



January 29<sup>nd</sup>, 2006 (Vol. 6)

## The Community Church Movement

Mark Dunagan

The community church movement has grown out of a denominational background. The chief models are the Willow Creek Community Church in Illinois and the Saddleback Community Church in California. The textbook for the movement is *The Purpose Driven Church* by Rick Warren. Some of the characteristics of community churches, are the following:

(1) Contemporary music. At Willow Creek a pop singer has replaced the choir, and a 10-piece rock band has replaced the organ. (2) Eliminating denominational names. Most community churches are disguised denominations, that is, they still hold to Baptist or Methodist creeds and teachings, but the name has been changed. As this movement has infiltrated churches of Christ, the name church of Christ has been diminished or eliminated. (3) Casual emphasis in worship, both in style and dress. (4) Different kind of leadership model rather than elders who have authority. (5) Praise teams and entertainment orientation in worship. (6) A greater emphasis on "self", including one's own feelings and emotions. (7) De-emphasis on doctrine, and among churches of Christ, an emphasis of the restoration plea. (8) A market-driven program, that is, striving to provide what people want or what they are seeking, rather than what God says they need.

**Concern Even in the Denominational World.** In his book, *Ashamed of the Gospel*, John MacArthur writes against the "market-driven" approach to religion. Here is how he describes the philosophy behind the community church movement: "Provide non-Christians with an agreeable, inoffensive environment. Give them freedom, tolerance, and anonymity. Always be positive and benevolent. If you must have a sermon, keep it brief and amusing. Don't be preachy or authoritative. Above all, keep everyone entertained. Churches following this

pattern will see numerical growth, we're assured; those that ignore it are doomed to decline" (pp. 45-46). "Preaching particularly preaching about sin, righteousness, and judgment is too confrontive to be truly satisfying. The church must learn to couch the truth in ways that amuse and entertain" (p. 23). In contrast to such a philosophy of preaching that entertains, the Bible commands preaching that convicts the heart and moves the sinner to repentance (*Matthew 4:17; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30; 26:20; 20:21; 2 Corinthians 5:9-10; Acts 24:25* "And as he was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come").

- Please note that we can preach the truth, urge people to repent, expose error and still greet people in a warm and friendly manner. Jesus ate with sinners and continued to preach the truth. We can make people feel welcome, but we are making a mistake if we want them to avoid any discomfort at all. The Word of God will naturally cause any sinner to feel uncomfortable at times (*Hebrews 4:12; John 16:8; Acts 2:37*). Remember, life is not about avoiding discomfort.
- People who wanted sinners to feel no discomfort were labeled as false prophets in times past, (*Isaiah 30:10; Jeremiah 8:11*). Spiritual growth many times requires being convicted and being uncomfortable (*Matthew 5:3-4*)

**An Old Problem.** In his book, MacArthur quotes often from the 19<sup>th</sup> century Baptist preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Spurgeon was probably the most well known denominational preacher of his time. He became concerned with what he saw as a "downgrade", meaning that he saw faith going downhill (we would say the "slippery-slope"). The Downgrade controversy began with Spurgeon's publication of two anonymous articles by a fellow Baptist, which lament trends away from biblical fundamentals, compromises with the world, and the unwillingness of even otherwise orthodox preachers to oppose those whose soundness was questionable. He saw evangelicals using entertainment as a tool for church growth, and he believed that was subverting the church's priorities. He feared that frivolous diversions and carnal amusements in the church would eventually destroy

