

LEGACY WORD #2: The Spheres of Influence – 1975

The legacy word about engaging with the seven influential spheres of society came through hearing God's voice, as this important story relates.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN REVELATION

The phone call was received by the ranger's station in the Colorado Rockies as the Cunninghams were enjoying a family vacation. Would Loren and Darlene join Bill and Vonette Bright – founders of Campus Crusade – for dinner later that week? Loren eagerly accepted the invitation, eager to share with his friend the fresh insight God had given him. He had been asking God for understanding on how to see a nation discipled and God had just spoken to him about seven influential spheres of society that shape the worldview, beliefs and values of a culture. This was a breakthrough insight! He thought, "If we could simply teach the principles and practices of God's kingdom in each of these seven arenas then we could see the transformation of our communities and nations"

As they met for dinner, Loren had this new understanding scrawled on a yellow sheet from a legal pad tucked inside his jacket. After shaking Bill's hand he was reaching for the paper in his pocket when Bill blurted out, "Loren, you won't believe what God has just shown me. If we are going to see our nations changed, we have to impact seven different spheres of society" Initially deflated that Bill had beat him to the punch, Loren was soon encouraged by the fact that God was confirming through his friend the word that he had received from God only a few days earlier.

Within a month after that encounter in the summer of 1975, Darlene heard Francis Schaeffer – founder of L'Abri – speaking on the radio. He too spoke of how we could see nations changed by shaping seven different areas of society with Biblical truth. God certainly had their attention. He was clearly saying something which had great implications for Great Commission strategies.

A couple of years later, based on this new understanding, the Cunninghams together with their dear friend, Howard Malmstadt, would launch the University of the Nations. It would be a new kind of Christian university, designed to be a multiplier for missions in a digital, globalized age, eventually equipping young men and women from over 200 different countries in the ways of God. The goal of this new kind of live-learn

training? To bring transformational change to nations by intentionally applying kingdom principles in each of the seven spheres of influence!

THE SEVEN SPHERES OF INFLUENCE Once you read the last chapter of a well-crafted mystery novel, all of the clues – which previously may have eluded you, the reader – fall into place, revealing an unmistakable pattern that leads to the solution of the mystery. It's all so obvious once the great detective explains the compelling evidence. Then when you re-read the novel, all that which was once obscure becomes amazingly clear. In a similar way, an understanding of the framework of the seven spheres of influence allows us to be able to re-read the text of the Scriptures and grasp essential, God-inspired concepts, which we might have easily glossed over without first being aware of this framework. But once we see the pattern, we see it not just here or there, but everywhere through Scripture. It becomes apparent to the student of the Word that God has been concerned with the discipling of nations throughout all of human history.

A MESSAGE FOR THIS GENERATION The time is now ripe for this message. Even though several variations of the theme have emerged in recent years – some with 7, others with 8 or even 12 spheres – the foundational principle is the same: God created individuals (Genesis 1:26-27) and loves them, wanting to redeem them from brokenness and sin. In the same way God created nations (Acts 17:26-27) and loves them, and wants to bring kingdom transformation into every dimension of their societal interactions. So whether you call this reality a “sphere” a “mind-molder” or a “mountain” – it points to a God who cares for both individual and corporate humanity. This same God sent prophets of old to speak the word of God at times to individuals (a king, a general, a widow) and at times to corporate expressions of humanity (a tribe, a city, a nation). God has a heart for lost individuals and lost nations and invites us to collaborate with him to bring a transformative impact of the kingdom of God into every area of life, both private and public.

These seven spheres exist in every society from the most primitive stone-age tribes to the most sophisticated megacities. They include the areas of family, economy, government, religion, education, media, and celebration. The seven spheres are to every society what the basic biological systems are to the human body – an intrinsic part of God's design, which give life when they are functioning in a healthy manner. Since God is the designer of these spheres, it would be good for us to dedicate effort to understand his purposes for each of them.

No part of the human experience is to be lived outside of the bounds of God's kingdom. We are to do all that we do coram deo – intentionally living our lives in the presence of God. This is because Jesus is and intends to be Lord of all dimensions of our life, both private and public. Therefore, let us pray that God will teach us how to rightly represent Him in all of these different arenas of society. May these new understandings help us all discover how we can faithfully walk in God's purposes for every societal sphere of influence.

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