

**Bluebonnet Baptist Association
Christian Leaders Conference
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*“No More Home Field Advantage: Christian Mission
in a Post-Christian Culture”*

Terry Coy
Gospel, Church, and Culture
www.christoculture.com
terrycoy@gmail.com
214.215.5598

Introduction and Thesis:

- Introduction: Ah, the good ole days?

Point/Thesis – we've lost all that.

- 1) Being the church without home field advantage is *nothing new in the history* of Bible-believing and Bible-obeying churches.

- 2) Similarly, being the church without home field advantage is *nothing new to the majority of world Christians*.

- 3) Being the church without home field advantage, on the margins and in a post-Christian culture will lead, and is leading, *to a rediscovery* of biblical evangelism, discipleship, ministry, and community.
 - a) Rediscovery and new understanding of Biblical evangelism. .

 - b) Rediscovery and new understanding of Biblical discipleship.

 - c) Rediscovery and new understanding of what it means to be the church.

 - d) The possible rediscovery and new understanding of Biblical suffering?

What I want to do in these sessions:

Session 1: “Playing an Away Game.”

The Big Question: What in the world happened for us to lose home field advantage?

Practical question: What do I need to know?

Purpose: Information >> Knowledge >> Understanding of culture

Session 2: “A Game Plan for Cultural Underdogs.”

The Big Question: What are people thinking?

Practical question: What do I need to prepare?

Purpose: Knowledge >> Analysis >> Preparation to engage culture

Session 3: “Calling the Right Plays as Cultural Underdogs.”

The Big Question: What are we going to do?

The Practical question: What do I need to be and do?

Purpose: Insight >> Wisdom >> Engagement of the culture

Session 1: “Playing an Away Game” What in the world happened?!? How did we lose home field advantage?

■ **Christendom and the American Experiment:**

The Rise of Christendom:

Christendom checked and in decline

Reflections, Lessons, and Consequences of Christendom:

Positives?

1. Christendom meant a near identification of Western culture and Christianity.
2. Also led to the founding of schools and universities, hospitals, and other benevolent ministries.
3. Also meant unity in fighting pagans or even engaging in war with another Christendom nation.

Negatives?

1. Christendom could only be held together by power.
2. Because Europe was “Christian” the general disposition was that the Great Commission had been fulfilled.
3. Such corruption and abuse of power simply meant that the gospel of Jesus Christ and the prevailing culture had become so syncretized as to be unrecognizable.

The current reality:

1. The church has moved from the center to the margins.
2. Paradoxically the non-Western world still sees the west in general, and America in particular, as a Christian culture and all Westerners as Christians.
3. Good news is that the end of Christendom means the rise of Biblical evangelism and missions.

4. The collapse of Christendom does not mean that Christianity has collapsed.

The American Experiment:

What about the U.S? What was different about the American experiment?

**Protestant beginnings

**Enlightenment Philosophies

**The Development of Civil Religion

Civil Religion Begins to Fade

Benefits and Dangers of Civil Religion:

Benefits:

1. Like Christendom, serves as the glue that held the dominant culture together.
2. Provided some semblance of a common ground for answers to questions of authority, morals, and ethics.

3. Kept the extremes from dominating the culture.

Dangers:

1. Can confuse Christianity with patriotism, or worse, with nationalism.
2. Actually weakens the gospel of Jesus Christ and the call to discipleship.
3. And, we confuse unbelievers, especially non-westerners.

■ **Secularization:**

Secularism is the more aggressive political movement or philosophy that “affirms that the less public religiosity there is, the greater the benefit for society.”

Secularization is the historical process of moving from the Biblical worldview, where God sustains all, to the situation where God and religion are minimized and marginalized.

History and process

From the 11th through the 19th centuries: Power struggle between church and state, emerging nation-state and market economies, rise of mechanical philosophy, in which all things are viewed like machines. There was the rise of the modern autonomous self, which meant less identification with family, clan, and tribe. That was followed by the industrial revolution, advances in transportation = restructure communities and increase mobility. Privatization of religion is consequence.

In the midst of the historical process, the U.S. was born.

Implications and Applications of Secularization:

1. The world is essentially religious, and, contrary to conventional wisdom in the Modern age, modernity does not necessarily bring about secularization.
2. Americans “feel” growing secularization in large part due to its prevalence as a movement in academia, mass media, and the entertainment world.

Consequently:

1. We are both a religious nation and the first modern secular nation.
2. Public religion was civil religion, and it is becoming less and less Judeo-Christian
3. At the same time that we are getting more religiously pluralistic, we are getting more secular.
4. Religious nation and world, but secularization is a global phenomenon.

■ **Conclusion to Session 1:** Why is all this history and philosophy important to know?

1. Your people get all kinds of mixed messages:
2. As we move closer to the margins – as we keep losing more and more the home field advantage -- you will need to help your people understand how to respond.
3. National, Patriotic, and Cultural Perspective.
4. Historical, Biblical, and Theological Perspective – this is even more important.

Questions for further reflection:

1. How can I help my people understand what is happening in the world, our nation, our community, and in the life of the church? What do they need to know, understand, question, affirm, forget, re-learn, re-think, set aside?
2. What are some of the “comfortable” elements of civil religion I see in my community and in my church which may confuse American culture with Biblical Christianity?
3. How has civil religion and cultural Christianity affected the message of the gospel in my church?
4. What are some implications for my preaching/teaching, especially on national holidays and election years? How can I remind my congregation to be Kingdom citizens first and still good American citizens?
5. How can I lead my church to think first of the Kingdom and of our church as a Kingdom outpost? What are the implications in and for a flat, globalized world?
6. What are some aspects of secularized society (individualism, consumerism, religious compartmentalization, etc) I have seen accepted by people in my church?
7. How have I seen secularization creeping into my community and even into my church?

Suggested Resources

Ashford, Bruce and Chris Pappalardo, *One Nation Under God*.

Dickerson, John S. *The Great Evangelical Recession*.

Friedman, Thomas. *The World is Flat*.

Frost, Michael and Alan Hirsch. *The Shaping of Things to Come*.

Grenz, Stanley. *A Primer on Postmodernism*.

Jenkins, Phillip. *The Next Christendom*.

Land, Richard. *The Divided States of America*.

McNeal, Reggie. *The Present Future*.

Newbigin, Lesslie. *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*.

Nichols, Stephen J. *Jesus Made in America*.

Noll, Mark A., George Marsden, and Nathan O. Hatch. *The Search for Christian America*.

Olson, David T. *The American Church in Crisis*.

Wilsey, John D. *American Exceptionalism and Civil Religion: Reassessing the History of an Idea*.

The Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) website has numerous resources available on a variety of topic. www.erc.com

More articles on a variety of topics can be found on the website of the ERLC's president at www.russellmoore.com.

Research information on religion and public life:

- George Barna: www.barna.org.
- The Pew Research Center for Religion and Public Life: www.pewforum.org