The Great Divorce between belief and behavior, as seen in moral life and in public behavior, is sufficient cause to reconsider the authoritative claims of the Kingdom of God upon individuals and churches alike. The greatest heresy of the 21st century is not in orthodox doctrinal confession, but rather in the dualistic divide between belief and behavior. Consistency in lifestyle is not expected in the personal and corporate life of believers. The alarming statistics revealing this divorce, between biblical information (one’s belief system) and one’s practice, are catastrophic. The effect this Great Divorce has had upon pastors, lay leaders, and the eyes of the watching world is difficult to document. Many view the church as an irrelevant and hypocritical institution.⁷³

The spiritual and moral decay of the lives of believers, the breakdown of marriage and family, and the lack of spiritual depth and growth among confessing Christians, have all reached epidemic proportions. Many have

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documented this Great Divorce. Ben Freudenburg writes that “the life values of Christian teenagers and adults are often indistinguishable from the world’s life values. In survey after survey, the beliefs of Christians are largely the same as the beliefs of non-Christians.”⁷⁴

George Barna writes, “Religion, although an enduring interest of Americans, remains oddly incapable of influencing the lives of a large number of people.”⁷⁵ Barna documents what many Christian leaders have suspected: the Great Divorce has reached epidemic proportions. He says, “No matter how you look at the statistics, they seem to point to the same conclusion: The American church exerts precious little influence on society. Not only is church growth failing to keep up with the nation’s birthrate, but the behavior of those who identify themselves as Christians cannot be distinguished statistically from those who make no such claim.” In a recent interview, Barna warned, “Despite the activity and *chutzpah* emanating from thousands of congregations, the church in America is losing influence and adherents faster than any other major institution in the nation.”⁷⁶ Then he predicted one of two outcomes for the United States within the next few years: either “massive spiritual revival” or “total moral anarchy ... It all depends on whether the church can rouse itself to respond to current trends.”

The August 5, 2002, edition of *Christianity Today* tells of Barna’s ten-year campaign to awaken church leaders about the Great Divorce. He stated optimistically over five years ago, “At the risk of sounding like an alarmist, I believe the church in America can turn itself around and begin to affect the culture, rather than be affected by it.”⁷⁷ Unfortunately, he laments today that the Great Divorce between belief and behavior is steadily becoming the norm among Christians in America. “Nothing’s changing and the change we are seeing is not for the better.”⁷⁸

Not only have individual believers been affected by this Great Divorce, but entire congregations have been devastated by the lack of internal consistency and outward expression of corporate life. William Hendricks writes that “there is a dark side to recent reports of surging church attendance in North America. While countless ‘unchurched’ people may be flocking in the front door of the church, a steady stream of the ‘churched’ is flowing quietly out the back. These are the disillusioned Christians, people for whom the faith has not turned out as advertised.”⁷⁹ He suggests that the deepest needs of the American heart and soul are not being touched. The call for consistency comes not only from statistics, but also from Christian statesmen who lament the evangelical dropout rate. In the words of J. I. Packer:⁸⁰

I turn finally to those whom I call disaffected deviationists, the casualties and dropouts of the modern evangelical movement, many of whom have now turned against it to denounce it as a neurotic perversion of Christianity. It is distressing ... because there are so many of them. Who are they? They are people who once saw themselves as evangelicals, either from being evangelically nurtured or from coming to profess conversion within the evangelical sphere of influence, but who have become disillusioned about the evangelical point of view and have turned their back on it, feeling that it let them down.

Some leave it for intellectual reasons ... others leave because they were led to expect that as Christians they would enjoy ... trouble-free circumstances ... hurt and angry, feeling themselves victims of a confidence trick, they now accuse the Evangelicalism they knew of having failed and fooled them ... it is a mercy if they do not therewith similarly accuse and abandon God himself.

Modern Evangelicalism has much to answer for in the number of casualties of this sort that it has caused in recent years by its naivety of mind and unrealism of expectation.

Christian author Philip Yancey laments, "Sometimes in a waiting room or on an airplane I strike up conversations with strangers, during the course of which they learn that I write books on spiritual themes. Eyebrows arch, barriers spring up, and often I hear yet another horror story about church. My seatmates must expect me to defend the church, because they always act surprised when I respond, 'Oh, it's even worse than that. Let me tell you my story.' I have spent most of my life in recovery from the church."⁸¹

All is not well with the church in America. The church is broken in many ways. Unfortunately, the church is not broken enough in a spiritual sense, according to the words of Psalm 51:17. It often has been that in the times of the greatest darkness, a true spirit of brokenness is often found among God's people. The data regarding the moral state of the church point to a spiritual problem far deeper than statistics or spiritual dropouts can tell. The greater need is for spiritual renewal and revival. The Kingdom of God and its emphasis is needed to correct the malady of the Great Divorce.

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This mindset also has affected public perception of the reality of God, in the eyes of the unbelieving world. Clergy sex scandals, financial deception, power struggles, church splits, decreasing concern for racial justice and social issues, have all resulted in a loss of credibility for the church within the surrounding culture. This lack of consistency in holiness and sanctification has resulted in worldliness that has spiritually jaded large segments of the population. It has caused them to dismiss the church as a hypocritical institution. The church is no longer the visible compass for how people are to live their daily lives. Only a recovery of the theological and spiritual roots of the Kingdom of God (a recovery that includes repentance, brokenness, and humility) can transform the lethargy of the church. It is this writer's contention that when the church is renewed and revived, the public perception of the church will change for the good. This has been God's pattern in history⁸² and has been the root of the Gospel's power to change culture.⁸³

The King of the Kingdom in the Scriptures demands righteousness from his subjects. He also empowers them to serve and live righteously for him. Righteousness is not only a gift imparted to the believer through justification (Romans 5:1-10), but a new condition and new orientation toward all of life that is expressed in righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:11-21). Righteousness is not merely a theological concept alone but a comprehensive lifestyle. The righteous are those "whose way of thinking, feeling, and acting [are] wholly conformed to the character of God."⁸⁴

The New Testament knows nothing of this disconnect between belief and behavior. An in-depth recovery of biblical truth and spiritual renewal based on the holiness of the great King will bridge this great gap in the unholy disconnect. Jesus warned that words or acts alone do not constitute a true relationship with him (Matthew 7:22-23). Jonathan Edwards expresses this same thought:

The external acts of worship consisting in bodily gestures, words, and sounds are the cheapest part of religion, and least contrary to our lusts. Wicked men enjoy their covetousness, their pride, their malice, envy, and revenge, their sensuality and voluptuousness, in their behavior amongst men ... they will be willing to compound the matter with God, and submit to what forms of worship you please, and as many as you please. Words and sounds are the cheapest part of our religion, and least contrary to our lusts.⁸⁵

Jesus also clearly teaches that a consistent lack of spiritual change (Gospel fruit) will reveal the hypocrisy between belief and behavior, and over time will reveal the true nature of a person's beliefs. A simple summary of a word study of "fruit" reveals the true measure of a converted life. The Gospel fruits which are evident according to the New Testament include:

- A life change, starting with repentance (Matthew 3:8).
- A new connection with the life of Christ (John 15:1-2).
- An expectation to do good works (Colossians 1:10).
- A new relational character quality (Galatians 5:22-26).
- A Godliness that displays the reality of God at work in a life (Romans 7:4-6).
- A desire to worship and praise Jesus (Hebrews 13:15).
- A commitment to be a peacemaker within the Christian community (James 3:17-18).
- A desire to give to God financially (Romans 15:28).
- A desire to multiply and spread the Gospel around the world (Colossians 1:5-6).
- A desire to see others come to Christ (John 15-16).

The call for theological and spiritual reflection and repentance is needed to eliminate the mindset that the Great Divorce is acceptable within the life of individuals or the corporate behavior of churches.

The Great Deception

Kingdom rule is power released at conversion. Therefore, Kingdom subjects are to be transformed into this righteousness and to reveal growth in heaven's values and character here on Earth. The Great Deception between decisions (human response) and conversion (a Divine initiative) must be dealt with if spiritual vitality and transformation is to occur within the church as it now exists. Tragically, we as Christians have reduced the clear call for a radical reorientation of all of life upon entry into the Kingdom of God into a decision to "get saved" or to be "born again." It is clear that a human response to the work of Christ is necessary (Acts 2:36-41), but humanity's response is not the work of conversion.

The lack of spiritual quality control regarding the issue of conversion, and the unwillingness of many Christian leaders to speak out on this subject, has added dysfunction into the already cloudy mist of deception. The danger of this deception is false assurance of salvation and lack of transformation. The danger

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is that salvation may be reduced to a human decision in contrast to salvation by the will of God (John 1:13). Without delving into the theological complexities and historic positions on this topic, it is crucial that a call be issued by the church to its own members to test themselves. "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you – unless, of course, you fail the test?" (2 Corinthians 13:5).

The Kingdom standard is for Kingdom subjects to do serious inventory regarding the state of their own souls. They are to remember that "moment in time" when they "responded" to God, but also to passionately respond to the present work of the Spirit of God in their daily lives. As the Apostle Paul reassures, "I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test" (2 Corinthians 13:5).

Jesus' teaching about the absolute necessity of conversion, and renewed in-depth study of Scriptural proof of conversion and the fruit of conversion, would do more to renew the church than all the church-growth and church-health seminars combined. Gordon Smith notes there is "a pressing need to think theologically and critically about conversion" because the "goal of conversion is transformed humanity."⁸⁶ Smith insists that the subject of conversion and the transformation of the individual must occur with a genuine salvation experience. He challenges evangelicals to reexamine their theology and practices. Kingdom subjects are to be salt and light in a decaying world (Matthew 5:13-16).

The needed theological weight to recover from the Great Deception can be found in examination of the biblical expectation that conversion is a prerequisite for entrance into the Kingdom. Unfortunately, the gap in the Great Deception is growing wider every year. A well-known pastor challenges the Great Deception in his ministry, noting that:

Why should we assume that people who live in an unbroken pattern of adultery, fornication, homosexuality, deceit, and every conceivable kind of flagrant excess are truly born again? Yet that is exactly the assumption Christians of this age have been taught to make. They have been told that the only criterion for salvation is knowing and believing some basic facts about Christ. They hear from the beginning that obedience is optional. It follows logically, then, that someone's one-time profession of faith is more valid than the evidence of that person's ongoing lifestyle. The character of the visible church reveals the detestable consequence of this theology. As a pastor, I regularly

re-baptize people who once ‘made a decision’, were baptized, yet experienced no change.⁸⁷

Charles Shaver laments about this Great Deception, and the huge back door in the church. Shaver comments that “the evidence of such losses mounts up. A study of statistics from all major denominations for the past 20 years reveals that nearly 40 percent of our evangelistic recruits are lost to the church within seven years.”⁸⁸

The clear teaching of the Kingdom of God will not allow passive assimilation of man-made decisions to be substituted for an in-depth call for total surrender to the King of Kings. The governing authority of every believer is to be God’s Word, and this includes every area of a person’s life. There are no “off-limits” signs in the lives of God’s people. Even the great “born again discourse” that Jesus had with Nicodemus focused not only on the removal of sin but on in-depth spiritual transformation. Entrance into the Kingdom requires a whole new way of life; a radical reorientation of everything. If Divine conversion is reduced to human decision then the Kingdom of God becomes optional rather than mandatory. Human beings become the initiator, and leader, of the spiritual journey, not God.

If entrance into the Kingdom becomes human-centered (based on a decision) rather than God-centered (based on God’s work of conversion), not only is there potential eternal loss but the defining, operative paradigm of the Christian life becomes ego-centric rather than theo-centric. This loss of a Kingdom dynamic (model of conversion) and Kingdom ethics (model of behavioral expectations) must force a fresh reexamination of the biblical teaching of conversion as one of the most crucial concerns in the modern church.

Jesus’ teaching on the Kingdom of God, Jesus’ model of this radical new reorientation of all life, and Jesus’ promise to return and reconcile all things, become the spiritual DNA and dynamic force formed in the life of the believer. This begins at conversion but the power of the Kingdom is continual. This has been called “spiritual dynamics.”⁸⁹ This tragic loss of emphasis will require spiritual courage and a new passion for precision of spiritual truth and personal experience. Throughout the great reforming and revival movements of church history, this Kingdom entry point (conversion) has been rediscovered at an in-depth level. It must be fresh for every generation. This was true during Martin Luther’s time, as well as the times of John and Charles Wesley, George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, and Charles Finney. It has been the theme of all revivalists who call for true conversion, not for a human decision alone. Entry

into Christ's Kingdom is a critical issue for evangelicals to revisit. The courage to speak today will require strength, tact, and great compassion.

The Great Division: The Absence of Unity

The Kingdom's rule is *shalom* and relational peace. Therefore, Kingdom subjects seek organic unity. The Great Division describes the current state of the church in its fragmentation and division. The church was designed to be integrally and organically related to her resurrected head, not a conglomeration of individualistic corporate entities. There are encouraging signs and positive steps being taken, moving toward the unity described in John 17.⁹⁰ Yet, many expressions of the visible church are marked by a steady decline of unity, increased fragmentation, and confusion among genuine believers in knowing how to relate and work with one another.

This has resulted in increased sectarianism among some Christians and syncretistic ecumenism among others. The results are often spiritual prejudice or superficial pluralism. The most serious consequences have been rampant spiritual confusion regarding the cooperative mission of the church and division regarding the church's role in public life. Particularly crucial is the tension and division regarding differing views on how Christians are to relate with culture, and defining the church's role in public life. Although not a new problem,⁹¹ the tension regarding the issue of church in culture has escalated in recent times.

James Dobson described this tension in a recent newsletter. He lamented that evangelicals may be retreating again, and he expressed the need for evangelicals to have a model that helps them engage in cultural transformation. Dobson lamented that "Our culture's continued moral decline and, more importantly, the apparent hesitancy of some within the Christian community to try and stem the tide. They believe that for Christians to involve themselves in cultural issues – even though they are profoundly moral in nature – is to dilute the Gospel message."⁹² Dobson cites three voices that give expression to this argument, including veteran newspaper columnist Cal Thomas who writes that "there is no biblical mandate for reforming the world through government ... The time is ripe for conservative Christians to spend less time trying to influence Caesar, to consider what it means to render unto God, and to start rendering. The kingdom of God is not going to arrive aboard Air Force One." Dobson worries that evangelicals may be again reducing their personal faith to just that – personal faith alone without a vision for cultural or societal change. He writes that "*Christianity Today* published an editorial on April 1 titled 'Enough Bullying.' It severely criticized those of us who believe religious broadcasters should speak out on cultural issues. The statement read, '[Christian

activists are] often seen as indignantly condemning the sins of the world more than proclaiming the good news of salvation from those sins.” The editorial went on to decry “the politics of hysteria and outrage.”

There is a need for common unity in the church and for greater clarity of the role and function of the church in public life. The church was never intended to act independently of its Lord, nor was its mission ever to become individualistic, escapist, or myopic. The early church viewed the Kingdom of God as a present reality (Acts 1:7). They served a sovereign Lord to whom they could appeal (Acts 4:23-31). Kingdom purposes here on Earth were to be powerfully displayed. Their advancement would be shaped in unity (Acts 4:32). This corporate solidarity to see Christ’s Kingdom come to Earth has been divided by sectarianism and differing philosophies of cultural interaction.⁹³

There are some disturbing trends that contrast the encouraging signs of unity that have been observed. The church is not functioning as one and still suffers from increasing fragmentation, division, and confusion. It is this writer’s conclusion that a Kingdom model is a necessary corrective for the Great Division.

At the beginning of the 20th century, there were approximately 1,900 denominations in the United States, Canada, and Europe. By the late 1980s the estimate was 22,000.⁹⁴ This is not only true of the church in the West; it is a truly global and international phenomenon as well.⁹⁵ Leith Anderson describes new shapes and forms of the church multiplying like McDonald’s franchises in the United States and beyond.⁹⁶ This does not include all the new missional churches, evangelistic agencies, parachurch ministries, or house churches. There also has been a proliferation of cell churches, ethnic churches, mega-churches, and Apostolic networks. Truly increasing multiplication of diversity will continue in the future. There is the need for a unified Kingdom paradigm that emphasizes the organic interconnectedness of the church. Willingness to change one’s thinking from a localized parish mentality to a regional Kingdom model may be one of the great paradigm shifts for leaders in the next several decades. This was the pattern modeled by the first century church and it is the model for Kingdom cooperation. It is this writer’s conclusion that a Kingdom model is just such a cooperative, regional model. Denominational theory has validity, but far too often it restricts healthy Kingdom growth.

Shaw has suggested that Jeremiah Burroughs’ model of denominational unity surrounding him and his associates at Westminster is an appropriate model. He argued for a denominational theory of church unity based on six principles.⁹⁷ This writer contends, however, that the issue of the organic unity of the Kingdom of God transcends even the borders of denominational theory.

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The Kingdom is the only organic, multifaceted, multidimensional vision large enough to include the legitimate diversity within the Body of Christ today. The great unifying thrust of the Kingdom, as echoed in the Lausanne Covenant, expresses this Kingdom missional concern:

He has been calling out from the world a people for himself, and sending his people back into the world to be his servants and his witnesses, for the extension of his kingdom, the building up of Christ's body, and the glory of his name. We confess with shame that we have often denied our calling and failed in our mission, by becoming conformed to the world or by withdrawing from it. Yet we rejoice that even when borne by earthen vessels the Gospel is still a precious treasure. To the task of making that treasure known in the power of the Holy Spirit, we desire to dedicate ourselves anew.⁹⁸

This Scriptural and historic call to unity represents the integral unity of all true Kingdom subjects. Rex Koivisto explains that "We confess that we have often lost the fullness of our Christian heritage, too readily assuming that the Scriptures and the Spirit make us independent of the past. In so doing, we have become theologically shallow, spiritually weak, blind to the work of God in others, and married to our cultures."⁹⁹ He calls for reformation within Evangelicalism: "We call for a recovery of our full Christian heritage. Throughout the church's history there has existed an evangelical impulse to proclaim the saving, unmerited grace of Christ and to reform the church according to the Scriptures."¹⁰⁰ Koivisto further explains that:¹⁰¹

We deplore the scandalous isolation and separation of Christians from one another. We believe such division is contrary to Christ's explicit desire for unity among his people and impedes the witness of the church in the world. Evangelicalism is too frequently characterized by an historical, sectarian mentality.

Therefore we call evangelicals to return to the ecumenical concern of the Reformers and the later movements of evangelical renewal. We are convinced that unity in Christ requires visible and concrete expressions.

After careful reflection upon the Great Division and its tragic and fragmenting effects, this writer suggests these principles to complement Burroughs' work on denominational theory, and Koivisto's work in the history of denominational theories of unity, to move to the model of the Kingdom of God (see Figure 1).

Only a fresh investigation of the pages of Scripture and a new invitation for the Holy Spirit will bring greater revelation into a cooperative, systemic understanding of Kingdom relationships. This will equip a new generation of leaders to work cooperatively toward Kingdom purposes.

The Great Diversion: The Domination of Programs

Kingdom rule is progressive and expansive. Therefore, Kingdom subjects are to grow in transformation and they are missional throughout the earth. The Great Diversion has become so prevalent in the modern church that the rediscovery of obedience as the normative expectation of converted people within the Kingdom will suffice. The proliferation of congregational programs over the last 100 years, and the intensification and specialization of need-based ministries, have diluted the central call of the Great Commission to make disciples. Programs are not the root problem. Rather, the root problem is a need for the visible expression of a greater redirection of the church's focus and energy toward a final goal.

The simplest definition of "disciple" is the word "follower". To be a disciple means to be a Christ-follower, a Christ-bearer, a Christ-learner, and a Christ-obedient individual. Church membership, church ministry, denominational affiliation, church models, paradigms of the Holy Spirit, as well as theological and methodological approaches, all have value and importance. But most importantly, the spiritual seed of the Kingdom of God is planted in hearts by the Holy Spirit. It is cultivated by making and reproducing disciples. No one approach, model, or methodology can fully disciple an individual. It is a sovereign lifelong interactive process as well as an intentional ministry focus. These areas target key concepts in the forming of disciples.

Foundations for Discipleship: An Introduction and framework

- The Great Omission in the Great Commission – obedience (Matthew 28:18-20).
- The fourfold function of God's Word – accountability (Heb. 4:13; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).
- Christianity is a lifestyle not a belief system alone (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Mark 1:17).

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- Disciples live in transforming community – relational (Mark 3:13; John 13:34, 17:21).
- Discipleship is transformational not only informational – life change (Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 3:18, 4:16).
- Christlikeness is our goal – Christ is our model (Matthew 10:24-25).
 - Relationship – Intimacy with God (Mark 1:35).
 - Character (John 5:19).
 - Work (John 14:12-14).

A Biblical Definition of Discipleship

- A disciple is one who is called and follows and loves Jesus with his whole self (Mark 1:17, 12:29-31).
- A disciple does not dictate his own plans (John 1:27, Luke 17:7-10).
- A disciple is one who has surrendered all (Luke 14:33).
- A disciple is one who carries his cross (Luke 14:27, Matthew 16:24).
- A disciple is one who is becoming more like Christ (Matt.10:24-25, Rom. 8:29).
- A disciple is one who actively obeys Christ's commands.
 - Worship (Mark 12:29-31).
 - Discipleship (Matthew 7:21, Mark 1:17, John 14:15).
 - Fellowship (John 13:34).
 - Witness (Matthew 25: 37-40, 28:18-20).

Disciples display intimacy and a dynamic walk with God. They exhibit faithfulness under pressure and serious obedience to follow Christ whatever the cost involved. Without the intentional making of disciples we as Christians will continue to reproduce more of the same spiritual seed that has clogged the fields in our churches over the past generation as well as in the present day. Warner quoting Tozer said, “Christianity will always reproduce itself after its own kind.”¹⁰²

It is what Howard Ball calls “the great omission”¹⁰³ in the Great Commission. He meant the removal of the word “obedience.” Immediately this writer began to see that the whole thrust of the church, the approach of program-based ministry, and the consumer mindset, had all domesticated the call for radical discipleship. The Lordship of Christ over the individual believer’s life, and the functional headship of Christ over the corporate church’s mission, had been removed. Without obedience built within the mandate and the mission of the church, the church can easily proceed into many paths, yet not prepare disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. The church may be theologically accurate but may still be spiritually obstinate. The distinct possibility exists for creating the

church described in the bulleted list of “Almost a Great-Commission Church” (Matthew 28:18-20):

- Doctrine and Christology are correct.
- Agreement – missions is important.
- Teaching ministry is emphasized.
- Practice of Trinitarian baptism.
- Belief in the resurrection.
- Belief in omnipresence of God.
- Personal nature of God.
- God's active presence to do the work.

A good church by human standards, perhaps, but not an obedient church. Dallas Willard explains that the greatest need of the modern church is obedience to Jesus Christ. Willard writes that “more than any other single thing, in any case, the practical irrelevance of actual obedience to Christ accounts for the weakened effect of Christianity in the world today, with its increasing tendency to emphasize political and social action as the primary way to serve God. It also accounts for the practical irrelevance of Christian faith to individual character development and overall personal sanity and well-being.”¹⁰⁴

The only response for disobedience is repentance and a return to the Kingdom call to make disciples. Programs will never replace the call that Jesus makes to surrender all to enter the Kingdom. True commitment can never be created in a classroom but a Kingdom-oriented approach toward obedience to the King of the Kingdom can be cultivated. Discipleship is as much a spirit as it is a methodology. For centuries Puritan pastors cultivated the spirit of discipleship among its community with few modern tools, resources, or programs. They understood biblical obedience, spiritual pilgrimage and warfare, and the death-to-self that was required to follow Christ.¹⁰⁵

The Great Delusion: Our Churches Are Healthy

Kingdom rule is comprehensive. Therefore, all of reality is evaluated by the King's standards. The last deadly D needs the least amount of explanation. If the church in America is fine, then repentance, renewal, reform, and awakening are unnecessary. However, the church in America is in great need of a deep spiritual touch, comprehensive reformation, and the theological tracks expressed in the Kingdom of God. In case one still believes the church is fine, read the following description by Tom Clegg titled *The Condition of the Church in America*.¹⁰⁶

Moving Toward the Kingdom and the Seven Deadly D's

Who would have believed that in 100 years the U.S. would go from the #1 missionary sending nation in the world to the #2 missionary receiving nation? As we enter the new millennium, the U.S. is now the third largest unchurched nation in the world.

As of May 1, 2001, we were 278 in population. Of these, 75 million are churched, leaving 200 million unchurched by the church of Christ, despite the fact that there are 363K churches in America populating its 28,500 ZIP codes. That works out to be about seven churches per ZIP code, to reach a population of 97K!

The birth rate is 3.9 million per year; 2.3 million die; 2.76 leave the church; 2.72 join the church – for a net loss of 450K – and it grows larger every year. There is one birth every eight seconds; one death every 15 seconds; one immigrant arriving every 30 seconds; for a net gain of one person every 11 seconds in the U.S. The church loses one person every 25.17 seconds and gains one new person every 25.26 seconds.

Is the United States a mission field? Let's take the next 24 hours and examine the case. What will happen?

10,799 babies will be born – 6,403 will die; 6,148 will be married – 3,110 divorces will be granted; 3,246 babies will be aborted – 3,445 unmarried women will give birth to a child; 84 people will commit suicide; 45 people will die from HIV aids; 43 will die in alcohol related automobile accidents; 4,630 fifteen-year-old girls will give up their sexual purity; 1,312 students will drop out of high school; 6,000 under 18 will start smoking; 28,206 will be arrested – 4,274 related to driving abuse violations; 3,396 households will declare bankruptcy; 63,288 people will secure food stamps.

In that same 24-hour period:

411 will convert to Islam; 872 to Mormonism; 5,000 will join the church of Christ and receive baptism; eight churches will close their doors and six will open.

The result is that several thousands of people will die every day in the U.S. without every hearing about the good news of the Gospel. Literally, they have never heard that Christ died and rose again for them.

Other interesting facts indicating that America is a dark place: The largest center for teaching Eastern Meditation Techniques exists in Fairfield, Iowa; The largest Buddhist Temple in the world is in Boulder, Colorado; The largest Muslim discipleship center in the world is located in Brooklyn, New York.

Missiologists tell us that it is easier to get a hearing for the Gospel in Asia, Africa, and South America than it is in America!”

The time has come for change, revival and a Kingdom model.

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