

## POPCORN KERNELS #2 5/31/99

Last week we began a short series of articles examining the ideas of pop culture prophetess, Faith Popcorn. I will refer you to issue 19 of NEW LIVING for a brief introduction to Ms. Popcorn and her 95% accuracy rate in predicting future trends in our society. We are not so much interested in how to position ourselves in the business world as we are in what these trends may mean for the church in society and what might be the most effective way to present our message.

Last week we looked at the disillusionment of our culture and the general attitude of unhappiness that prevails in spite of great blessing. This week consider if you will a couple more “seeking” attitudes that folks are developing. Although at first they may seem contradictory, they actually compliment each other as they address basic human needs.

The first is seen in the growth of so-called “mega-churches” over the past decade or so. Sometimes it is true that half-hearted folk may choose to attend these congregations because they can disappear in the crowd while salving their conscience by attending “church.” However, this group may be in a minority. The truth is that in larger churches, there is usually more diversity of thought and financial ability to participate in various efforts. These things require more active, participating, through-the-week workers than a small congregation where most of the weekly work is done by the preacher and “church-work” often consists of simply leading worship once or twice a week. The actual trend we notice here then is that people are seeking “community.” In our separated, walls up, don’t-know-your-neighbor, right to privacy society people are still trying to establish some sort of connection. We are social beings and we need interaction and fellowship with others. As well, people crave involvement, not just attendance and pass-the-plate. Groups that have not picked up on this trend toward “community” (partnership, working together, being part of a peer group with positive feedback) are losing members and momentum.

The other trend Ms. Popcorn mentions that seems turned in the opposite direction but actually is not is a trend toward intimacy. If you thought of it in retail terms we might compare it to the fact that on the one hand people like going to Meijers or a Super Walmart or Circle Center Mall where everything is available in a giant conglomerate. At the same time we have seen an increase in small specialty shops for things like bagels, manicures, coffee, or candles. People like the customization and intimacy of a small specialized store as well as the Mall or Superstore, for different reasons. The ones that are suffering are the retail businesses in the middle-sized category that are too big to be intimate and too small to address a variety of needs. They’re getting their socks beat off on both ends.

What does this mean to us? It means we must focus clearly on fellowship (partnership, working together, sharing in God’s work, one-another activities). People are looking for it and God teaches it as part of the church’s work, Acts 2:42. We need to identify the jobs that need doing and then join together and get going. We need to appreciate our workers (more on this later) and use encouragement to draw together rather than being critical and divisive.

Additionally, the trend toward intimacy tells us that people need and appreciate special friendships and personal attention. Hundreds of people in a worship service can be an exciting moment, but few of us can relate personally to that kind of crowd. People need individual connections. Brethren, we MUST look around and welcome visitors into our congregation AND into our small circle of friends. We must give them individual intimate connections to Christ and His body. Paul described it in Eph. 4:16 by “each individual part...” causing the body to grow by building in love.

We re-emphasize that the Lord’s church has now and has always had that which men need for fulfillment. But, we must look beyond ourselves and minister to others (Phil. 2:4) for that power to be able to start to work for them.

To be continued...

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