

New York City on Brink of Awakening?

Twenty years ago, Eric Metaxas recognized the desperate need for a spiritual awakening in Manhattan. The cultural commentator, thought leader, and author compared the city to a spiritual ghost town.



Yet, over the recent decades—particularly this last one—New York has seen a surge in evangelicalism. Some cultural experts believe the Big Apple stands on the brink of another Great Awakening. Gregory Thornbury, president of The King's College, compares this rise in Christianity to the great Wall Street revival of 1857. He comments, "I would say there is a very special moment of spiritual renaissance happening in New York City right now."

The Roots of the Renaissance

While it may seem to onlookers that the spiritual renaissance in New York City has just started, it has roots that reach several decades deep.

In 1969, shortly before Jim and Carol Cymbala came to lead The Brooklyn Tabernacle, B.J. and Sheila Weber sensed a need in the city for evangelical, like-minded businessmen to come together for encouragement and growth. So they founded New York Fellowship. Incorporated in 1984, New York Fellowship grew beyond the meeting of businessmen and extended its reach into the city.

New York also had other evangelical pioneers like the late David Wilkerson, whose heart was pierced for the gang members and drug addicts of New York. He moved there in the 1960s and

began Teen Challenge, a ministry that is still considered successful today.

These ministries and others gained momentum and flourished over the next two decades. As the 1980s came to a close, Tim Keller planted Redeemer Presbyterian, hailed as one of the most vital congregations in New York City.

The King's College opened its doors in the Empire State Building in 1999. (The school is now located in the financial district.) Because of the growth of that school and several other Christian colleges in Manhattan, thousands of young people are flooding the churches there.

In 2001, New Yorkers saw the terrorist attacks at the World Trade Center. "These events focused hearts on New York City," says Metaxas. "This caused a lot of people to move to the city and start churches and other ministries."

A post-September 11 New York City saw the emergence of many new churches representing a wide variety of theological and worship styles. More parachurch organizations also popped up.

"Now, there are so many churches in town, I don't know the names of all of them," says Metaxas. "I am convinced we are on the verge of some kind of faith renaissance in New York City that will blow a lot of minds."

What's Next for NYC?

While much has been accomplished spiritually in New York City, there is still a lot to be done. Even still, patience and prayer are required, according to Metaxas. "New Yorkers have to see things from a long-term point of view," he explains. "This 'renaissance' isn't happening overnight, so we have to continue to prepare the ground for friendship evangelism. And, friendships take time."

Since New York City is a center of influence in terms of media and entertainment, Metaxas also asserts that a spiritual

change inside New York would have a ripple effect outside of New York. “If we could see changes in places like New York and Los Angeles, we could see changes across the whole country.”

As someone shaping the next generation of believers, Thornbury is eager to see young Christians continuing the work in New York City. “I see the church in New York City becoming a prophetic witness that seeks the welfare of the community. I also envision more young believers relocating here, doing a work in the city, and having a heart for the metropolis.”

He continues, “Historians will be able to tell us a generation from now whether or not—technically speaking—this era in New York City fits what missiologists and sociologists would call a ‘revival.’ But it’s clear that God is on the move here.”

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