

DINING WITH THE DEVIL. The Megachurch Movement Flirts with Modernity by Os Guinness.
Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Mich. 49516. Soft-cover, 113pp.

Os Guinness is a friendly critic of the church-growth movement. He knows how difficult it is to engage the world of modernity with the Gospel. He exposes the dangers of modernity and convincingly shows that its impact in the United States means that the Christian faith has lost much of its integrity and effectiveness in shaping the lives of believers. (This is also true in Canada.) Guinness observes, "What people believe no longer makes much difference to how they behave." He lauds the desire of the church growth movement leaders to win the lost for Christ and to see His Church expand. However, he has serious questions about their methods and theologies. He argues that the megachurch movement flirts dangerously with modernity. It features the hallmarks of secularization with its exaltation of numbers and techniques. It often uses the ideology and tools of the modern world to make the life of the people of God more comfortable in spiritual captivity. That's why Guinness examines trends, raises issues, and sets out Biblical principles to help evaluate the church growth movement. Does effective evangelism come through such modern means as management, megachurches and marketing? One of the top ten megachurches is Willow Creek Community Church in northwest suburban Chicago, whose pastor travels all over the United States to share his success story, and also hosts conferences on the methodology of church growth. And pastors and lay leaders from many denominations regularly flock to Willow Creek to learn about its success story and how they can implement its techniques in their own churches.

Can the Gospel be marketed to win converts? One church-growth marketer claims that the difference between "growth" and "marketing" is only semantics. Guinness believes that this man is absolutely wrong. In the process of marketing the Gospel, the megachurch pastors mold their message to suit the consumer. And Guinness refers to a statement made by megachurch leaders: "It is also critical that we keep in mind a fundamental principle of Christian communication: the audience, not the message, is sovereign." Guinness remarks that this statement is utterly false and deadly. The audience determines then the content of the message of the Bible. Instead of looking to the Word of God, the preacher will try to find out what the public would like to hear. In the process, the hard sayings of Scripture regarding self-denial, sacrifice, suffering, judgment and hell are gone. Many "seeker-friendly" churches have quite deliberately subordinated "both worship and discipleship to evangelism, and evangelism to entertainment." And these churches seem to rely so much on "correct" methods to bring the seekers into their churches that there is no longer the need to let God be God. Theology is kept at a minimum. The qualifications for pastors of megachurches are based more on therapeutic and managerial skills than on Biblical criteria for the ministry.

Os Guinness warns against the indiscriminate embracing of modernity. The megachurch's uncritical use of managerial and marketing techniques impedes rather than fosters a Biblical understanding of the Church and its mission to the world. It also destroys our ability to shape our lives around the Gospel. What is success in the sight of

the world is not necessarily success in the sight of God! Guinness pleads with his readers to remain faithful to Scripture and for a God-centered evangelism. The book includes two unique meditations appropriate to its subject: Soren Kierkegaard's *Fishers of Men* and Nathaniel Hawthorn's *The Celestial Rail-road*. Each chapter concludes with a few pertinent questions for reflection and discussion. Highly recommended as essential study material for consistories and evangelism committees.

Johan D. Tangelder
April, 1998