

RESPONSE TO TIMOTHY R. AND SHAWNA SONGER GAINES'
 "BEING THE PILGRIM PEOPLE OF GOD: IDENTITY, MISSION AND MINISTRY"
 Jay Height

As the paper explains, we are in a new era for the North American church. No longer are we the in fashion, cool to be you, hip place to be. We are a people, we are pilgrims who are headed into exile.

I agree that, much like Israel, this exile has come as the results of our seeking power versus purpose. We were a happy people, when we thought our engagement in culture was to elect a certain party, or a certain person.

The authors lay out the case that the middle class church in North America is not : a geographical reality and expulsion from one's homelands it was for Israel.." Instead they contend it is based on "economic, political and power-dynamic privileges."

We see the signs everywhere; we see it in the election cycles of our times. We see this reality in entertainment world. Tragically, it is seen in our churches. The North American middle class church has begun the exile.

Yet, the urban church has been in exile for sometime. The city has long been a place of powerlessness, no voice and hopelessness. We see this on the news reports of the violence. My family has lived it for 25 years. Trying to value those society has ignored and forgotten. The exile for them has been decades in the making.

Those who live in the city have never seen Babylon as a place of value, but a place that they must abide in. No, there is no traveling involved in the exile, because for ugh of the urban environment, those things valued left them. Boarded up churches, closed retail stores, the designation of food desserts all give testimony to the exile.

Tragically, much like Sodom and Gomorrah, the exile is the results of the sin...the sin of forgetting to care for the poor. So could the two exiles be connected. Could the decades old exile be tied to the much more modern and current one found in suburbia.

Could the church have laid the seeds when it capitulated the care of the poor to the government in response to war on poverty? Did we lose our purpose and then begin the process to today's exile?

Dr JK Warrick and some other church leaders stood on the porch of the Fletcher homestead in Martin County, Kentucky. 50 years to that week, President Johnson stood on the same porch and declared the War on Poverty. The son of Tom Fletcher, the father seen in the iconic photos , Calvin said to us. "The government promised us a lot, but nothing has happened, could the church help us."

This is not an indictment of Babylon...it is maybe an symptom of the cause of the exile. It ask the question, "what is our purpose."

The authors also point out the particular descriptors of the of the society in Babylon. Each of them listed seems similar to our culture today, with the basis being self-sufficiency.

Yet, God created us for connection. He created us to not need the connection to Babylon, but to each other. That is what the urban church has learned...the need for community. For community to be present, power is not need. The authors state, " The people of God can continue to be the people of God with or without large amounts of societal power." Amen!

Jesus was the model. He lived it preached and invested in a few to encourage them to carry it on...in the face of persecution and exile...And the church thrived.

So maybe the church that is now headed into exile can learn from Jesus and the urban church...this is truly an exciting day. A day to embrace the way of Christ and to live in true community. To help bring about His kingdom, on earth as it is in heaven. The world may take away our power, our economics and our voice, but we have a Savior...and a church.