

Newsbytes

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"Let us be alert to the season in which we are living. It is the season of the Blessed Hope, calling for us to cut our ties with the world and build ourselves on this One who will soon appear. He is our hope—a Blessed Hope enabling us to rise above our times and fix our gaze upon Him." Tozer

Well, this is interesting; read between the lines and consider the future of Europe and Israel as we see in prophecy...MD

Why Europe's New Nationalists Love Israel

David P. Goldman

"If ponies rode men and grass ate cows," goes the text of "The World Turned Upside Down," the tune piped by the Continental Army band at Cornwallis' surrender of Yorktown. Europeans might consider adopting it as their anthem to replace the present European Community hymn, the overused Ode to Joy. The resurgent nationalists who made the Alternative fuer Deutschland into Germany's third-largest party and the Austrian Freedom Party into that country's second-largest (and a likely member of a new governing coalition) have an extreme-right reputation, but they are now the most pro-Israel parties in Europe. The world has indeed turned upside-down, and we might as well sing about it.

Most remarkable is the success of the Austrian Freedom Party (German initials FPÖ) in last Sunday's Austrian elections. It came in second with 26% of the vote, ahead of the governing Social Democrats. Its chairman, Heinz-Christian Strache, rubbed shoulders with neo-Nazis during his early political career, and four years ago posted an anti-Semitic cartoon on his Facebook page, "showing a banker with a large hooked nose and Star of David cuff links profiting from Europe's financial crisis," as the Times of Israel reported. Since then Strache has undergone a Damascus road conversion from Saul to Paul (or perhaps the other way round). He has visited Israel several times, defended Israeli settlers in Judea and Samaria, and demanded that Austria move its embassy to Jerusalem.

Strache brings to mind the canonical definition of a philo-Semite, that is, an anti-Semite who likes Jews. It is widely alleged that he is looking for respectability after emerging from the extreme right swamp into the mainstream of Austrian politics, and hoping to burnish his credentials through gestures of reconciliation with the Jewish State. It is also widely believed that the FPÖ as well as the AfD support Israel as the enemy of their enemy, that is, the flood of Muslim migrants that provoked the surge in their support among voters.

I do not know Herr Strache and have no knowledge of his true motives. But I have had the opportunity to speak at length with a leader of the Alternative for Germany. Both motives--the desire to shed the stigma of neo-Nazi associations and common cause with Israel against radical Islam--are relevant, but something far more interesting is at work.

There are neo-Nazis and other swamp creatures lurking in the new nationalist right. Earlier this year I

stated that, deplorably, I would vote for Angela Merkel rather than the AfD in the German elections, in part because the AfD's Vice-Chairman Alexander Gauland defended a regional AfD leader who proposed to dismantle Holocaust monuments, in part because Gauland is insultingly anti-American, and in part because Gauland is too friendly with the mystical nationalists around Vladimir Putin. But that is not the whole of the AfD, and it is possible that the AfD will go in quite a different direction.

There are European nationalists who support Israel out of conviction rather than expediency. They admire the accomplishments of the Jewish State, moral as well as military or commercial. They observe that Israeli women bear on average 3 children compared to just 1.3 in Germany. They wish that Europeans could show the same love of country and culture that the Jews evince in Israel, and the same willingness to defend themselves.

That really is the world turned upside-down. European nationalism from its inception drew inspiration from biblical Israel. Greece was not a nation but a collection of small, quarreling city-states. Rome was not a nation but an empire--as were the Egyptians, Hittites, Sumerians, and so forth. Israel is the only exemplar of a nation in the ancient world, and the Davidic kingdom the only instance of a national monarchy. As I explained in my 2011 book *How Civilizations Die*, the first national monarchies in Europe--the 7th-century Merovingian kingdom in France and the Visigoth kingdom in Spain--emulated the Davidic model under the tutelage, respectively, of St. Gregory of Tours and St. Isidore of Seville.

Isidore and Gregory, I remarked elsewhere, were the Bialystock and Bloom of the Low Middle Ages: They sold 100% of the deal to every investor. That is, they persuaded each national monarch that his line was the new Davidic dynasty and his people the New Israel. This form of supercessionism gave rise to anti-Semitism (how could the Merovingians or Visigoths be the new Israel if the old Israel was still wandering about asserting its claim to divine election?). It also gave rise to perpetual warfare among Europe's national dynasties for the claim to chosenness. The Thirty Years' War of 1618-1648, Europe's most devastating conflict, was fought by fanatics in France and Spain respectively who believed in the divine election of their respective lands. National exclusivity and hatred had the same roots as anti-Semitism.

There is another path, taken by the United States, which allows that every nation can be "almost chosen," in Lincoln's memorable phrase. It can emulate Israel without seeking to supercede it. What distinguishes American culture is the radical Protestant belief that the City of God cannot be realized in the City of Man, that life is a pilgrimage whose goal is ever beyond the horizon. This concept defines and shapes American literary as well as popular culture, as I tried to show in this essay.

The existence and success of the State of Israel changes everything. It is not merely a promise, spiritualized by Christianity into a vision of another life beyond this one, but a living, breathing people that punches above its weight in every field of human endeavor. Perhaps the people of Israel will help fulfill their mission to be a light unto the nations by example. Europe's new nationalists may attempt to emulate Israel not by superceding it or by asserting their claims for election against each other, but by seeking to identify its virtues.

Post-nationalist Europe bears an irrational hatred of Israel, I wrote in this space in 2014.

The flowering of Jewish national life in Israel makes the Europeans crazy. It is not simply envy: it is a terrible reminder of the vanity of European national aspirations over the centuries, of the continent's ultimate failure as a civilization. Just as the Europeans (most emphatically the Scandinavians) would prefer to dissolve into the post-national stew of European identity, they demand that Israel do the same. Never mind that Israel lacks the option to do so, and would be destroyed were it to try, for reasons that should be obvious to any casual consumer of news media.

It is too early to judge the direction of the new European nationalism, which has some elements that make me cringe, and some that make me release the safety-catch on my Browning. But it also has men and women who do not want to disappear into the dustbin of history and look to Israel for inspiration.

Willow Creek Chooses Co-Ed Pastors to Succeed Bill Hybels

Megachurch becomes biggest in America to appoint a female lead pastor.
Christianity Today



Image: Willow Creek

Since “no one person can replace” Willow Creek Community Church founder Bill Hybels, the influential megachurch has named two people: its current executive pastor Heather Larson and teaching pastor Steve Carter.

Hybels announced on Saturday that the pair will succeed him as lead pastors when he steps down in October 2018.

The historic transition will make Willow Creek one of the largest churches in America with a woman in the lead pastor position, as well as the only major evangelical megachurch with male-female lead pastors who aren’t married.

“When we saw this shaping up, we had to ask ourselves, ‘Can our congregation have a lead pastor that’s a woman?’” said Hybels, speaking from Willow Creek’s central campus in South Barrington, Illinois, one of seven locations in the Chicago region that draw a collective total of 25,000 worshippers each weekend. “And because this is a deeply held value in our church, we said, ‘No problem.’”

Larson will be lead pastor, overseeing Willow Creek’s 400-person staff and \$77 million budget, and Carter will be lead teaching pastor, continuing to preach most weeks.

The news comes amid Willow Creek’s six-year succession plan for the megachurch, which was founded in 1975 and has grown to rank among the 10 biggest in America. The 65-year-old pastor joins a wave of greying leaders who have opted to go public with their leadership transition, as Hybels first disclosed at the church’s 2012 Global Leadership Summit.

“We know that no one person can replace Bill,” Larson said in an interview on the Unseminary podcast last year. “That has led Willow to talk about moving to more of a team approach in leading the church in the future and what that might look like.”

Larson, 42, has worked at Willow Creek for 20 years and has served as Hybels’s No. 2 since she became executive pastor in 2013.

“There is clearly a growing tendency to see shared senior leadership in larger churches, to do ministry as a team,” said Warren Bird, who consults on megachurch succession and co-authored the book *Next: Pastoral Succession that Works*. “Many are experimenting with titles and roles like ‘directional leader’ and ‘chief visionary,’ and giving the No. 2 person a greater role. Willow is leading another wave

of experimentation in role combinations.”

After an outside consultant recommended splitting the senior pastor duties, the two leaders were selected by Hybels and approved by the church’s elders.

“The shared leadership dynamic is a wise move for an organization with the size, scale, and history of Willow,” said Jenni Catron, a church leadership coach.

Around 5 percent of megachurches are led by a husband-wife co-pastor team (think Joel and Victoria Osteen at Lakewood, or Todd and Julie Mullins at Christ Fellowship Palm Beach Gardens), but none have an unmarried pair named as lead pastors, according to Bird.

Historically, “there have been a tiny number of female leaders in the top spot—Aimee Semple McPherson being the most prominent, at one point leading the nation’s largest-attendance church,” he said, noting that for a time, widows Sharon Daugherty at Victory Tulsa, Betty Peebles at Jericho City of Praise, and Anne Gimenez at Rock Church International also had lead pastor roles.

“This is a significant move for not only Willow Creek Church, but also for the greater evangelical movement,” said Tara Beth Leach, who became the first female senior pastor at First Church of the Nazarene of Pasadena last year. “Bill Hybels and Willow Creek have made a move that no church of its size has done before, and I hope that moves like this will have a ripple effect across all of evangelicalism.”

The number of female pastors overall has tripled in the past 25 years, to about 9 percent of all Protestant pastors in the country, according to Barna’s 2017 State of Pastors report. But the numbers are just a fraction of that for women in lead pastor roles and at megachurches, since female pastors tend to lead smaller congregations. Only about a third of nondenominational churches welcome women into senior or preaching pastor roles.

Halee Gray Scott, a researcher focused on evangelical women in leadership, said Willow Creek’s announcement “trailblazes a path for the Western church.”

“It is a model of leadership that is deeply scriptural, built not on personality nor an individual’s personal charisma, but on partnership,” she said. “It is a model that reflects the fullness of humankind, both male and female.”

Since its early days, Willow Creek has not restricted women’s leadership, eventually basing its position on a study led by Gilbert Bilezikian, a longtime Wheaton College professor and Hybels’s mentor.

In a chapter in *How I Changed My Mind about Women in Leadership*, Hybels describes his desire to be proactive about adding women to leadership teams and being intentional about the women appointed to be paradigm-breakers as they step into significant roles.

Prior to being named executive pastor, Larson was involved in Willow Creek’s young adult ministry, global outreach, and compassion and justice work. She opened up about her leadership role in a 2015 interview with CT’s *WomenLeaders.com*:

Being a woman in this position is a much bigger deal outside of Willow than it is inside of Willow. Because it has been so much a part of the DNA of Willow, I get a lot of encouragement from women and men in the church who say they’re so excited to see how I’m leading and guiding the church.

But outside of Willow I get a lot of more shock. That has been good for me to keep in mind how

different Willow is from a lot of other churches. I've never wanted to be on a soapbox about the role of women. I would rather build influence and lead where God has placed me, and let that speak for itself.

"She owns the values of this church all the way down to her toes," said Hybels. "She has the pure Romans 12:8 gift of leadership."

Though Larson was raised as a pastor's kid, she said she didn't expect to end up working for the church; instead she started her career working for the Red Cross. She has two daughters, ages 12 and 13, and is a graduate of Taylor University.

"This is not something I ever planned for or expected, but it's something that God planted in my heart," she said. "I want my life to be about building the local church."

Carter, 38, currently does the bulk of the preaching at Willow Creek, where he has been on staff since 2013. He was also involved in The Practice, the church's experimental worship community led by Aaron Niequist, which concluded in June. (Carter and Niequist discussed their vision for the initiative with CT Pastors in 2014.)

Since he had only just arrived at Willow Creek when Hybels began his global search for his replacement, Carter initially didn't put himself in the running. He teared up as Hybels announced his new role.

"He's one of the most gifted, pure teachers that I've ever known," said Hybels. "Better than that, he is coachable and has an insatiable desire to get better."

Carter, a father of two, is a graduate of Hope International University. He previously served at Rock Harbor Church in California and Mars Hill Bible Church in Michigan.

His book on evangelism, *This Invitational Life*, came out last year. He wrote:

Over the past ten years, I've seen a decrease in urgency when it comes to sharing one's faith. I think a lot of it has to do with the way evangelism has been portrayed and done over the years. What I want to do is to try and reclaim the essence of the word.

My advice for those who want to live an invitational life is to show up with expectancy, with one ear attuned to heaven, so that when God whispers you'll be ready to respond. God's heartbeat is for humanity and He is inviting us to be ministers of reconciliation. He has given us a story of reconciliation and we are His ambassadors as if God was making his appeal through us. He wants to use you. When the spirit whispers, please say yes!

Carter also co-hosts a sports podcast from Relevant. "Because he's played sports all his life, he understands the dynamics of a team," said Hybels.

This weekend marks Willow Creek's 42nd anniversary. Ahead of the news, Lynne Hybels wrote that her family was "genuinely excited about this announcement because we earnestly believe it will be a blessing and gift to this church that we love."

Willow Creek pioneered tech-savvy and cultural-savvy ministry with its innovative programming, most notably its Global Leadership Summit. The annual event has drawn top names in business to address thousands of church leaders over the past 15 years, as well as pioneered a new approach to organizational leadership among evangelicals. Willow Creek spent a dozen years, from 1992 to 2004, as the largest church in America, according to Outreach magazine.

About a decade ago, the booming Chicago-area megachurch pivoted from what had been deemed a “seeker sensitive” approach to explicitly focus more on Christian growth and discipleship among its members.

Research previously featured in CT indicated that most prominent pastors leave the pulpit by 65 [see chart below, from CT September 2014]; Hybels will be 66 when he steps down next year, though he will remain involved in the Willow Creek Association and Global Leadership Summit.

“We’re going to fight through the funk of succession,” Larson assured the crowd on Saturday night. “We know it’s hard.”

Not a little bit creepy --

Dubai Airport to replace security checks with face-scanning fish and a virtual aquarium tunnel

Dubai International Airport is doing away with security counters next year and introducing virtual fish to verify your identity instead. Yes, you read that right.



Instead of waiting in line for security kiosks or e-gates, passengers will be able to walk through a virtual aquarium tunnel in which 80 in-built cameras will scan their faces. The role of the fish? To capture the passengers' attention - and thus their biometrics.

Foreign affairs chief Major Gen Obaid Al Hameeri told The National: "The fish is a sort of entertainment and something new for the traveller but, at the end of the day, it attracts the vision of the travellers to different corners in the tunnel for the cameras to capture

his/her face print."

The first "biometric borders" will appear by late 2018 at Dubai International Airport's Terminal 3, with other terminals being fitted with them by 2020.

You'll have to be pre-registered to pass through the tunnel, with 3D face-scanning kiosks set up at locations around the airport to do so.