

# Christian Coalition of Washington

Educating and Activating Christians for Social, Political, and Spiritual Action

October 2018

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## Wanted: No Risk No Cost Religion

Angels who guard you while you drive, usually retire at 65! --Burma Shave

*"It is the duty of the clergy to accommodate their discourses to the times, to preach against such sins as are most prevalent, and recommend such virtues as are most wanted..." --John Adams (1754)*

**M**otoring from one state to another along simple two-lane roads before America's vast Interstate highway system was in place, involved frequent stops in many little "hamlets." While conversational English was a given, modest regional "intonations" varied from the Pennsylvania-Dutch, to Cape Cod, the Bronx, Chicago, Wilmar, Charlotte, and TAKE-SUS!

Along endless stretches in mid-west cattle and corn country, must-read billboards helped to pass the time. Advertisements such as the *Burma Shave* teaser above, might start "Angels who guard you..." Further along, another sign would continue "while you drive..." and so on.

Some no doubt recall the "ubiquitous" signs placed in many states urging weary travelers to stop by *Wall Drugs (Store)* in Wall, South Dakota. Upon arrival, visitors encountered a one street town with a hundred cars vying for a parking space. (Note): Years ago, this writer even observed a *Wall Drugs* sign in Amsterdam. Under an arrow, it read, "Wall Drugs—4,497 miles!"

Perhaps though, a steady homogenizing of America actually started with Route 66, also known as the *Will Rogers Highway*. Established in 1926, it was at one time considered the "Main Street of America." Originally, Route 66 ran from Chicago through Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona before ending in Southern California. In 1937, Patrick McDonald opened "The Airdrome," a food stand at the end of Route 66 in Monrovia, California. The rest is history.

No doubt many fewer vacationers today pass through Wall or pull in for a sandwich in Monrovia. Instead, they hasten-by-air to booming entertainment venues—starting with Las Vegas, Nevada, which offers 169,100 hotel rooms—more than any other city in America. Number two destination city, Orlando, Florida, has 119,800 rooms available for Disney World visitors.

Acutely aware that entertainment venues generate a windfall in tourist dollars, New York City, Chicago, and Washington, DC are currently racing to erect tens-of-thousands more guest accommodations in the next several years. But, we wonder if in the lure and pursuit of entertainment, we are missing America's amber waves of grain?

In post-modernity, where more and bigger are frequently associated with "better," churches, not unlike leading U.S. cities, are racing to become "mega-churches." Megachurches are those with 2,000 or more attending weekend services.

But much like rural small-town USA, many small community churches are struggling to keep the doors open as former members drive much further distances on the super-highways to attend larger, more exciting Saturday night or Sunday morning services.

Arguably, the very definition of *mega* is the amazing *Yoido Full Gospel Church* in Seoul, South Korea. Reporting more than 800,000 (local) members, Yoido is the largest Christian church in the world. Sunday services at Yoido “start at 7 a.m. and run the whole day, until 7 p.m. They’re not in the same building at the same time, but officials say nearly 200,000 people attend worship services every week at the main church in Yeouido, an island in central Seoul that sits in the Han River.”<sup>1</sup>

For several decades, church leaders from around the world have traveled to Seoul to meet with staff at this phenomenal church, to observe and then hopefully bring inspirational bacon back home to their own interested or faltering fellowships.

Although Yoido has impacted its indigenous culture (and beyond) in a phenomenal way, it is not exceptional—at least not on the Korean peninsula. The next two—possibly three—largest local congregations in the world are also based in Seoul, South Korea. In all, the South Korean capital is home to no less than 17 megachurches!

Even so, Korean church leaders speak of recent challenges that have greatly hampered church growth. One of them is a loss of favor with the general public due to a very large embezzlement (upwards of 12 million dollars) and other scandals that have negatively impacted growth in many local churches.

But even large scandal-free congregations in the U.S. are expressing concerns that heretofore had not been anticipated. One of them is the problem of “anonymity.”

For whatever reason, massively large congregations can unintentionally provide cover for those who prefer to quietly slip in-and-out of weekend services—leaving nary a footprint behind. Christian public pollster George Barna calls these folks “notional Christians.” Barna says “these are people who consider themselves Christians and act like Christians, but do not believe the key biblical doctrines of salvation.” Nevertheless, they are very comfortable in a church...or in a bar.

That said, we wonder if the size of a congregation is a reasonable predictor of spiritual efficacy?

The late theologian R. C. Sproul had much to say on the topic of the local church in our day, but without necessarily specifying fellowships large or small. In a September 2012 essay, he took the “Church” to task for bowing to civil government concerning essential moral issues. His case was illustrated in the application of federal tax-exemptions which he said are good only as long as the Church remains passive on the issues.

Sproul refers to Acts 14, Paul’s first missionary journey, where the gospel was proclaimed in an agora (public square). Some were receptive, but others in the crowd were outright hostile. Later in the chapter, Paul is arrested, tried, and stoned (he later revived) before moving to the next venue to try it all again.

But today, insists “R. C.” we have made a deal with civil authorities. “If we confine our preaching and teaching to spiritual matters (matters of the world to come) and keep our mouths shut about what’s going on all around us in the culture in which we live, then we will be protected by the powers that be. But if we venture off the reservation and intrude our opinions into the public square, then we will feel the full measure of the wrath of the culture and indeed of the government itself.”<sup>2</sup>

This leads one to wonder if a few megachurches in Las Vegas and Orlando are much more vulnerable to intimidation and control than ten-thousand times ten-thousand churches along old Route 66!

*Rick Forcier*

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<sup>1</sup> [www.pri.org/stories/2017-05-01/biggest-megachurch-earth-facing-crisis-evangelism](http://www.pri.org/stories/2017-05-01/biggest-megachurch-earth-facing-crisis-evangelism)

<sup>2</sup> [www.ligonier.org/blog/principles-for-voting/](http://www.ligonier.org/blog/principles-for-voting/)