

Rick Warren and Judaism

Rick Warren has been very much to the fore this week with his appearance on the worldwide stage when he delivered an 'invocation' at the inauguration of Barack Obama. His use in his 'prayer' of a portion of the Jewish SHEMA as found in **Deuteronomy 6:4** brought to mind an encounter he had back in December 2007 with Jewish Religious leaders in San Diego.

A report of this meeting is posted on this link

http://www.christiantoday.com/article/rick_warren_counsels_jews_on_recruiting_congregants/15651.htm

and this is the text of that report-

Rick Warren counsels Jews on recruiting congregants

by Jennifer Riley, Christian Today US Correspondent

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Megachurch pastor Rick Warren attended a large Reform Jewish gathering last week to share tips on how to build a community. Warren - who saw his church expand from just seven people meeting in his house to 22,000 people worshipping in an expansive treasure island-like campus - said the key to holding onto visitors was involving them in a small group. "We believe congregations have to grow large and small at the same time," Warren said Thursday, according to the San Diego Union-Tribune newspaper. "We don't really feel like people are in the congregation until they're in small groups." The "Purpose-Driven" pastor spoke to thousands of Jewish leaders Thursday night at the Union for Reform Judaism's biennial convention in San Diego.

With the holiday season in mind, Warren urged clergy to take advantage of crowded events to publicise other programmes so people can get involved in the community through smaller groups. "There are some principles that apply regardless of our faith, if it's Jewish or Christian," he said at the convention. One of his principles: "Just be nice to people. Smile."

After Warren spoke a few minutes at the podium, he sat alongside two popular Southern California rabbis for a casual talk about strengthening congregational life. Other advice given by Warren included looking at everything from an outsider's viewpoint, such as simplifying worship terms, making strangers feel welcome, and encouraging interaction. "The congregation that really loves people, you have to lock the doors to keep people out," said Warren, whose Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, Calif., is scheduled to host 14 Christmas services this year with an estimated crowd of 45,000 people.

The biennial meeting of the largest Jewish denomination in North America began December 12 and concluded on Sunday. Other guests at the conference included the Rev Jim Wallis of Sojourners and Dr Ingrid Mattson, president of the Islamic Society of North America.

I want just to make a few simple observations about Rick Warren's approach to this encounter with Jewish Religious leaders.

1. The apparent aim of Rick Warren was to articulate principles that he believed would help enlarge the congregations of the Jewish Religious leaders present – according to the report he said **"There are some principles that apply regardless of our faith, if it's Jewish or Christian,"** and by way of example he apparently **"urged clergy to take advantage of crowded events to publicise other programmes so people can get involved in the community through smaller groups"**. Another reported principle apparently is **"Just be nice to people. Smile."**
2. Other reported advice to the Religious leaders present **"included looking at everything from an outsider's viewpoint, such as simplifying worship terms, making strangers feel welcome, and encouraging interaction"**.
3. A prominent Muslim leader, Dr Ingrid Mattson, President of the Islamic Society of North America, apparently was also privy to what Mr Warren had to say – presumably with the aim of learning how to **"grow"** the Islamic community.
4. There is no reference to any attempt by Rick Warren to proclaim the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Having made these observations I would like to contrast Rick Warren's approach to Judaism when he came to San Diego with that of the approach adopted by the Apostle Paul when he came to the city of Corinth. We read of Paul's arrival there in **Acts 18** and in **verses 4-5** we read **"And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. And when Silas and Timothy were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ"**.

Unlike Rick Warren, the Apostle Paul did not seek to advise those in the synagogue how they might grow/enlarge their faith communities that would have been either Christ-rejecting or Christ-ignorant.

In the face of such lack of knowledge or acceptance of Jesus Christ we read that Paul **"reasoned"** [According to Vine's Expository Dictionary this means **'to dispute with others'**] that he **"persuaded"** [According to Vine's Expository Dictionary this means **'to apply persuasion, to prevail upon or win over, to persuade – bringing about a change of mind by the influence of reason or moral considerations'**] that he **"was pressed in the spirit"** [According to Vine's Expository Dictionary this means **'Paul was constrained – Paul felt the urge of the word of his testimony to the Jews in Corinth'**] and that he **"testified"** [According to Vine's Expository Dictionary this means **'to testify or protest solemnly'**].

Over recent days I have read in papers and heard TV reporters refer to Rick Warren as a 'conservative evangelical' who believes that only Christ can save. The Apostle Paul might also fit those descriptions but I could never imagine Paul assisting the leaders of the religion, out of which he was gloriously saved, to grow/enlarge their soul-damning faith communities. In contrast to the strategy of Rick Warren when he came to San Diego, the Apostle Paul outlined the strategy he employed when he came to Corinth – he wrote later to the believers in that city in **1st Corinthians 2:1-3** **"And I brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, [‘growth principles’?] declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear and in much trembling"**.

What a glorious testimony to an unashamedly fearless and faithful witness to **“the gospel of Christ...the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first and also to the Greek” [Romans 1:16].**

Going back to **Acts 18** we read of remarkable fruit through Paul's faithfulness to his Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ for we read in **verse 8** **“And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing, believed and were baptised”.**

But that was not the end of Paul's influence in Corinth with high-ranking Jewish Religious leaders for we learn in **verses 12-17** how an attempt was made in the civil court to have charges brought against Paul in front of the deputy of Achaia, Gallio, but when he dismissed the charges we read of the 'fate' of the then chief ruler of the synagogue in **verse 17** **“Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue and beat him before the judgment seat”** - that was the price Sosthenes had to pay for failing to get Paul convicted. However there is a wonderful outcome to all of this and we read of it in **1st Corinthians 1:1** **“Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ, through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother”.**

If in Corinth the Apostle Paul had adopted the same strategy as that used by Rick Warren in San Diego then it is highly unlikely there would have been any church in Corinth for Paul to write to later. The witness of Paul in Corinth is a living example of the longings of his heart as expressed so clearly in **Romans 10:1-4** **“Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness and going about to establish their own righteousness have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth”.**

I am yet to be convinced that Rick Warren similarly experiences such **“heart's desire”** when he is addressing diverse religious groups whether in San Diego, at the United Nations or wherever and for the cause of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ that is a matter of deep regret.

Cecil Andrews – ‘Take Heed’ Ministries – 23rd January 2009