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The Church: Shaping History

The mighty heroes of the world...conquered nations for themselves and made them miserable, the apostles conquered them for Christ and made them happy. --Matthew Henry

Often when we think of history, names like Christopher Columbus and George Washington come to mind. But, recently, I was challenged to think of the Church - which includes you and me - as history-in-the-making.

Some weeks ago I had the opportunity to be a guest of Dr. Bruce Speer and the men of Monroe Community Chapel for a two-day men's retreat at Camp Berachah, near Auburn. The purpose of the retreat, according to Pastor Speer, was to impress upon his men, the significance of the Church in history and the blessings of our godly heritage, as well as the responsibilities which accompany those blessings.

The special conference speaker was Dr. Marshall Foster, founder and president of the Mayflower Institute, a nonprofit educational foundation started in 1976 to teach the biblical and historical foundations of liberty.

Dr. Foster contends that post-modern education has ignored if not censored the Church from history and thus from the minds of our people. But, he says, without the Church, there is no history! Foster points out that history is essentially a recording of the establishment and growth of God's Kingdom throughout the earth via His body, the Church.

Our purpose in reviewing history, says Foster, is to expose the evil works of darkness and to distill the strategy of victory laid out for the children of light. He argues that history is linear, not cyclical. It is cosmic in purpose, and God-centered, not the chance accumulations of a series of unrelated events!

Explaining history as a continuum, with players of each generation either advancing or attempting in vain to inhibit the growth of the Kingdom, Dr. Foster drives it home when he asks, "Men, this is our moment in history. What are we to do with it?" He adds that we know the works of the generations of the upright before us, and perhaps now, they watch us and root for us among ...*so great a cloud of witnesses...* (Heb. 12:1).

Dr. Foster's comments inspired me to consider the impact of the Church in the 21st Century. Is the Church today even a player in the making of history?

Currently, great battles are raging in our communities that cause many Christians to shrink back from either confronting our "cultural" opponents or ministering to their needs. In some ways, we have allowed resignation to creep into our sermons and our mindset, conveying that we should remain inside the walls of our church buildings and just "hang in there" until Jesus comes.

But history points out that the work of the Church has always been hindered - perhaps more so in previous generations. Following the Roman era, missionaries to Northern Europe encountered and confronted some of the most barbaric practices imaginable - often resulting in their death. But they kept coming, and they kept confronting.

In A.D.432, [Saint] Patrick confronted Ireland, a nation lost in the worship of the gods of darkness. Defiantly, he lit huge bonfires on hilltops and invited the people to worship the one true God. Much of Ireland was converted by the time Patrick died in 461.

Similarly, in the eighth century, Boniface, an English Benedictine missionary, found people in Germany worshipping their god Thor under a great oak tree near the city of Geismar. As an object lesson, he took an ax to the tree and had it used for building the first church in Germany. The people's faith in false gods was broken.

Others such as Wycliffe, Luther, Calvin, Knox, and Tyndale also stood up to the evils of their day, especially corruption in church hierarchy. History remembers these great men as "reformers," the Christian Coalition or Focus on the Family of their day, if you will. Proclaiming "Sola Scriptura"—the Word of God alone, they called for the reinstatement of the "crown rights" of King Jesus. Like the Apostles before them, they turned their world right side up through faith in Jesus Christ and obedience to his commands to ...*teach all nations...to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you...* (Matt 28:19, 20).

The great evangelist Charles Finney was also a reformer. He became president of Oberlin College in Ohio and from that platform, became one of the first national voices to speak out consistently against slavery in America. He vigorously supported the North in the Civil War and later championed the women's right to vote.

A recent example of the Church acting to constrain cultural forces, involves the proposed King County moratorium on church growth in rural areas. Rather than passively observing as government officials attempt to strip away precious religious freedoms, the Church has rallied to preserve its right to worship and provide religious instruction in rural areas. By speaking out on this issue, the Church is impacting and shaping the history of King County, if not the entire state.

History is also taking shape in Monroe. Pastors in that community have a vision for the righteous to be in authority in the Monroe Valley. With a grin, they call their vision, the "New Monroe Doctrine." Plans call for the churches to encourage Christians to run for public office, special intercessory prayer for godly leaders, and ad hoc committees to search out qualified candidates. Additionally, pastors are personally committed to getting better acquainted with community leaders through frequent, informal get-togethers.

Rather than being part of an audience, these pastors are determined to be actors in the drama of Church history in Monroe, Washington.

Jesus said, ... *All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth* (Matt 28:18). What wonderful purpose illuminates us and moves us to action when we realize we have not been appointed to ride out the storm. We are commissioned to push back the darkness.

Rick Forcier

Executive Director