OVER PROMISING: UNDER DELIVERING

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Category: Church: UK

I am rereading Rob Warner's bookÂ Reinventing English EvangelicalismÂ 1966-2001Â at the moment (it costs a fortune, so don't get it unless you really need to) and I was struck by these two lengthy quotes.

> *...First, the quest for a quick fix, a short-term methodology that has, allegedly, produced exceptional results in another part of the world, which can be transplanted to the UK with more or less guaranteed results. Second, impatient expectations, in which leaders embrace a particular strategy with enthusiasm, only to abandon it when the fashion fades: while evangelicals marched for Jesus for a few years (1987-2000), Catholics make pilgrimages to a shrine for many centuries. Third, a naive optimism that predicates substantial conversion growth as the rapid and direct consequence of the currently fashionable methodology: an expectation that had its roots in Finney's nineteenth century mechanical theory of revival. Fourth an inability to or even refusal to recognise the severity of the cultural dislocation between the church and the prevailing culture. Fifth, a disinclination to engage in the necessary critical reflection prerequisite to more realistic, even chastened, long-term goals. Sixth a tendency to claim to provide strategic thinking while actually functioning on intuitive impulse and high-octane rhetoric. Seventh, enthusiastic endorsement by high profile leaders of an ill-considered and unrealistic vision that quickly turns to dust. (p. 109)*
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> *This kind of contemporary song promotes a universal ecstatic spirituality that promises a sustainedly passionate devotion to Christ, with the expectations that every believer will speak truth to all mankind and that whole towns are presently filled with joy and compelled by the Gospel. Neither the New Testament nor church history gives credence to such expectations. Given the current condition of the church in Western Europe, such songs indulge a wilful disregard for reality. (p. 84)*

There is a good deal in both of these quotes, but I just want to pick up on one; over-promising and under-delivering. This seems to be a real problem in some strands of the church today. I'm forever seeing adverts for meetings, conferences and books which are going to transform this generation, bring the kingdom to your neighbourhood, change your life or bring revival. Meanwhile, the wider world goes on pretty much as ever, apparently unaware that generations have been transformed and so on. We sing songs that make claims about our discipleship which don't seem to have a lot of connection with reality outside of the church building or celebration meeting.

To be honest, I find it all rather depressing.

As Christians, we are supposed to be people of truth, the spin and heavy advertising that is part of life in modern Britain should not be part of the life of the church. Being pragmatic, if we are going to plan for the future, our plans should be based on the reality of British society, not on a rose-tinted picture that says that everything is wonderful.

The problem is that when we over-promise and under-deliver we will eventually lose all of our credibility and Christians and others become cynical about the church.

I should also say that mission agencies aren't immune from this sort of hype either.

Yes, I know that God could transform the UK and bring revival if he chose. I pray that he does, but if he does he will do so in his way, not in ours. If God does bring revival, I suspect that those who have made big statements about what God is going to do through them, will be the most surprised!