

R RESURGENCE

#1 New York Times Bestselling Author

MARK DRISCOLL

**A CALL TO
RESURGENCE**

WILL CHRISTIANITY HAVE A FUNERAL OR A FUTURE?



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Praise for *A Call to Resurgence*

Mark Driscoll and I minister in very different contexts. He is in the extremely secular Northwest, and I pastor a church in Dallas, Texas. Though we have different obstacles and challenges we face due to the contexts we minister to, we have in common the deep hope that the gospel of Jesus Christ boldly proclaimed from the Scriptures will transform lives and bring a church to life. This book is about hope. Despite all the naysayers about the future of the church in North America, I agree with Driscoll and this book that there is a real opportunity here to see the Church of Jesus Christ grow and make an impact in a growing hostile and secularized society. If you are fearful of the growing antagonism of the world and the marginalization of the church, then let this book encourage you.

MATT CHANDLER

Lead pastor of The Village Church, president of the Acts 29 church-planting network, and author of *The Explicit Gospel*, *Creature of the Word*, and *To Live is Christ, To Die is Gain*

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A Call to Resurgence: Will Christianity Have a Funeral or a Future?

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments *vii*

- CHAPTER 1: Christendom Is Dead: Welcome to the United States of Seattle *1*
- CHAPTER 2: Standing Knockout: How We Got Our Bell Rung *33*
- CHAPTER 3: A New Reality: From Modernism to Everythingism to Tribalism *83*
- CHAPTER 4: Home Sweet Home: Understanding Our Borders *117*
- CHAPTER 5: The Holy Spirit: Empowering the Church for Mission *151*
- CHAPTER 6: Repentance: A Biblical Response *177*
- CHAPTER 7: Mission: Seven Principles for Resurgence *215*
-
- APPENDIX A: A Word to the Tribes *247*
1. Tribal History: A Survey of Missional Movements *247*
 2. The Cycle of Tribal Movements *281*
 3. A Word to Tribal Chiefs *292*
- APPENDIX B: Recommended Reading *297*
- Notes *317*

Chapter 1

CHRISTENDOM IS DEAD

WELCOME TO THE UNITED STATES OF SEATTLE

I HAVE SPENT THE LAST twenty years of my life ministering in one of the least church-ed and most liberal cities in America.

In many ways, Seattle is not just post-Christian; it's pre-Christian. We never had a Christian heyday. The Puritans landed on the other side of the nation. The Great Awakenings did not touch my hibernating hometown. The evangelical church-planting movements, the denominations, the publishing companies, and the theological institutions spread to the South and Midwest but never to the Great North Left. The county I live in voted enthusiastically for gay marriage and marijuana, which means I can now smoke a joint while marrying a dude. The Netherlands decriminalized marijuana;

A CALL TO RESURGENCE

Jamaica overlooks it; we legalized it, so I guess we're to the left of Amsterdam and Kingston, if you can believe it.

When I first planted Mars Hill Church out of a college ministry in Seattle in 1996, we were a small group of broke, newly converted, single indie rockers trying to reach a city that was home to more dogs and cats than children or evangelicals. Today a growing majority in the United States, Canada, and Europe—especially young people and urbanites—think and act pretty much the same as the people I've been trying to reach. In the providence of God, I was granted, along with other ministers in cities like mine, the great honor to plow new ground and scatter gospel seed early—with all the birds, rocks, and thorns that Jesus promised.*

Of course, the rest of the country and the world are not destined to become just like Seattle. But I am convinced that what my church has seen become normative in our city will soon become normative elsewhere. The tsunami of cultural change hit our beach first, which puts us in a position to help others learn from our fruit and our failure. Maybe our little church plant was like Noah's dove, sent to explore the landscape of a new world.

I have been hated, protested, despised, lied about, threatened, and maligned so many times and in so many ways I could not even begin to recount them all. I have made mistakes, committed sins, failed, and said things in ways that should have slowed down the forward progress of the gospel. Yet while we started with about a dozen mainly broke, single,

* See Matthew 13:1-23.

CHRISTENDOM IS DEAD

arty people in the living room of our rental home with literally nothing but an open Bible and open hearts, we've seen God graciously build a church one changed life at a time. We've become one of our nation's largest and fastest-growing churches, based upon an hour-plus of Bible preaching every week. It truly makes no sense. But every time the media ask me what the secret is, I tell them the same thing: it does not matter what is against you if Jesus is with you.

Jesus said the fields are "ripe for harvest,"* and he was not exaggerating. For multiple years in a row we have baptized over a thousand new Christians. Many if not most of them are young, single, college educated, and not virgins, who have spent more time with porn than with Paul and who represent the first generation of faith in their families, breaking decades of unbelief, perversion, addiction, and folly. All of this is happening in what some affectionately call The People's Republic of Seattle. Our run won't last forever, and not every church will experience exactly what we have, but there are reasons for hope.

For those Christians concerned that culture is trending more hostile to the faith, I assure you after two decades on the front line that this is not a time of retreat but rather resurgence. This is not a time for compromise but rather courage. The fields are ripe. And as Jesus says, "the laborers are few"[†]—in part because the prophets of doom are many. I'm frankly sick of all the books and movies trying to predict

* John 4:35, NIV.

† Matthew 9:37.

A CALL TO RESURGENCE

when Jesus will return and we'll get to start our eternal vacation at his all-inclusive resort called heaven. I'm also sick of the nerd parade of books and conferences that approach the Bible like scholars whose mission is to get their master's rather than soldiers who are on mission with their Master.

We've got work to do. There are lost people to reach, churches to plant, and nations to evangelize. Hell is hot, forever is a long time, and it's our turn to stop making a dent and start making a difference. This is no time to trade in boots for flip-flops. The days are darker, which means our resolve must be stronger and our convictions clearer.

ONE NATION, UNDER GOD?

If you don't believe me that evangelical Christians' days are getting darker, consider the spirituality of our 2012 presidential candidates. Unlike in past elections, candidates proving themselves to be born-again Christians is no longer seen as helpful for campaigning. The loser's beliefs were clearly Mormon. The winner's beliefs were clearly unclear.

On January 21, 2013, Barack Obama placed his hand on a Bible he may not entirely believe to take an oath to a God he may not entirely know.¹ Jesus alone will judge his soul one day, but in the meantime we are free to be confused by a man who says he's a Christian while ending his speech to America's largest abortion provider with, "Thank you, Planned Parenthood. God bless you."² Anyway, with a hand on the Bible, he swore to faithfully execute the office

CHRISTENDOM IS DEAD

of president of the United States, concluding with the words, “So help me God.” He then made a speech that invoked God five times.³ In a conspicuous display of religious pageantry, an array of leaders representing numerous faith traditions witnessed the event, each offering some nebulous greeting card statement from the Sky Fairy while wearing a robe or fancy hat, because the best way to keep up a farce is to *really* play along and pay attention to the details.

Barack Obama then took his place as the leader of a nation whose money says “In God We Trust” without even the courtesy of a punch line to let us know it’s a joke. At the very least, the photos of the dead presidents on our currency should show them smirking to clue us in on the ruse.

One notable omission on the inauguration stage was Pastor Louie Giglio. He was dumped like a prom date with tuberculosis, although the official report was that he withdrew.⁴ He had been invited to offer an opening prayer as the token evangelical. Louie is by all accounts a great, noncontroversial guy—unlike some of us—which is pretty much what you’d expect from a guy named Louie who wears scarves. He’s known for leading the Passion Movement, which hosts conferences for upward of sixty thousand college students who flock to Atlanta every year to hear from God’s Word and sing God’s praises. He has given years of his life and raised millions of dollars to free people from human trafficking and the sex trade. He started a popular church in Atlanta, where he loves and serves people. It’s no wonder the Obama

A CALL TO RESURGENCE

administration took notice and invited Giglio to give the benediction at the second inaugural festivities.

The hose found the bees' nest when a website published excerpts from a sermon Louie had delivered almost two decades prior.⁵ In that message this pastor had the audacity to point out that, according to the Bible, the homosexual lifestyle is unacceptable in God's eyes. The disclosure had its intended effect. Like-minded critics jumped on the story, and a guy who could have won "most huggable" in Bible college became Public Enemy Number One overnight—all because he was God's messenger instead of God's editor. Forty-eight hours after receiving the invitation to join President Obama onstage, Louie Giglio was scratched from the schedule. Clearly embarrassed by their original choice, the Presidential Inaugural Committee went into damage-control mode and issued a statement assuring the nation that "we were not aware of Pastor Giglio's past comments at the time of his selection and they don't reflect our desire to celebrate the strength and diversity of our country. . . . As we now work to select someone to deliver the benediction, we will ensure their beliefs reflect this administration's vision of inclusion and acceptance for all Americans."⁶

Like most hypocrisy, the irony was unintentional, I'm sure, as those who are most vocal about tolerance are often the most intolerant. While the nation celebrated tolerance, liberation, and homosexuality, the evangelical Christian was forced to get into the closet. When George W. Bush

CHRISTENDOM IS DEAD

was in office, he personally addressed the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention by either satellite or video at least four times in two terms and got a standing ovation from conservative evangelicals who were respected and influential at the highest levels of government. In President Obama's first term, the White House had invited Rick Warren to pray. This time around, however, one of the faith's most likable, well-meaning, accessible representatives was barred from participation. When evangelicals can't even land a token appearance at an event orchestrated to reflect the various facets of American society, it's clear that Christian clout has reached its expiration date and been pulled off the shelf.

The Inaugural Committee replaced Louie Giglio with a very nice, unquestionably pro-gay Episcopalian pastor in a bathrobe, brought in from central casting to lend an air of formal spirituality to the whole affair.⁷ The prayer he offered was forgettable and diplomatic; he's about as likely to preach repentance as I am to get pregnant. The Associated Press reported on the significance of the whole ordeal: "There may be no clearer reflection of this moment in American religious life than the tensions surrounding prayers at President Barack Obama's inauguration."⁸

January 21, 2013, was more than Inauguration Day. It was also a funeral. The highest office in the land made it clear: "inclusion and acceptance for all Americans" no longer includes Bible-believing, evangelical Christians.

A CALL TO RESURGENCE

As far as Western civilization is concerned, Christendom is officially dead.

AN OBITUARY FOR CHRISTENDOM

Like many deaths, the final demise of Christendom occurred after a long, painful struggle that started in the 1960s and 1970s. Christendom took a serious beating during those years from the fatal five: gender confusion, sex, abortions, drugs, and Spiritless spirituality. Strength and vigor waned as Christendom grew old and tired in the 1980s and 1990s. By the turn of the millennium, it could no longer fight back. Finally, after more than a decade of labored breathing and a weakening heart, Christendom has gone the way of all flesh.

But before we move forward into a future without Christendom, it's important to look back to see where we've come from. What exactly *is* Christendom, how is it different from Christianity itself, and how does it relate to the church today?

The life of modern Christendom began about the time of the Reformation and lasted roughly five hundred years, depending on which historian you read. The United States of America was among the most adventurous experiments of Christendom. It was a nation established in large part by professing Christians motivated by Christian values to accomplish Christian purposes.

For many years Christendom shaped the development of

CHRISTENDOM IS DEAD

Western culture in general and American culture specifically. Judeo-Christian ethics provided a shared moral infrastructure, the church and its leaders were welcome participants in the fabric of society, a common vocabulary facilitated discussion regarding the public good, and religious organizations benefited from certain legal and financial advantages (for example, nonprofit designations for ministries and tax deductions for giving to the church).

Practically, this did not mean that everyone was born again, loved Jesus, hated sin, and believed the Bible. Devotion to a particular deity was not as important as being a moral person and good citizen. Even so, a common heritage of faith resulted in a general consensus on many social issues. For example, in the days of Christendom, couples were discouraged from living together before marriage. Conventional wisdom said that the best context for raising children was heterosexual marriage. Pornography, prostitution, and drugs were considered wrong. And at least until the 1990s, Christendom in America wielded great political and cultural power in the form of the Religious Right and the Moral Majority, a term that almost no one would use to describe Christians today, unless while scoffing.

In many ways, the world benefited greatly from the collective conscience instilled by Christendom. But the era came with plenty of disadvantages as well. Those representing majority values were often guilty of cruelty toward those in the minority. The wealthy and powerful could justify horrible atrocities with token references to out-of-context Scripture.

A CALL TO RESURGENCE

Christendom sometimes enabled rampant hypocrisy, undermining the credibility of Jesus, the gospel, and the Bible.

Christendom bears the fingerprints of our faith, but it is *not* Christianity. In fact, when a society favors Christians, people are incentivized to claim the faith whether they actually believe it or not. Publicly practicing some aspects of Christianity—baptizing a child, getting married in a church, giving money to a church, attending services on occasion—included enough perks to encourage people simply to go with the flow. Christendom may have created a favorable environment for Christians, but it often did so at the expense of true Christianity.

THE RISE OF CIVIL RELIGION

Now that Christendom is dead, don't be surprised if you see its corpse lurching around like a zombie, inhabited by an impostor wearing what's left of the body. As *New York Times* columnist Ross Douthat observes, "America's problem isn't too much religion, or too little of it. It's *bad* religion: the slow-motion collapse of traditional Christianity and the rise of a variety of destructive pseudo-Christianities in its place."⁹ One of the most common "pseudo-Christianities" is a construct known since a landmark 1967 essay by sociologist Robert Bellah as "American civil religion." In this rival religion, who God is and how God is to be worshiped are secondary matters we can agree to disagree on so long as all theologies and houses of worship conform to a basic

CHRISTENDOM IS DEAD

moral framework that serves the primary matter of making a great nation.¹⁰

American civil religion is not a recent phenomenon. In his farewell address President George Washington said, “Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and Morality are indispensable supports. . . . Reason and experience both forbid us to expect that National morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.”¹¹

Likewise, 150 years later, President-elect Dwight Eisenhower said, “Our form of government has no sense unless it is founded in a deeply-felt religious faith, and I don’t care what it is.”¹²

What has changed since the days of Washington and Eisenhower is that Christendom is no longer the legitimizing center of American civil religion. Instead, our nation has created its own religion that appropriates many of the symbols and narratives of Christendom but without the substance of Christianity. Think of American civil religion in biblical terms: America is Israel. The Revolution is our Exodus. The Declaration of Independence, Bill of Rights, and Constitution compose our canon of sacred scripture. Abraham Lincoln is our Moses. Independence Day is our Easter. Our national enemies are our Satan. Benedict Arnold is our Judas. The Founding Fathers are our apostles. Taxes are our tithes. Patriotic songs are our hymnal. The Pledge of Allegiance is our sinner’s prayer. And the president is our preacher, which is why throughout the history of the office

A CALL TO RESURGENCE

our leaders have referred to “God” without any definition or clarification, allowing people to privately import their own understanding of a higher power.

Due to the ongoing existence of American civil religion, many evangelicals are oblivious to the fact that Christendom is dead and real Christianity is in serious decline. Those in the United States may have a general sense that Christianity is struggling in Europe, but many remain fairly optimistic about our “one nation under God.” As long as we see Christmas trees on government property, as long as *The Bible* miniseries gets good ratings, and as long as we hear public figures talk about “faith,” many believers naively assume that real Christianity is alive and well and respected by the majority of our people.

Brace yourself. It’s an illusion.

BRUTAL REALITY

If you’re reading this book, most likely you’re an evangelical Christian (or one of my critics looking for rocks to throw, which I have piled for your convenience). While many definitions of evangelicalism exist, this diverse and delightfully dysfunctional family of God is perhaps best identified by four distinguishing characteristics:

- **Bible.** The Bible is God’s true Word.
- **Cross.** Jesus died on the cross for our sins.

CHRISTENDOM IS DEAD

- **Conversion.** Individuals need to be personally converted.
- **Activism.** Belief in the gospel needs to be expressed outwardly.¹³

Based on these criteria, what percentage of Americans could be classified as evangelical Christian? Take a guess.

The answer is around 8 percent. Yes, there are more left-handed people, more Texans, and more pet cats than evangelicals in America.

Common statistics estimate that evangelicals represent anywhere between 40 to 70 percent of the country's total population, or approximately 130 million people. However, more extensive research cited by John Dickerson in his book *The Great Evangelical Recession* indicates that the actual range is between 7 and 8.9 percent, somewhere between 22 and 28 million people.¹⁴ Moreover, all studies indicate that younger people are less likely to be evangelical. According to a 2012 Gallup poll, about 6.4 percent of the US population ages eighteen to twenty-nine identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered, which means in all likelihood there are as many young people with alternative sexual lifestyles as there are active young evangelicals in the United States.¹⁵

Why do we see such a great discrepancy between the true number of evangelicals and the number of evangelicals reported in popular statistics? Thorough research confirms the cultural trend evident around us: many of those presumed to be Christians do not possess true faith. Rather, in the world

A CALL TO RESURGENCE

of post-Christendom, true Christian belief has been replaced with a borrowed faith, a lost faith, or no faith at all. Depending on your demographic (namely, where you live and how old you are), at least one of these three will probably sound painfully familiar.

Borrowed Faith

The world of Christendom permitted a superficial faith that could be outwardly practiced but not inwardly experienced. The result was numerous somewhat moral, churchgoing unbelievers who wrongly assumed they were believers and not merely traditionalists. They borrowed the faith of prior generations, especially that of their older family members, such as a devout grandmother.

Those with a borrowed faith feel some degree of affinity or obligation to the church or to the denomination to which their parents or grandparents were committed. Faith borrowers do not want to be socially ostracized for lack of a church connection, and they want the church to be there as needed for major life events like births, weddings, holidays, or funerals. For the faith borrowers, church is more of a hotel than a home. They do not give their lives to the church or love the church as Jesus did. They consider the church to be a civic organization available to meet public needs when deemed beneficial.

England's royal family is a classic case of borrowed faith. Queen Elizabeth II reportedly "is a devout Christian, with

CHRISTENDOM IS DEAD

a deep sense of religious duty, who attends church on a weekly basis.” Her grandson, however, is another story. Prince William was wed in a church at a ceremony officiated by a pastor. He will one day ascend the British throne as king of the realm, which means his official duties will include “Defender of the Faith and Supreme Governor of the Church of England.” Yet the prince and his wife “rarely, if ever” attend regular services. They wrote a prayer for their wedding ceremony, and they give money to charity, but they go to church only for official ceremonies or special occasions. William was baptized in the church as a baby, confirmed in the church as a young man, and married in the church as an adult. One day he will be the most powerful leader of the national denomination, but if you have questions regarding the royal couple’s view of sin, repentance, Jesus, or the Bible, you’re not likely going to get an answer.¹⁶

The prince is certainly not alone in the cradle of Christendom. Prince William appears to be like other British men his age, barely 8 percent of whom attend church regularly. According to a survey by Christian charity Tearfund, the United Kingdom is “among Europe’s four least [religiously] observant countries”: “Two-thirds of those polled had not been to church in the past year, except for baptisms, weddings, or funerals,” although 53 percent still “identified themselves as Christian.”¹⁷ Another study indicates that back on our side of the pond, more than 40 percent of professing US evangelicals do not attend church weekly, and more than 60 percent of professing American mainline Christians

A CALL TO RESURGENCE

do not attend weekly.¹⁸ One Christian leader concludes, “In short, millions who consider themselves Christians limit their church attendance largely to holidays, weddings, and funerals.”¹⁹

For generations the countries of Christendom have operated on borrowed faith. Your options were to play along with the faith or be shunned from society. Nineteenth-century philosopher Søren Kierkegaard saw the storm clouds on the horizon sooner than most. He criticized state religion, particularly in his home country of Denmark, a “Christian nation” united under the official Church of Denmark. At the time, state churches issued baptisms for babies much like the United States doles out Social Security numbers. Everyone was a Christian, which made the label all but meaningless. Kierkegaard’s lament echoes today: “Christendom has done away with Christianity without being quite aware of it.”²⁰

Lost Faith

The inevitable result of borrowed faith is lost faith. People born into a family anchored in Christendom tend to assume they’re right with God, regardless of whether they personally turn from sin and trust in Jesus. In common conversation, when asked how they became Christians, those with lost faith (or borrowed faith teetering on the brink) will talk about being born into a Christian family or about how they’ve always been Christian.

With the death of Christendom, however, the cultural

CHRISTENDOM IS DEAD

advantages of Christianity have diminished, and many people have decided to drop the charade altogether. This shouldn't come as a surprise; without inward conversion there's no reason to expect outward devotion. Younger generations increasingly feel less obligated even to profess Christianity, and society increasingly provides less incentive to do so. The advent of mass media, digital communication, and global travel have made competing religions, spiritualities, and philosophies (including agnosticism and atheism) more acceptable and fashionable. In contrast, Christendom is the old way, led by old people for old people. It's no wonder young people stop attending church, stop giving to the church, and stop practicing faith through Bible reading, a lifestyle of repentance, and passion for Jesus Christ.

In many ways, this is my story. I was raised in an Irish Catholic home. My family is from County Cork in southern Ireland, and we have been devoutly Catholic for as far back as any history can be traced. (My father and I ventured to the homeland to investigate the Driscoll heritage for ourselves.) My paternal grandmother was a staunch Catholic who preferred Latin Mass and was not enthusiastic about the changes adopted at the Second Vatican Council in 1965. Despite her emphasis on tradition, it is my sincere belief that my grandmother did possess saving faith in Jesus and was born again by the Holy Spirit rather than being just born into the church. My mother was also born into a Catholic family, but she was born again during the Catholic Charismatic Renewal

A CALL TO RESURGENCE

of the 1970s, when she started attending prayer meetings and Bible studies with evangelical charismatics.

So I was born into a Catholic family with a believing mother and grandmother. I was baptized as an infant, went to Catholic school for a few years, and served as an altar boy. By the time I was a teenager, however, I attended church only for holidays, weddings, and funerals, mainly because that's what my family did. I enjoyed traditions such as sitting under stained glass by candlelight during midnight Mass on Christmas Eve, but beyond the aesthetics I had no interest in church. I professed a faith that I most certainly did not possess and hardly ever practiced.

In my junior year of high school I met an evangelical pastor's daughter named Grace (who is now my wife, my best friend, and the mother of our five children). Smitten with her, I asked her out. She responded by asking me if I was a Christian, to which I replied with a confident yes. After dating me for a while, however, she began to have her suspicions. I had no innate zeal for Jesus or Scripture and showed no evidence of new life in Christ. She gave me a nice Bible as a gift, and by God's grace I was saved while reading it during my freshman year in college.

The "seeker sensitive" movement arose in the waning years of Christendom to reach moral pagans like me, who were occasionally in church but not in Christ. Christian leaders like Bill Hybels rightly surmised that evangelism needed to occur not only in the world but also in the church. Numerous people baptized as infants in a church, raised in a

CHRISTENDOM IS DEAD

church, married in a church, and remembered at their funerals in a church were actually going to hell. Subsequently, an evangelistic effort began to reach lost “Christians” sitting in the pews week after week, people who were physically alive but spiritually dead.

Seeker churches often met in nontraditional buildings, removed decorative crosses, replaced stained glass with video screens, and sought to provide a different experience than the traditional church of Christendom in hopes of attracting and converting people from the appearance of Christianity to a legitimate relationship with Christ. Whether or not you agree with the principles and methods of seeker-sensitive ministry, the effort was designed to provide a solution to Christendom’s epidemic problem: lost people like me who wrongly thought they were Christians.

Today the seeker-sensitive approach no longer yields many conversions, especially among younger people, because the culture has changed. Christian pretenders don’t have to pretend anymore. In a demonstration of very humble honesty, Bill Hybels’s Willow Creek Community Church—the epicenter of seeker-sensitive ministry—published the Reveal study in 2008. The report admitted that the church was having trouble sustaining effective evangelistic ministry according to their methods. I believe that the diminishing returns can be attributed in large part to the fact that the market has dried up. People used to attend church and write checks because they loved the moral values derived from the teachings of Moses and felt

A CALL TO RESURGENCE

some sense of tradition, habit, or obligation. Now those with borrowed faith or lost faith are more commonly opting to join those with no faith at all.

No Faith

A study conducted by researchers from the University of California—Berkeley and Duke University reported in 2013 that “religious affiliation in the United States is at its lowest point since it began to be tracked in the 1930s.” According to the study, “one in five Americans claimed they had no religious preference, more than double the number reported in 1990.”²¹

Study after study confirms much of the same: when asked about their religious affiliation, a growing percentage of the population now respond “none.”²² In 2012, *Time* magazine listed “The Rise of the Nones” among the top ten trends changing American life. The article describes how more people are “turning away from organized religion and yet seeking rich if unorthodox ways to build spiritual lives.”²³

The “Nones” often describe themselves as “spiritual but not religious.” Like one woman I met, they say things like, “My garden is my church.” Another example is actress Jodie Foster, who said in an interview that she was an atheist and then added, “But I absolutely love religions and the rituals. Even though I don’t believe in God. We celebrate pretty much every religion in our family with the kids.”²⁴

If they’re interested in any organized religion at all (maybe for the sake of their kids), these kinds of Nones prefer a loose

CHRISTENDOM IS DEAD

affiliation with a benign denomination of the Unitarian Universalists variety, where rough edges like sin, repentance, monotheism, and heaven and hell are sanded off to provide an affirming, inoffensive community without Christ. This allows some tradition without tenets and spirituality without the Spirit.

In early 2013, *Boston* magazine published an article by a mother who had long ago abandoned her Christian faith and is now wrestling with the practicalities of raising her children in a nonreligious home. In one notable passage, she describes the patchwork None culture:

We Nones are atheists, agnostics, unchurched believers, “spiritual” types, lapsed Jews and Catholics, and people who just don’t care. Religiosity often has a natural kind of life cycle, in which people move away from religion in their teens and twenties, and then come back around when they marry and have kids. That’s not our story. We Nones move away but never come back.

And our numbers are growing. Twenty percent of American adults now say that they believe in nothing in particular. Forty-six million adults identify themselves as religiously unaffiliated, and 88 percent of them say they have no interest in joining a religious institution. This is a seismic cultural shift with the potential to profoundly reshape our society—not to mention our families.²⁵

A CALL TO RESURGENCE

The spiritual temperature has changed very suddenly in the United States. For many years, the None population was small—a mere 5 to 7 percent. Then it exploded quickly. This is very different from what happened in Europe. There, unbelief warmed up slowly, as if in a Crock-Pot. In the US, unbelief has warmed up as if in a microwave. While unbelief is heating up, belief is cooling down. The percentage of Christian converts is not keeping pace with our growing population as unbelief overtakes Christianity.²⁶

For those sheltered in the culs-de-sac of Christendom, all of this may come as a surprise. But life among the Nones is already normative for those of us who have spent our lives in places like Seattle, where the end of Christendom is a non-event because there was never really a beginning. As early as 2004, the Pacific Northwest was dubbed “the None Zone” because the majority of the region’s population had already begun to identify their religious preference as “none.”²⁷ The death of Christendom is old news out here. The Bible Belt and other lingering pockets of cultural Christianity are simply catching up.

After the 2012 election, I was talking with a friend from the great nation of Texas. He was shocked that the rest of the nation was so vocally anti-Christian and pro-gay. He was unaware that things were unwell in the Lone Star State, where between 2000 and 2005, attendance in evangelical churches dropped by 2.6 percent, even as the overall population grew by about 2 percent.²⁸ I smirked and told him, “Welcome to the United States of Seattle.”

WHEN “CHRISTIAN” NO LONGER MEANS CHRISTIAN

With the epic rise of borrowed faith, lost faith, and no faith, what’s left of actual Christian faith? The present-day blend of beliefs, traditions, and spiritualities makes it difficult to identify a remnant, especially when all of the ingredients have been marinated in the brine of American civil religion and Judeo-Christian ethics. Everything comes out of the mix with a hint of Christianity and vice versa.

Spiritual leaders who find an audience among the borrowed, losts, and Nones often make the mistake of turning one attribute of God into the totality of God. For example, John’s declaration that “God is love”^{*} gets flipped so that “Love is God,” and “love” means that God does not forbid anything or judge anyone. Never mind that the most commonly mentioned attribute of God in Scripture is holiness, that the Bible speaks of God’s wrath over six hundred times with some twenty different words, or that Jesus speaks of hell more than anyone in the Bible. Love wins; God loses.

For evidence, look no further than the church. Our secular-but-spiritual therapeutic culture, combined with psychology and the professional counseling movement, has recast the church as a social service organization that exists to do kind things like feed people, provide aid to anyone outside of the church, and help hurting people within the church—all without judging or calling them to repentance of any sin in their lives. That’s the approved, acceptable role

^{*} 1 John 4:8.

A CALL TO RESURGENCE

of the church in the post-Christendom world. Lots of good works; little if any Good News. Lots of relationships; little if any repentance. Lots of talk about institutional sin; little if any talk about personal sin. Lots of concern about suffering; little if any concern about eternal suffering.

Many Christians of the borrowed or lost faith variety have gladly accepted society's new vision for the church. They may still gather in traditional buildings and conduct traditional liturgies, but the emphasis is on community service, social justice, and self-help sermons from pastors who are inoffensive and nice, providing care but not making converts. In many of these congregations, the church favors *showing* the gospel and abandons *speaking* the gospel altogether.

The problem is, the gospel cannot be shown; it *must* be spoken. Love, grace, mercy, justice, and the like can be shown with works. The gospel of Jesus Christ, however, must be spoken with words, because the gospel of Jesus Christ is not about *our* deeds but rather *Jesus'* deeds: his sinless life, substitutionary death, burial, and bodily resurrection for the salvation of sinners. And without the gospel of Jesus Christ, you may still have morality, spirituality, and charity, but what you don't have is Christianity. Real Christianity results in these things but cannot be replaced by them.

This is precisely what the apostle Paul says in what is perhaps the most succinct statement of the gospel in all of Scripture. He reminds us that the gospel is about our Savior and must be spoken ("preached"):

CHRISTENDOM IS DEAD

I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.*

The gospel—the Good News—is about what Jesus has done, and it must be spoken. Good deeds are about what Jesus wants us to do, and they must be shown. Good deeds can serve people, but only the Good News can save them. When good deeds are confused with the Good News, bad things happen. As Jesus said,

You will recognize [false prophets] by their fruits. Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?” And then will I declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.”†

* 1 Corinthians 15:1-4.

† Matthew 7:20-23.

A CALL TO RESURGENCE

According to Jesus, not everyone who talks like a Christian or acts like a Christian is actually a Christian. You can be born into a Christian family and not be a Christian. You can be baptized and not be a Christian. You can attend a Christian school and not be a Christian. You can pray every day and not be a Christian. You can be a ministry leader and not be a Christian. You can be a generous and helpful person and not be a Christian. You can believe in God and not be a Christian. You can swear an oath on two Bibles and not be a Christian. If the legacy of Judas has taught us anything, we should know that just because people identify themselves as followers of Jesus, it doesn't mean they actually believe. Rather, we see in this passage and elsewhere in Scripture that true Christianity is a faith that must be professed, practiced, and possessed:

- *To profess faith* means to confess Jesus Christ as Lord and proclaim this faith to others in hopes that they, too, will turn from sin and trust in Jesus alone for salvation.
- *To practice faith* means to live a new life of worship patterned after Jesus and to be empowered by the Holy Spirit to continually repent of sin, obey Scripture, fellowship with other believers, serve in love, and partake in the sacraments such as Communion and baptism.
- *To possess faith* means that God has implanted the life of Jesus in you. Once you were a sinner separated

CHRISTENDOM IS DEAD

from God, and now you are a child adopted by God, redeemed and forgiven by the Holy Spirit's power.

Only God knows the heart, but unless people demonstrate the “fruit” of all three aspects, we have no reason to believe that they actually are saved followers of Jesus. We can profess faith (“Lord, Lord”) and practice faith (“mighty works”) without actually possessing faith (“I never knew you”).

American civil religion resembles Christianity because it appropriates the language of Scripture and uses the Judeo-Christian framework to control and unite the populace. Borrowed faith resembles Christianity because it promotes religious tradition and occasional church attendance. Lost faith resembles Christianity because it can often point to a heritage of faith. Even “None” faith can resemble Christianity by mimicking spiritual disciplines and promoting social justice.

Do not be deceived.

We can love, respect, and enjoy those who are not Christians, of course. But if people believe they're Christians and thus safe from hell and the wrath of God, when most likely they are not, it is absolutely unloving to allow them to proceed in their delusion. If we truly care about alleviating human suffering, then we must concern ourselves not only with practicing good deeds but also with preaching the Good News in hopes that people trust in Jesus and avoid eternal suffering—which is the worst suffering of all.

FUNERAL OR FUTURE?

This chapter contains more about politics than I've said in my entire preaching career. But this is not a political book. Politics do not lead culture so much as follow culture, contrary to what some believe. We elect our candidates to represent and realize the desires of a majority, not to force-feed policy on their constituency. My interests in politics are not political, but missiological: What do these events reveal about Western culture, and how does that affect our efforts to reach people with the Good News of Jesus Christ?

The role evangelical Christians are playing (or *not* playing) on the national stage today is a clear snapshot of how the spiritual landscape of Western civilization has changed, along with our place in it. The 2012 election season shocked a lot of evangelicals living in suburban, conservative contexts who wrongly believed we were still an influential and respected majority.

I'm not exactly mourning the loss of Christendom, a religious culture that at times bred hypocrisy, false assurance, and legalism. But Christian faith is not just losing its market share. Civil religion and borrowed faith have confused the substance of Christian faith to the point where it is losing its salvation message. I don't care about preserving Christendom. My concern is the gospel of Jesus Christ, humanity's one and only hope. To borrow the words of Jude, "I found it necessary

CHRISTENDOM IS DEAD

to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.”*

More and more, we have less and less clarity about what we believe. There are fewer and fewer people (including even so-called Christians) who care what we believe. Simply stated, today’s evangelicals are not weighty, nor do they see clearly. The reality is obvious if you haven’t chosen to close your eyes. We’re approaching a cliff. The river of culture is surging headlong toward the brink—if it hasn’t begun to tumble over already—and the waters are carrying away Christians by the millions. Many will cower, lose their grip, and fall over the edge.

For those ready to dig in and hang on, however, this book is an unflinching look at what we’re up against and what it will take to not just survive but to thrive and accomplish the mission God has given us to extend a hand of rescue to those drowning all around us. It is a call not of retreat but of resurgence.

The death of Christendom means life just got a lot more difficult for anyone who really does want to be a Christian and follow Jesus. And we have every reason to believe that things are only going to get worse.

Jesus speaks to our present and future, saying, “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they

* Jude 1:3.

A CALL TO RESURGENCE

persecuted the prophets who were before you.”* We are going to be persecuted. And much of that will come not as much in the form of getting thrown to the lions as getting thrown to the critics. But we are to keep our wits and rejoice with gladness because this life is as close to hell as we will ever get. God will call some of us to endure overt persecution and die for the cause of Jesus. God will call all of us to endure covert persecution and live for the cause of Jesus. Both are forms of persecution, as some are called to die for Christ while others are called to live for Christ. Either way, the Christian life is hard, and the Bible does not sugarcoat this reality. In fact, if you never experience any sort of persecution, you probably need to consider whether you’re truly following Jesus. The Bible says that “all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”†

Whatever we do, we must not lose our saltiness. Jesus says, “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet.”‡ Salt preserves, flavors, and creates thirst. Salty believers are tempted to lose their saltiness by denying the hard truths and backing down on the tough issues to avoid persecution.

But God tells us, “Fear not.” This is the most common commandment in the entire Bible, appearing roughly 150 times, because this is the most common problem for the

* Matthew 5:11-12.

† 2 Timothy 3:12.

‡ Matthew 5:13.

CHRISTENDOM IS DEAD

Christian. Who are you afraid of? What are you afraid of? That fear will paralyze you. It will cause you not to live courageously and boldly. Jesus knows that there are reasons for you to be afraid. And yet he says, “Fear not.”

Nearly every time the Bible commands us to “fear not,” it also tells us why. Not because we will see things turn around soon, or even ever. Not because it’s going to be easy. And not because we will be vindicated in this life. Instead, when we are told, “Fear not,” in some fashion God is telling us, “I am with you.” Jesus, through the presence of the Holy Spirit, lives in us, works through us, goes with us, and will never leave us or forsake us, because he promised to be with us always, until the end of the age, as we limp toward home.

The Jesus who goes with you is a God who has experienced tribulation, poverty, slander, suffering, and death. He is always present to comfort you because he has walked the road that you are on and is waiting with nail-scarred hands to embrace you at its end. Since he has walked that road for you, his invitation to walk it with him is a great honor.

This is not a political book. This is not a reactionary book. This is a prophetic book.

Christendom is dead.

Jesus is alive.

Stay salty.

Fear not.

