



Francisco Cañas

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The church is in isolation and in denial. When we talk about decline, we come with a strategy to stop decline. We try planting new churches to stop dwindling numbers. But that's not real. The reality is we're trying to keep the institution alive, and we've forgotten about the “main mission”: walking with people and making disciples. If we remain in isolation, our future is not promising and we are not heeding the basic calling of God.

As a church, we often deny our isolation, but consider this. If you could open the window of your home and have the opportunity to see the whole world through this small but powerful frame, you would see many colors, many ages, many races, and hear the sweet sound of many languages. You would see people struggling, fighting for “their little moment” — their smallest space — where they could feel safe and free to be who they are.

Just look at the issue of immigration. At this moment, it's one of the major issues in the United States and also globally. But what is the church doing in regard to immigration? We pretend to be bold and committed, but isn't our real priority in maintaining the institution?

We establish national plans that are going to address the needs of those minorities, but we never, never give full support to them. In the United States, where the main culture is declining in numbers, Hispanics are accounting for 14.4 percent of the population, and the country is becoming multicultural. Yet the denomination has one coordinator and assistant for the entire nation. And our plan is probably one of the best of all the denominations! Yet the plan is little compared to the demand in this country. And if immigration is just one of several issues for Hispanics and others, how much time can the church really be devoting to it?

We are a multicultural, multiethnic, multilingual nation, and that is only going to increase. Look out the window again. It's a beautiful picture — a lot of colors, vitality, happiness, noise and celebration.

But celebrating doesn't mean it's not difficult for people to have dignity. People of color have been oppressed, classified as the people of the afternoon services and the basement worships. Eleven o'clock on Sunday morning belongs to a particular group of people, regardless of the fact that the people of the basement worship are more in numbers.

And those undocumented — who the church will not fully support — they are sitting among us, tithing and serving, being the church. Yet they don't have the official documents to legally work in the country and still are struggling with the language, and many don't fully understand the complexity of the institution.

We, the church, must walk with the people and ask God for direction on resolving poverty, finding a better way to relate with our neighbor, doing justice and practicing faithfulness.

God's not going to respond to silly, selfish prayers, but to selfless actions, like our commitment to transforming our own realities and the realities of our neighbors.

It's time for the church to take responsibility for the gifts God has given us and to stop protecting an institution that excludes so many. It's time for redemption — dignifying and transforming redemption. We can't seek salvation if children are dying or suffering in our own prosperous metropolitan areas because we have not sought to care for them. First, we have to transform ourselves, so that all children are recognized and equal participants in our society, in our schools, in our churches.

This is a vision of God's kingdom. And I see it as a large party, a grand fiesta, where we come without fear and anxiety — and with freedom. We will come to a common place and a table to share as equals in all that God has provided us through God's creation. Our language will be compassion, respect and dignity, regardless of what society values or tells us to value.

Idealistic? Probably. But that's part of our faith.

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