
Why the Church Is Not Discipling the Nation

By Luis Sena

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I would like to address the theme of The Church and the Truth, based on a reflection I have been doing recently. We are constantly surprised, in our generation, by **the low effectiveness of local churches to transform their communities and cities** in spite of the high number of churches and the multitude of people that go to church every week. I think the reason for such low impact is that most churches are not discipling their members nor discipling the “culture” of their members. That is, they are not providing a biblical framework to the various cultural practices which are influencing their members.

What is the identity of the church? We find one of the finest descriptions of the church in 1 Peter 2:9, **“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellences of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”** (ESV)

This is the nature of the church ... and also the identity of the church. We find a similar description in 1 Timothy 3:15, where the church is identified as the **“pillar and buttress of the truth.”**¹ So the church matures and grows, first by **“defending the truth”** as we find in Jude 3.² Second, it matures by **“propagating the truth”** like we find in the great

¹ 1 Timothy 3:15, If I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. (ESV)

² Jude 3, Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

commission in Matthew 28.³ Third, maturity in the church comes by **“following the truth in love”** as ordered in Ephesians 4:15.⁴

Now when we talk about the church, we need to clarify **what is the church?** For clarity, I will quote Abraham Kuyper⁵ on this point.

The church on earth is not an institution for the dispensation of grace as if it were a dispensary of spiritual medicines. There is no mystical spiritual order gifted with the spiritual powers to operate with a magical influence upon laymen. There are only regenerated and confessing individuals who in accordance with this scriptural command and under the influence of the sociological element of all religion have formed a society and are endeavoring to live together in subordination to Christ as their King. This, alone, is the church on earth, not the building, not the institution, not a spiritual order ... The church is found in the confessing individuals themselves.

We need to realize the difference between the **“church as organization”** (as a social institution) and **“the church in the people”** (a spiritual organism). I think that churches, local churches in our generation, have organized too much and have come to see themselves more as religious organizations than as the people of God. There are, of course, few exceptions, but in general, **the church in our generation has adopted the form, the model of the “corporation” from the western culture.** As a consequence, instead of discipling their members, in most cases, churches have Christianized cultural practices like advertising and marketing. They have done this in order to be friendlier to the public and to have a wider impact in their city as a religious organization but *not as the people of God.*

That’s why the expressed strategic goals for churches are so often the same as those of corporations: **“self-preservation, growth, and expansion.”** Most plans for churches have as their focus the “expansion” of their size (i.e. numbers as indicators of effectiveness). **Driven by self-preservation, preachers and teachers don't touch the hot issues of the culture, because they know they will be persecuted. The privileges they enjoy as organizations will be lost. They will be challenged by the surrounding culture.** Church leaders (usually) won't risk publicly applying truth because it might mean **putting the ministry in danger.** But, when a church adopts this paradigm, it has inadvertently **forsaken the truth.** The essence of the church is “the people of God”

³ Matthew 28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in^[b] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ **teaching them** to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

⁴ Ephesians 3:15, Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,

⁵ Kuyper, Abraham, The L. P. Stone Lectures for 1898-1899, p. 75-76 (Calvinism and Religion) Six Lectures Delivered in the Theological Seminary at Princeton by Abraham Kuyper, D.D., LL.D., MP. Professor in the Free University, Amsterdam New York Chicago Toronto, Fleming H. Revell Company

present in their community. **The church has organization but she is not to be an organization.** When the leaders put all their effort into the organization and not into the discipleship of the people of God, they act more like **politicians** than like Christian leaders called to serve the people of God.

Manfred Svensson pointed out a similarity of thought between Max Weber and C. S. Lewis regarding “two ethics.” Weber said,

We need to distinguish between two kinds of ethics, the ethic of the saint and the ethic of the politician. The ethic of the saint is the ethic of moral absolutes that are uncompromising. The ethic of the politician is the ethic of utilitarianism; the ethic of the consequences, the ethic of never risking everything, and the ethic to know where to compromise even in the things that the saint would consider a moral absolute.⁶

Many pastors and Christian leaders in our generation, because of too much focus on the organizational aspect of churches, have imported the ethic of the politician into the church. The guiding principle for their decisions as leaders is **never risk the whole, but know where to compromise** in order to keep the organization functioning and expanding. The focus is **self-preservation**.

The church of Jesus Christ has not been called to self-preservation but to defend and expound the truth, applying the biblical truth to all areas of culture regardless of the consequences.

When church leaders act like politicians they tend not to disciple their members. When they try to transform their community they do it **as an organization, as an organized ministry, instead of empowering their members to** apply their God-given gifts at their vocations and relationships in the society. **The church acting as an organization will never transform society.** It is the church as the people of God, not as an organization, whom the Holy Spirit inhabits. **The modern/post-modern identity of the church as an organization, as a religious corporation is neutralizing the effectiveness of the people of God in our times.**

Our prayer should be:

*Heavenly Father, we praise your name. We know that your means of grace are as effective as ever to transform people and societies. If we are facing a problem transforming society in our times is because we have a problem in our worldview, we have been missing the point understanding what your church really is. Please, help us to transmit your vision of the church to our church leaders, help them to repent and disciple your people, the people you have entrusted them to care for you at their congregations. **Please assist the***

⁶ Ethics and Politics; Thoughts of C.S. Lewis, 2011

church leaders to equip their churches to transform their cities: until your knowledge will cover our cities as the waters cover the sea. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.



Luis Sena is Coordinator of the School Development Program (Esperanza-Edify Program) at Esperanza International. Luis was born and raised in the Dominican Republic and came to faith in Christ in 1980. He earned his master of business administration in 1992. Luis founded and served in Iglesia Fundamento Bíblico until 2009. He served as Program Director and Country Director for Food for the Hungry International (FHI) in the Dominican Republic and overseeing FHI in Haiti from 1982-2010. He has served as a trainer and speaker in several organizations.