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“Contextualization” and the Corruption of the Church
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by John MacArthur

It should be clear that modern church marketers cannot look to the apostle Paul for approval of their methodology or claim him as the father of their philosophy. Although he ministered to the vilest pagans throughout the Roman world, Paul never adapted the church to secular society’s tastes. He would not think of altering either the message or the nature of the church. Each of the churches he founded had its own unique personality and set of problems, but Paul’s teaching, his strategy, and above all his message remained the same throughout his ministry. His means of ministry was always preaching—the straightforward proclamation of biblical truth.

By contrast, the “contextualization” of the gospel today has infected the church with the spirit of the age. It has opened the church’s doors wide for worldliness, shallowness, and in some cases a crass, party atmosphere. The world now sets the agenda for the church.

This is demonstrated clearly in a book by James Davison Hunter, a sociology professor at the University of Virginia. Hunter surveyed students in evangelical colleges and seminaries, and concluded that evangelical Christianity has changed dramatically in the past three decades. He found that young evangelicals have become significantly more tolerant of activities once viewed as worldly or immoral—including smoking, using marijuana, attending R-rated movies, and premarital sex. Hunter wrote,

The symbolic boundaries which previously defined moral propriety for conservative Protestantism have lost a measure of clarity. Many of the distinctions separating Christian conduct from “worldly conduct” have been challenged if not altogether undermined. Even the words *worldly* and *worldliness* have, within a generation, lost most of their traditional meaning…. The traditional meaning of worldliness has indeed lost its relevance for the coming generation of Evangelicals. (Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation*, 63)

What Hunter noted among evangelical students is a reflection of what has happened to the entire evangelical church. Many professing Christians appear to care far more about the world’s opinion than about God’s. Churches are so engrossed in trying to please non-Christians that many have forgotten their first duty is to please God (2 Cor. 5:9). The church has been so over-contextualized that it has become corrupted by the world.

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