



FRIDAYFAX 2.0

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Kingdom-focussed E-Mail news-bulletin with inspiring reports of God at work around the world, with special emphasis on the current global reformation of Church and Missions. **Editor:** Wolfgang Simson. Subscription: €30/ US-\$ 40 per year. Freitagfax 2.0, PO Box 1248, D-79397 Kandern, Germany. Email info@ffax2.com; website: www.ffax2.com. © Dawn Europa e.V.; 22 issues per year, available in English and German.

The New Exodus

I just returned from Egypt a few days ago, a country that once, during the times of slavery under pharaohic regime, has seen the vast multiplication of the people of Israel amongst them to around 3 million in number. The mainline Egyptian society, 3000 years ago, has seen the Israelites just as slaves and useful workers, if not a nuisance or even a threat in case of a war. After the biblical plagues hit the Egyptian society, most Egyptians probably were happy to get rid of them during the times of the Exodus. Pharaoh, the embodiment of hierarchical, controlling and dictatorial rulership that has seen no need to be accountable to "another Lord", ultimately ended up, together with his chariots and army, at the bottom of the Red Sea.

Today, I believe, we are witnessing another Exodus on a global scale: **the Holy-Spirit birthed extraction of the people of God from pharaohic religious structures ruled by tradition, money, convenience and leaders that are little more than spiritual descendents of Pharaoh, running a church that long since has ceased to be that authentic, apostolic community that God originally intended it to be.**



Rebirth of the Church – outside the Church

According to meticulous research conducted in the country of Egypt, the first protestant churches in Egypt were planted in 1860. 100 years later, in 1960, altogether 623 churches were known, growing to a sum total of 1.250 protestant churches, organized in 16 denominations as well as 300 independent "groups", by the year 1996. Through attrition, emigration and other reasons the protestant membership started to decline: from 1985 – 1996 it declined a massive 18%, and during the same time, the number of new traditional churches planted rose 6.2%. The message was clear: CAWKI, Church-as-we-know-it in Egypt was unable to disciple a growing proportion of society, even if new churches, molded after traditional Protestantism, were planted at an impressive rate. However, something new has happened. More and more Christian Egyptian leaders understood that people cannot be brought to churches – the church needed to be brought to the people. And for this to happen, the church absolutely needed to change its essence and its DNA. As **form follows function**, a viral, incarnational, "missional", apostolic church looks entirely different from the classical Sunday-service based attractional model that Christianity has grown accustomed to. One of my friends in Egypt– together with a growing team of leaders - decided that this is absolutely what needed to happen. He prayed for it, proposed it, planned it, trained people for it – and promptly was excommunicated by his particular denomination as a nuisance and disturbance. Nevertheless, in the last few years the housechurch network they have been able to see emerge in Egypt now has around 4.000 new churches planted – plus many new churches abroad, in other areas of the Middle East. It took traditional Protestantism a full 120 years to grow to close to 1.300 churches – and this entirely new movement, literally started outside the church – grew to 4.000 churches in not even 10 years. The difference in terms of growth and multiplication is staggering. What will happen in the next 10 years? Who, would you think, will truly carry the future of Christianity in Egypt?



The Church in the West

By comparison, a similar process is taking place in "The West", Europe, America and Australia. Leonard Hjalmarson is a journalist, software developer and writer who lives in Kelowna, Canada. In an article published on his website www.nextreformation.com he quotes FridayFax Correspondent and author Reggie McNeal saying: "The current church culture in North America is on life support. It is living off the work, money and energy of previous generations from a previous world order. The plug will be pulled either when the money runs out (80 percent of money given to congregations comes from people aged fifty five and older) or when the remaining three fourths of a generation who are institutional loyalists die off or both... A growing number of people are leaving the institutional church for a new reason. They are not leaving because they have lost their faith. They are leaving to preserve their faith." Hjalmarson continues: "When the Titanic hit an iceberg on April 15, 1912 she was the largest floating object ever built. She represented

the state of the art in ocean liners... she was fast, luxurious, and unsinkable. It was the latter claim that would be severely tested on that cold, clear night.

Similarly, Western Christendom has been sailing along under full steam for most of the last century, and has made some remarkable progress. In the late sixties signs of stress began to appear. It seemed relatively easy to make course corrections, and it wasn't long before large ministries were booming, following the model of the most successful seeker-sensitive ministries like Saddleback and Willow Creek. Unfortunately, as argued above, the western church hit the iceberg and the lifeboats far too few are being launched. Since 1991 the population in the United States has grown by 15%. During that same period of time the number of adults who do not attend church has grown from 38 million to 75 million... a 92% increase! [says George Barna] We are seeing a new diaspora and facing incredible challenges of translation. Our models are no longer working, but perhaps the Lord is engineering a reconnect with culture and we need to find ways to join Him in His work. Richard Halverson, former chaplain to the US-senate, once said: 'Christianity started out in Palestine as a fellowship. Then it moved to Greece and became a philosophy, then it went to Rome and became an institution, and then it went to Europe and became a government. Finally it came to America where we made it an enterprise.' How did we come to choose an attractional model over an incarnational one? Is it true, as Winston Churchill opined, that 'we create our buildings then our buildings create us?' What are the implications of that statement in terms of the future viability of the Christian movement? In Christendom, we abandoned our role to carry the gospel to the world. Yes, we taught the word in our churches and lived something like a Christ life with one another, but mostly our light was hid under a lamp stand in our buildings and meetings. We chose an attractional model over an incarnational one. **We chose invitation over infiltration** and justified that model theologically. As Howard Snyder put it, 'Church people think about how to bring the world into the church. Kingdom people think about how to get the church into the world. What would it mean to be the church without buildings? Or rather, if God is calling us to infiltrate society?'



Marginalizations as a blessing

From a postmodern cultural perspective, Hjalmarson adds: "The context we share is postmodernity, and a growing sense of marginalization. We are post-modern, because we live and breathe in a time when modernity and its assumptions are dying. Our culture is rooted in the Enlightenment. This scripting exercises a powerful hegemony. As Karl Marx realized, 'the ideas of the dominant class become the dominant ideas.' The Enlightenment instructs us about knowledge (epistemology), being (ontology), and also about issues like formation (discipleship) and learning (education). I take the context of Christendom to be determined by a fundamental gnosticism, or dualism, rooted in Greek ideas and passed on to us through Augustine, the Reformers, and through the Enlightenment. Challenging these fundamental assumptions changes the very nature of the discussion, and will cause us to examine even the language we use. As Einstein remarked, 'the kind of thinking that will solve the world's problems will be of a different order than the kind that created those problems in the first place.' We need to step out of the box of Christendom.

Reggie McNeal comments: 'We have a church in North American that is more secular than the culture. Just when the church adopted a business model, the culture went looking for God. Just when the church embraced strategic planning (linear and Newtonian), the universe shifted to preparedness (loopy and quantum). Just when the church began building recreation centers, the culture began a search for sacred space. Church people still think that secularism holds sway and that people outside the church have trouble connecting to God. The problem is that when people come to church, expecting to find God, they often encounter a religious club holding a meeting where God is conspicuously absent. It may feel like a self-help seminar or even a political rally. But if pre-Christians came expecting to find God -- sorry! They may experience more spiritual energy at a U2 concert or listening to a Creed CD.' **For this reason marginalization is a blessing**, something that has been identified as an **exilic experience** by a number of theologians.

Exile has always been a creatively subversive voice in the Christian tradition. The enforced Israelite exile as a consequence of the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar in 597 B.C was central to invigorating the Jewish Scriptures and faith. Similarly, Jesus was born in a cave, pursued as a refugee into Egypt and crucified outside the city gate. The early Christian church grew on the edges of Jewish culture and of Roman imperial society. With specific reference to contemporary Christianity, it is argued that in times of great social change, margins are places of immense creativity. This sense of homelessness – this exilic experience – plays a large part, I believe, in the recent phenomena of the growth of interest in intentional Christian communities within North American, European, and Australian cultures. Miroslav Volf therefore suggests that 'the center is not the place where Christian faith should be anyway: it was born on the margins... social marginality is not to be bemoaned but celebrated.' We do not celebrate our loss of influence, but that the influence we have will be more authentic. We do not celebrate that we have lost our political power, but we celebrate that the weakness of the Cross is our strength. With this exilic condition in mind, the question is: 'On what basis can the church, which in many respects has found itself to be *persona non grata* in the brave, new post-Christian world, expect to reconnect with society, make friends again, win respect, gain a hearing?'"