TRENDS FOR 2022

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Some thoughts about what 2022 might hold.
Category: Observations

The physicist, Neils Bohr is said to have remarked that it is difficult to make predictions, especially if they concern the future. Though as with many quotes of this nature, there are various other suggested sources. Unlike Neils Bohr, I don't have a worldwide reputation to defend, nor a Nobel prize to live up to, so I'm going to make a few predictions for 2022. I may remember to return to these in December to see how well they check out.

Now depending on which eschatological camp you fall into, you may feel that everything is going to get worse until Jesus returns or you may think that things are going to improve, or like me you might believe that good and evil will both grow together. So, next year I see a mixture of things happening, some are good, some less so.

The church will continue to grow: overall, around the world, the church will continue to grow. While we are likely to see continued recessions in the church in the Western world, elsewhere significant numbers of people will turn to Jesus - many from other religious backgrounds. However, the world population will continue to grow faster than the church and in percentage terms, we will actually lose ground.

The worst of the pandemic is behind us: I will admit that this is to some extent wishful thinking. As long as the vast majority of the world's population remain unvaccinated, then there is always the capacity for a new variant to emerge. However, the wide spread of the omicron variant gives some hope that it will confer a fair degree of immunity without a massive death toll. Only time will tell, but I am hopeful. However, none of us are safe until all of us are safe.

Cultural pressure on the British church will grow: sensitivity to issues raised by LGBTQ groups in the media and elsewhere will increasingly place pressure on conservative churches in the UK. Navigating the waters between pastoral sensitivity and biblical clarity will become increasingly difficult and an increasing number of churches will find themselves vilified as x-phobes (where x is any quantity) in the media. At some point soon, concerted campaigns against individual churches or groups of churches will be launched on social media. Leaders need to be ready for this.

Christian nationalism will be a growing problem: the most obvious example of this (though it is far from the only one) is found in the USA. This is a difficult issue to raise, and I am aware that I may offend some people in what I say. However, the way in which some Christians are draping their faith in their national flags is detrimental to the gospel around the world. It is hard for people outside of the church to distinguish between those who are humbly calling people to follow Jesus and those who are pushing a nationalist agenda; especially as the latter have louder voices in the media.

Climate change will be undeniably deniable: Over the last twelve months we have seen enough extreme weather events that it is now clear that we are living through a period of climate change. Over the next year, we will see an increasing number of similar events around the world. Despite this, people will continue to deny that climate change is a real issue

The world will continue to need Jesus: and the church will have to face up to the continual temptation to offer the world meetings, services, systems and programs.