FRIDAY CHURCH NEWS NOTES

MARK DRISCOLL, HOWLER MONKEYS, AND THE UNISEX SOCIETY

Though I am not a Mark Driscoll fan, having written many warnings about him long before he “fell from grace” (e.g., my 2008 book *What Is the Emerging Church?*) I have been puzzled at his downfall. He was an extremely popular and influential emerging church leader and the senior pastor of Mars Hill, a multi-campus megachurch in Seattle that he founded, when he resigned under pressure last year. Accusations against him include his dictatorial pastoral methodology, anger issues, crude language, pride, self-promotion, and using church funds to promote his books. Though he has publicly repented of these things, every time he gets a speaking invitation, a small group of dedicated enemies sets

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QUEEN OF SHEBA’S GRAVE DISCOVERED

Throughout much of the 19th century, Sheba, the spice kingdom ruled by a queen in Solomon’s day, was considered mythical by Bible critics. Since then, the evidence for Sheba’s existence in southern Arabia (modern Yemen) has become overwhelming. In the 1950s, Wendell Phillips led the first official archaeological expedition to Sheba’s ancient capital, Marib, and found evidence of a sophisticated, idolatrous society. This month I visited the “Unearthing Arabia” exhibition at the Sackler Museum in Washington, D.C., which displayed some of the artifacts discovered by Phillips. I have also seen ancient artifacts from southern Arabia at the British Museum and the Louvre in Paris, as we describe in the book *Bible Times and Ancient Kingdoms*. Recently, archaeologists from the University of Oxford found a tomb outside of Marib that is believed to be that of the Queen of Sheba (“Archaeologists Discover Tomb,” *World News Daily Report*, Feb. 6, 2015). The tomb dates to the early 10th century BC, which is the time of Solomon. It contained the skeleton of a woman adorned with luxurious jewelry, inscribed clay tablets, and vases still containing traces of myrrh and frankincense. Dr. Joseph Lang, head archaeologist of the team, says, “The carbon-dating, the location, the inscriptions, the characteristics of the skeleton and the nature of the artifacts on the site all seem to confirm that the bones are indeed those of the famous queen regnant who visited Solomon. Many of the inscriptions in the tomb refer to ‘Bilqis, mqtwyt of Sheba,’ which means Bilkis, high chieftess on Sheba.” The skeleton and artifacts have been deposited in the National Museum of Yemen.
up a commotion on social media sites like a bunch of howler monkeys, and they have been successful so far in getting him blacklisted. But it doesn't appear to me that any of the aforementioned points are the real reason. Dictatorial pastoral methodology, anger issues, pride, and self-promotion are not uncommon to megachurch pastors. As for crude language, the emerging church hero Bono is not only crude, he is actually foul-mouthed and lives an immoral lifestyle, but no one in this crowd is howling at him. As for talking too plainly about sex, many of the megachurches are guilty of this. Looking more closely at the accusations, I suspect that a large part of the issue might be Driscoll's political incorrectness, particularly his attacks on the unisex society. Consider the points that the howler monkeys raised against Driscoll in their recent successful petition to have him removed from a Hillsong conference in Australia. The points include Driscoll's “public statements against women in leadership,” his belief that we are living in a feminized nation, his warnings against “feminized men,” and “his ongoing negative attitudes toward women, gender non-conforming men and gay people” (“Petitioning Hillsong: Remove Mark Driscoll from the Hillsong Conference,” www.change.org). This is doubtless the heart of the issue. The howlers in this case are a group of feminists and homosexuals. The unisex movement, which began in earnest in the 1960s, was a major factor leading to the widespread acceptance of homosexuality today. There can be no doubt that it has resulted in the feminization of men and the masculinization of women and has affected American society at every level, including the police, the military, and the churches. When viewed in the context of the history of Western society, there is an intimate connection between the social acceptance of pants on women in the late twentieth century and the acceptance of homosexuality in the early twenty-first. Driscoll was one of the few megachurch pastors (if not the only one) who spoke plainly against unisexuality (though even he didn't deal with the hot-button issue of unisex clothing). He railed against the sissification of men in his hometown of Seattle and tried to teach the men in his congregation how to be men. Crude language aside, Driscoll was right about the unisex issue and women in church leadership. Howler monkeys on social media sites are trying to destroy freedom of speech and are doing a good job of it. They howl at Chick-Fil-A, Duck Dynasty, Brad Pitt's mom, anyone of influence who says things they don't like, particularly something against homosexuality and homosexual marriage. Another group of howlers roars at any scientist courageous enough to enunciate support for any type of “intelligent design.”

**HILARY SAYS RELIGION MUST ADAPT TO MODERN VIEWS**

Speaking in April, Hillary Clinton said that religion must adapt with the times and accept abortion on demand. In her keynote address before the World in the World Summit, Mrs. Clinton bemoaned the fact that “far too many women are denied access to reproductive health care,” saying that “deep-seated cultural codes, religious beliefs and structural biases have to be changed” (“Hillary Clinton says religious beliefs ‘have to be changed’ on abortion,” The Blaze, Apr. 27, 2015). A year ago, Mrs. Clinton told the New York Times that “the Bible was and remains the biggest influence on my thinking.” It is impossible to fathom where in the Bible she finds support for the murder of unborn children.
RELIGIOUS LEADERS SIGN OPEN LETTER TO THE SUPREME COURT ON SAME SEX “MARRIAGE” ISSUE

In a full-page ad in the Washington Post on June 10, religious leaders asked the Supreme Court not to force same sex “marriage” on the states and vowed not to obey any such ruling. “We implore this court to not step outside of its legitimate authority and unleash religious persecution and discrimination against people of faith. We will be forced to choose between the state and our conscience, which is informed by clear biblical and church doctrine and the natural created order. We will not honor any decision by the Supreme Court which will force us to violate a clear biblical understanding of marriage as solely the union of one man and one woman.” Signers included Baptists, Protestants, Catholics, and Jews, including Franklin Graham, James Dobson, Jerry Boykin, Alan Keyes, and Southern Baptist leaders Robert Jeffress and Paige Patterson. In our opinion, any true Christian involved in the advertisement program would have done better to have had some special prayer meetings to beseech God rather than to have disobeyed Scripture by joining hands with unbelievers and heretics in a spiritual matter. “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (2 Corinthians 6:14-16).

SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION CONTINUES DECLINE

According to the latest statistics, the Southern Baptist Convention is continuing its death spiral, with the largest decline in membership last year in more than 130 years. The SBC lost nearly a quarter of a million members in 2014 and has lost 800,000 members since 2003. The median age is now 54 years old. More than half of the churches baptized no “millennials” (roughly ages 12 to 30). Baptisms declined by 300,000. The convention claims to have about 15.5 million members, but that is a meaningless statistic. Most of these “members” are nowhere to be found. Sunday morning attendance is about 5.6 million, and that includes visitors, and the number of those who attend Sunday evening or mid-week prayer, typically, is much smaller. Ed Stetzer, executive director of LifeWay Research, says the decline actually started in the 1950s (“As Church Plants Grow, Southern Baptists Disappear,” Christianity Today, June 12, 2015). I am not surprised, as I grew up in SBC churches and they were spiritually lukewarm even then. Though there were some outstanding saints in the membership, the leadership and the congregations as a whole were lukewarm at best. At least that is my experience. The leaders were hirelings who were more afraid of man than God, and the people were in love with the world, a thing that God hates. “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (James 4:4).
BEFORE VACCINES

I don’t worship modern science, but I do thank the Lord for what it has accomplished in medicine. Antibiotics and vaccinations alone have prevented millions of premature deaths. Before vaccinations, small pox caused two million deaths a year. Polio paralyzed 1,000 children a day in America alone. Just 60 years ago, hospital wards were fitted with frightful “iron lung” machines in an attempt to keep children alive after polio had paralyzed their respiratory systems. Whooping cough vaccination is believed to save a half million deaths per year. More than 60,000 still die of whooping cough annually in places where the vaccine is not used. Called the 100 day cough, a person may cough so hard they break ribs. The disease spreads easily. After their infant son died of whooping cough in Australia in March 2015, Greg and Catherine Hughes urged parents to immunize their children so the disease doesn’t spread. Before vaccinations, diphtheria was another fearful cause of illness and death in young children. More than 15,000 died of it in America in 1921. Zero died in 2004. Vaccination also protects from the terrible disease of tetanus, which causes spasms so severe that bone fractures may occur. About 10% of those who are infected die. Tetanus still causes 59,000 deaths per year, but only in those who aren’t vaccinated. Meningitis caused 171,000 deaths worldwide before vaccination. Dr. Paul Offit observes, “Before vaccines, ... rubella (German measles) would cause as many as twenty thousand babies to be born blind, deaf, or mentally disabled; polio would permanently paralyze fifteen thousand children and kill a thousand; mumps would be a common cause of deafness; and a bacterium called Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib) would cause hundreds of children to die of suffocation from epiglottitis--no different than being smothered by a pillow. In the developed world, vaccines have completely or virtually eliminated these diseases” (Offit, Do You Believe in Magic? p. 138).

CONCLUSION

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