



URBAN CURRENT

A lesson from the election – talk to the city

President Obama is an urbanite. The people who put him in office are urbanites. In my November 2012 Urban Current, “You Live in an Urbanized World”, I told you in so many words who was going to win the election.

Joel C. Rosenberg writes in his November 8, 2012, blog summarizing a digest of red-tinted statistics “One would think that such a dynamic would have helped Romney win ...”

No, Joel, we don’t live in that world anymore, and Henry Graber tells us why: “Why has the question of American cities, which not long ago were the site of massive federal government intervention, nearly to a fault, been entirely absent from political discourse this fall? Largely because urbanites vote so reliably for Democrats that they tend to be ignored by both parties. We’ve scarcely heard the candidates, one of whom lives in Chicago, the other in Boston, even use the word city” (theatlanticcities.com – November 6, 2012).

In the last half of last century, American cities were emptying. Now they are burgeoning. Large minority groups — read black, brown, and the poor — are being pushed into surrounding suburbs and counties changing voting patterns in those regions, even as center cities fill with post-moderns of many backgrounds.

Steve Huntley opined in *Chicago Sun Times* November 9, 2012, Romney “lost for tactical and strategic reasons. The strategic cause of Romney’s defeat was his poor showing with America’s changing demographics. Latinos are of particular concern as they are the fastest growing minority group.”

In an interview with Diane Sawyer, Speaker of the House John Boehner, responding to the observation that his party’s gotten “too old, too white, and too male,” said “Well, Republicans need to learn — how do we speak to all Americans? You know, not just people

who look like us and act like us, but how do we speak to all Americans?” Seriously Mr. Boehner? Finally in 2012 you’re thinking about learning to speak to “all Americans”?

There has been a lot of talk about how to “talk.” Huntley specifically cited Romney’s “harsh immigration rhetoric during the primaries,” were digging him into a deep hole. He went on, “Social issues, especially abortion and contraception remain vital to women. It’s one thing to be pro-life, but quite another to advance the toxic notion of ‘legitimate rape’ or assert that a rape victim becoming pregnant, is God’s will.” In fact, the two senators whose careless language lost their senate seats were in red states, but red states that have big, blue regions called cities.

Lydia De Pillis writes in the *New Republic* November 12, 2012, “The GOP can’t afford to ignore cities anymore.” “Mitt Romney’s failure to understand America’s changing demographics, led to his own undoing.” She continues, Republicans will “need to get over their cultural aversion to the metropolis.” Republicans didn’t see cities as “something to be solved but something to be exploited,” explains Princeton University history professor Kevin Kruse. Kevin Phillips, in 1969, wrote *The Emerging Republican Majority* in which he outlined a “southern strategy” to wrest white people away from the Democrats by demonizing the black inner cities. “If you look at who he’s talking to,” De Pillis writes, “it’s a suburban strategy.” In 1980, Ronald Reagan won the presidency without carrying a single major city.

Okay! Where do I stop and ask, “Does anybody see a parallel?” I care about politics; I care far, far more about the Kingdom of God. White evangelicals abandoned the cities. We are still paying the price. Not politically. Spiritually. Our motto appears to have been, “But seek first the American dream and all its benefits, and if you have any time, money, or love leftover, go to

an urban rescue mission every now and then.” You can almost overlay every political piece I have cited above with an evangelical layer. The stories are so similar.

1. White evangelicals left, neglected, or ignored cities. Mind you, God never left.
2. This exhibited a certain blindness at best, hypocrisy at worst, as the world they prayed to reach moved next door.
3. Mainstream evangelicals moved more into an “us-and-them” view rather than “pitching-their-tent” among them. See John 1:14. The prevalent, cultural homogeneity seen and heard becomes increasingly obvious. The homogeneous Christian clique remains seemingly oblivious.
4. The white evangelical establishment is increasingly isolated from the cultural engines and influences they could have been observing (Acts 17:22), salting, and lighting.
5. They are left to become experts at talking to themselves instead of skilled in speaking to a post-modern mind, leaving churches looking less like and less connected to the world everyone lives in.
6. This becomes a set-up for, among other things, missing or being disconnected from the rising tide of Hispanic presence.

Where matters. The Holy Spirit led Paul to cities to plant truth-bases called churches because he who impacts cities influences the world. Reach the city — touch the world.

That’s how I see it. I could be wrong. But I don’t think so.

by Charles Lyons, Pastor
Armitage Baptist Church,
Chicago, Illinois
charles.lyons@armitagechurch.org

