

Over the past few months I have noticed that there are billboards in the area with a picture of an individual and the slogan “I am second”; there is no other explanation or contact information. It did not take much to understand that there was some contemporary church marketing thing going on. Further information may be found at the links below.

<http://iamsecond.com/>

<http://iamsecond.wordpress.com/>

http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/news/localnews/stories/DN-billboard_20met.ART0.State.Edition1.4a2064f.html

At first glance this might appear to be an authentic expression of what the Christian church should be like. It can be difficult to disagree with those behind such a campaign without impugning them as persons or their motives. That is not my intent. I do not know those behind this, but in a spirit of charity I trust that they are sincere.

That said, I profoundly disagree with the campaign’s message, partly in what it *does* say, but more centrally in what it does *not* say.

What it *does* say is noted in the very formulation of the statement, “I am second”. The sole subject of the sentence is “I”, already irrecoverably self-centered.

What it does *not* say is that I have an essential relationship to my neighbor as well as to God. The predication of the statement that one is immediately subordinate to an unspecified other, subsequently discovered to be God, only covers the first of the two greatest commandments, to love God with all one’s heart, soul, mind and strength. The second greatest commandment, to love one’s neighbor as oneself, is absent. *Why?*

Considering the second greatest command, the formulation should be something like “I am third”. Would that sell? Probably not. Yet, when did the Gospel become something to be sold using clever marketing methods?

There will probably be some good come out of this, and one might question why I don’t simply accept that and be glad for it? In response, this campaign may be clever marketing, but it is distorted theology; distorted theology leads to distorted praxis. It bypasses the essential relationship to the Other that is the core of the church as the eschatological community, living kingdom values now while awaiting its fulfillment. Because of its “I” focus and its eclipsing of the second greatest commandment, in my view the long term result of the “I am second” campaign draws us yet further away from the understanding and actualization of the eschatological church. That is its greatest loss.

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