



 Pastor's Coach

The Five Spheres of Society

Dr Michael Brodeur

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My Journey to the Mountains

I was privileged to serve as a minister of the city of San Francisco for over 33 years, and by God's grace we were able to build one of the most impactful churches that the city had seen in a generation. Throughout this entire time, my overriding passion was to see the gospel of the Kingdom of God impact our city in tangible ways producing salvation in the lives of people and transformation in the overall culture of our region. This is what I would call Revival.

In pursuit of this outcome, I became consumed with the Great Commission of Jesus: "All authority has been given it to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to do everything I've commanded you. And I'm with you always, even to the end of the age" (Mt. 28:18-29). In these final words of Jesus, we were commanded to continue His mission by carrying the message of Jesus in a manner consistent with the methods of Jesus.

In pursuit of these goals, I linked arms with other pastors and leaders in the Bay Area who were committed to bringing regional revival and a greater kingdom influence in every area of society. Through much fasting, prayer and strategizing together, we were able to bring about a number of powerful shifts in our city. However, we never saw the full manifestation of transformation that we were praying for.

At the time we were aware of the work of Bill Bright of Inter-Varsity, and Loren Cunningham of YWAM, who were conferring together to build a vision for impacting the various spheres of society for the Kingdom of God. I also began to study Francis Schaeffer and was connected to John Dawson and Ray Bakke, who both authored amazing books on the subject of transforming cities. I also had the opportunity of working closely with Ed Silvoso, and was inspired by his commitment to see tangible transformation take place for the glory of God. Revival and reformation became my driving passion.

Fast forward to 2010, when my wife and I completed our pastoral season and moved our family out of San Francisco to Redding, California to begin a new chapter of our lives. It was around this time that I began to be exposed to various teachers who are re-presenting some of the earlier teachings of Bright and Cunningham. This became known by some as "the Seven Mountains Mandate." Others used other titles, but the end result was a re-igniting of vision for bringing the influence and impact of the kingdom of God into our current culture and the various spheres of society.

Although I was initially inspired by all of the ideas that I was hearing, I began to be increasingly frustrated by the lack of clear biblical teaching on the subject and a scriptural model for bringing this vision to reality. We need a Theology of Transformation.

Theology of Transformation

Certain aspects of this “Mandate” are definitely clear in Scripture, such as...

- Jesus taught us to pray that God’s kingdom would come and his will would be done on earth as in heaven (Mt. 6:10).
- We are called to be salt and light (Mt. 5:13-15),
- And serve as priests and kings (Rev 1:5-6).
- The promise of Jesus in Isaiah 9:6, clearly states that the government of Messiah will keep increasing until the end of time.
- Isaiah 61:1-4 refers the saints of God rebuilding ruined cities.

These and other passages, affirm the Lordship of Jesus and his authority to rule over the earth. There are many others indicating that believers have a responsibility to partner with Jesus to influence the world around yet the I had difficulty finding ample Biblical support for some of the ideas and practices that were being promoted in the Seven Mountains crowd. Although my respect for these transformation teachers remains strong, here are a few areas of concerns that I had with the teaching that I was hearing.

- The Great Commission becomes all about discipling nations instead of the clear intended meaning make disciples in Christ. Win the people, then win the world.
- The use of the term, Mountains, gives rise to the idea of conquest and domination. Jesus rejects domineering leadership in favor of servant leadership.
- The Church is NOT one of the mountains! If we change metaphors and talk about a tree, the Church is not one of the seven branches; the Church is the TRUNK. Sadly, many transformation teachers marginalize the unique role of the Church.

Principalities

While thinking through these concerns, my own study led me to Colossians 1:13-20. The passage begins by declaring that we have been rescued from the dominion of darkness and brought into the Kingdom of His beloved Son. The passage goes on to declare the divinity of Jesus, and declares that He was that person of the Godhead that created all things, whether they be “visible or invisible,” in “heaven or on earth,” whether they be “thrones, dominions and principalities and powers.”

In verse 13, the apostle Paul declares that Jesus created the powers that influence human thought and behavior. Some of those created forces are invisible, some are visible. Some are heavenly and some are earthly. All are principalities that rule human thought and behavior. The invisible principalities consist of both the loyal angels that serve God’s people along with the rebellious forces that are mentioned in Eph. 6:10-17.

The question I began to ponder is this, “What are visible and earthly principalities and how do they differ from invisible and heavenly principalities?” We know from Scripture that the invisible principalities were created originally as loyal angels, but there was a rebellion in heaven, and up to a third of the angelic beings joined in this revolt. We can see these loyal angels in Daniel 9-10, the Gospels, and Acts. We also see examples of fallen angels described in Daniel, the Gospels, and in Revelation 12. These invisible principalities are actively at war one another over the world that God so loves.

Yet in our fascination with the invisible, we must not forget that in the same passage Paul talks about VISIBLE principalities and powers! What are they? And in what sense were they created by Jesus? And what kind of influence do they have shaping human thought and behavior?

In answering these questions, I came to this conclusion: When Jesus created human-kind he embedded within our beings the necessity to create social structures that will serve as “visible principalities” or governing forces that will promote the well-being of creation and human community on the earth

Back to Genesis

As I prayed about specifics, I was led back to Genesis Chapter 11. Prior to Genesis 11, the primary governing force of the earth was family: fathers and mothers raising sons and daughters. Family was created by God, and has always been the initial and most powerful influence on human thought and behavior. After Noah’s flood, family remained the foundational governing force in the world. Families eventually grew into tribes, and the tribes gathered in the land of Shinar, and then we find the emergence of other visible principalities. I call these the Five Spheres.

Here are the Five Spheres:

- **Family** – The source of all people – Imprinting basic identity in Family.
- **Culture** – They had one language – The foundation of Culture.
- **Economy** – They began to work together and barter – The basis of Economy.
- **Government** – They joined to build a city – The necessity of civil Government.
- **Religion** – They built a tower to God – The foundation of Religion.

I believe the predisposition to build these five visible principalities was woven into humanity at creation, and ever since, these five are found in every people-group and culture on the planet, although they often take very different forms. Each of these five primary spheres have a myriad of what we could call “Sub-Spheres.” In my perspective, this framework of these five spheres and their subs spheres provides a more biblical approach to what we could call: The Theology of Transformation.

Problems with Current Seven Mountains Teaching

Here is more detail on my disagreements with many of the Seven Mountain teachings.

1. I do not agree with “Dominion Theology” as it is presented by many. I believe that Jesus will return to set up his kingdom and every knee will bow and every tongue confess him as lord but I don’t believe that this is the responsibility of the Church to bring this about. If it were, I’m afraid we would look a lot more like ISIS that we look like Jesus. Jesus instructed us about the difference between domineering leadership and servant leadership (Mt. 20:24-28). I believe we will win the world not by dominance by influence. Dominionism gives birth to a set of attitudes that creates an adversarial relationship between the people of God and the people were hoping to reach. And this increases the polarization that ultimately becomes a barrier to salvation.

2. I do not believe in “discipling Nations” as an end in itself. Jesus did not die for concrete, he died for souls. Our mission is to plunder hell and populate heaven. God wills that none should perish, and requires that we do our best to influence the structures of society toward righteousness, to create environments that are conducive to the communication of the gospel, and the transformation of individual lives. In so doing, we will eventually influence government, education, medicine, technology, media, Hollywood, etc. but as far as I’m concerned, our efforts in influencing the spheres of society should be primarily about winning souls.
3. I have trouble with some of the exegetical extrapolation in which Old Testament mountains are the foundation for the seven mountains theory. For example, take Isaiah 2 and Micah 4. Both of these are beautiful passages that exalt the Lord, but I don’t think we can say “This is that.” We cannot claim that these and other similar passages are a direct reference to the Seven Mountain Mandate.
4. There is disagreement on how to categorize the Seven Mountains. Which are the seven? Why seven? How about ten or twelve? I have a problem with saying that there are only seven areas that we need to be praying for and seeking to influence for the kingdom. Actually, there are dozens of spheres that need to be reached and influenced for God’s Kingdom
5. Many who teach on seven mountains make the mistake of making the church merely one of the mountains. Some will say it is the mountain of the Lord they will dominate all the other mountains, but still, I think that’s wrong metaphor. The church is not one of the mountains, the church is THE pillar and ground of the truth. The Church is the bride of Christ. Using the metaphor of a tree, if there are “seven branches on the tree,” the church is not one of those branches, the church is the trunk of the tree that ultimately feeds all the branches. We are the spiritual family that raises up new believer from infancy to maturity so they can become the world-changing influencers that Jesus created them to be. Human religion may be one of the branches, but not the Church.

Although I have these different disagreements with some of my friends who are teaching various versions of the seven mountains message, I still affirm our shared passion to influence every branch of society toward a greater Kingdom alignment.

The Point Is to Impact the World

My biggest concern above any of the points I’ve made so far, is that over the last 50 years the church has lost most of her influence in current culture. This fact has been extremely evident in the last two years of pandemic, culture wars, political polarization, riots in the streets, and the overall moral decline in our media and entertainment.

Once upon a time, the church had a seat at the table. We had people like Billy Graham who would meet with Clinton, and then later meet with Bush, but the gap has grown now to an us vs. them mentality, and the church has been evicted from the mainstream. During the pandemic, the church was deemed to be “nonessential” while abortion clinics, liquor stores and pot dispensaries were kept open. Something is wrong with this equation. It’s time for the

church of Jesus Christ to reposition ourselves in a place of greater influence and impact in the world around us.

It's time for the Body of Christ to rediscover our identity and authority in Christ. We must equip and empower every member in ways that are both supernatural and super-practical, so that the Gospel can be preached and the influence of the Kingdom of God can be restored in every sphere of society.

Five Spheres Outline

When God created humanity, He embedded within us the capacity to generate various structures of influence that shape and govern human thought and behavior. These structures are found in their most basic form in the Book of Genesis and are essential for the formation of healthy community and collaboration. All these spheres overlap at various points. We have placed education and healthcare under family because we believe these sub-spheres are under the jurisdiction of the family until adulthood, and then under the jurisdiction of the individual.

1. Family and Individual

- Family: Marriage, parenting, children, orphans, foster care
- Education: Teaching, administration, support
- Health and Wellness: Health, medical, wellness
- Therapy and Social Work: Counseling, family support, bereavement
- Senior Care: Retirement, senior care, hospice

2. Culture and Lifestyle

- Cultural Expression: Cultures, sub-cultures, styles, trends, symbols
- Entertainment: Sports, Music, Movies, TV, video games
- Performing and Visual Arts Theater, dance, fashion, photography, fine arts
- Traditional Media: TV news, magazines, newspapers
- Digital Media: Internet, social networking

3. Business and Economics

- Finance: Investment, Insurance and Real Estate
- Science and Technology: Energy, Research and Development, Invention
- Manufacturing, Sales, Distribution and Service Marketing and Advertising
- Trades, Transportation and Technical Services
- Tourism, Travel, Hospitality and Culinary

4. Government and Law

- Political Office and Campaigning: Local, State, National
- Military Service: Various Branches and Roles
- Civil Service: Government employees
- Law Enforcement
- First responders
- Legal and Judicial Services

5. Faith and Spirituality

- Church and Ministry Leadership, Pastoring, Evangelism, Small Groups, Bible Classes
- Ministry Administration, Deaconal Ministry
- Education and Training: Bible Schools, Colleges, Ministry Schools, Professors, Teachers,
- Para-church Missions, Ministry and Non-profit Organizations, Evangelists, Service Providers
- Non-Christian Religion, Philosophy and Spirituality, World Religions, New Age and Occult