

Table 38: Church Leaders Comment on the Lukewarm Church in the U.S.

<p>Erich Bridges quotes a George Barna finding that many Americans are “comfortable” with faith but it is not a “critical factor in their decision-making.... Very limited effort is devoted to spiritual growth. Most Americans experience ‘accidental spiritual growth’ since there is generally no plan or process other than showing up at a church and absorbing a few ideas here and there. Even then, few people have a defined understanding of what they are hoping to become as followers of Christ.” Bridges observes, “It’s a discouraging analysis of the mile-wide, inch-deep landscape of American Christianity.”⁶</p>
<p>Presbyterian (USA) pastor and organizer Robert Linthicum observed, “The church has always talked about mission, but we organize ourselves for preservation, not mission.”⁷</p>
<p>Kenneth S. Hemphill was hired as a strategist to strengthen the commitment of Southern Baptist Convention members. In a denominational magazine column, he observed, “Many friends of the church have spoken about the anemic nature of the church in North America. Apathy is apparent as leaders resort to begging people to take positions of service. Could our ‘anemia’ be directly related to our spiritual diet? Are we larger and stronger or are we just obese?...Many people today are joining a church for its entertainment value, but they leave when there is a call for commitment to the fundamentals of Christian life such as Bible study, Scripture memory, and orthodox behavior.”⁸</p>
<p>An editorial from the Archdiocese of Cincinnati noted that Mass attendance is declining, as is Catholic school enrollment, and that “A recent Gallup Poll found that 49 percent of Catholics do not feel that they can explain their faith to others.” While acknowledging the impact of the sexual abuse crisis and some financial scandals, the editorial also quotes U.S. Archbishop John P. Foley, president of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications at the Vatican, as saying “that Catholics must ask forgiveness for the times they have failed in their efforts to evangelize. The archbishop said that, while ‘it is necessary to identify the evils in society and warn people against them, our major effort should be in proclaiming the knowledge and love of our merciful savior, Jesus Christ.’ We risk being left behind not only on the geopolitical scene, but also in terms of our own salvation if we do not do all that is within our power to spread the good news.”⁹</p>
<p>Billy Kim, president of Far Eastern Broadcasting in South Korea, on a visit to the U.S., observed that “When Jesus said ‘all power is given unto Me,’ He is speaking of the all-supplying power to fulfill the Great Commission within our generation. The only thing left is the commitment on the part of the Christian...We’ve been blessed so abundantly. The Scripture says ‘to whom much is given, much will be required.’ No other people on the planet Earth have been blessed by God Almighty as the people of the United States of America. May God grant a fresh vision, for ‘where there is no vision, people perish.’”¹⁰</p>
<p>John Perkins, founder of the Christian Community Development Association, designed to “build the community and the family among the poor” in inner-cities throughout the U.S., observed, “The Christian church is meant to be the continuation of the life of Jesus on earth. Unfortunately, I see it more [often] as a continuation of American individualism, need, and greed.”¹¹</p>
<p>“The spiritual profile of American Christianity is not unlike a lukewarm church that the Bible warns about.” David Kinnamon, quoted in The Barna Group release of its 2007 survey.¹²</p>
<p>“ ‘The U.S. church as a whole is spiritually arrogant, greatly spiritually undernourished, and it’s just spiritually lazy,’ [New Church Specialties founder Dr. Larry] McKain commented.”¹³</p>
<p>Christopher J.H. Wright is the international director of Langham Partnership, known in the U.S. as John Stott Ministries. In an essay on the church’s mission, he asked, “Can the West be re-evangelized? Only if we unlearn our default ethnocentric assumptions about ‘real’ Christianity (our own) and unlearn our blindness to the ways Western Christianity is infected by cultural idolatry.” He suggests that Christians in the West will have to learn from Christians in other areas of the world, changing the dynamic on giving and receiving. This shift “...makes us uncomfortably aware that what Jesus said to the Laodicean church might apply to us in the West: ‘You say, “I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.” But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked” ’ (Rev. 3:17).”¹⁴</p>

Notes for Chapter 8, Table 38, page 109

⁶ Erich Bridges; “Worldview: Here Comes the (Christian) Revolution”; BP News; posted 1/11/07; <<http://www.bpnews.net/printerfriendly.asp?ID=24752>>; p. 1 of 1/12/07 10:33 AM printout.

⁷ Jerry Van Marter; “Giving It All Away”; Presbyterian News Service; posted 1/17/07; <<http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/2007/07036.htm>>; pp. 1-3 of 8/4/07 5:06 PM printout.

⁸ Kenneth S. Hemphill, “Kingdom-Centered Churches Teach Sound Doctrine,” SBC Life, December 2006, p. 6.

⁹ Tricia Hempel, “Equipped to Engage in the Debate?” *The Peoria (Ill.) Diocese Catholic Post*, March 18, 2007, p. 5.

¹⁰ Kelly Davis Shrout; “Kim Cites ‘All-supplying Power’ for the Great Commission”; BP News; posted 1/22/07; <<http://www.bpnews.net/printerfriendly.asp?ID=24813>>; pp. 1-2 of 1/23/07 10:36 AM printout.

¹¹ Tim Stafford, “Grandpa John,” *Christianity Today*, March 2007, p. 51.

¹² “Barna’s Annual Tracking Study Shows Americans Stay Spiritually Active, But Biblical Views Wane”; The Barna Group, 5/21/07; <<http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdateNarrow&BarnaUpdateID=271>>; p. 4 of 6/18/07 3:39 PM printout.

¹³ Lillian Kwon; “How to Get Unchurched Americans Back Into Pews”; The Christian Post; posted 4/3/07; <<http://www.christianpost.com/pages/print.htm?aid=26688>>; p. 2 of 4/3/2007 2:57 PM printout.

¹⁴ Christopher J.H. Wright, “An Upside-Down World,” *Christianity Today*, January 2007, p. 44.

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Excerpt: Table 38

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