

Thoughts on Christianity and the Church

February 27 2010: Religion Excluded From Policy

Courtesy of [Answers in Genesis](#), this interesting New York times editorial about [the division between secular and religious in public discourse](#). The thesis is that the secular, being purely rational, can provide data but not value, and the current move to exclude the religious from policy results in the inability to base decisions in any imperative without "smuggling" religion-based value back in.



The comments to the article are almost unanimously opposed. It seems that the readers of the Times are predominantly secularists (what does that tell us about newspaper readers?) who want to claim the ability to assess value without admitting that this ability stems from anything remotely "religious". The commenters fail on two points, in my opinion:

- They confuse "religion" with "religious belief". They think the argument is asserting that only those with "religious belief" can have values. Obviously this is wrong (as the sponsors of this Tucson billboard know full well). What is really being asserted is, if the secular people are right, and there really *is* no validity behind "religion" (and therefore "religion" can safely be excluded from public discourse), then the logical conclusion to secular materialism is that there can be no meaning or teleological nature in reality that could provide values. Since this is obviously false, the secular people (atheists) are wrong*. If the "religious" people (at least the theistic ones) are right, then human beings bear the image of God and our souls include the basis for values - even humans who don't believe in God. So it isn't *belief* that is the generative property for values, but *the nature of reality itself*.
- They don't recognize that the values they *obviously do* have are bestowed upon them by a culture that still carries the mark of a

"religious" Judeo-Christian heritage, however decayed. The values they have are *not* the result of their secular or atheist training, but of being in the West. This "should religion be part of government decisions" topic would have an entirely different character in a muslim country (probably wouldn't be happening) or a Buddhist country, or in North Korea.

The values are *indeed* being smuggled in, either by nature (created human nature) or nurture. Certainly not consciously, but there all the same. And the objections by the secularists only emphasis that it is there.

The question isn't: "Can you be good without God?" The question is: "Can you have "good" without God?" In a purely materialistic worldview ("everything that exists is space, time, matter, and energy"), there is no provision for an absolute value like "Good". Everything abstract becomes mere brain activity, a subjective if common experience. A subjective and arbitrary "good" can provide a imperative basis for policy decisions, but the side asserting this needs to be honest: if it is not transcendent and absolute, then we can change it if we feel like it. This is precisely what is behind the relativistic trends we see in our world today (e.g., redefine "good" marriage to include same-sex relationships).

.....

* Secular Materialists would object to this, and offer an evolutionary explanation for how the human brain developed a "sense of values" as a survival mechanism. This does not help, for such a "sense of values" would then be an accident or "vestigial organ" and can be retained or discarded at will (which they do), not a transcendent, absolute Value that is a suitable basis for a moral imperative.

.....

www.answersingenesis.org/articles/2010/02/27/news-to-note-02272010#adm

opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/02/22/are-there-secular-reasons/

February 26 2010: Intentional Church



This Sunday, we visited a different sort of church - Tucson Community Church, aka [The Cool Church](#). The superficial "what's different about it" is that it is a largish church, but it exists in four separate campuses spread out over the city. Similar to Calvary Chapel, which has two large campuses in the city, but where Robert Furrow, the pastor of Calvary Chapel, physically travels to preach at the two campuses for *four* services each Sunday morning, all the sites of The Cool Church conduct their services at the same time, and David McAllister, the "teaching pastor", delivers a message at the "primary" West Campus and is televised at the other three at the same time.

But the more significant "what's different about it" is that it is unabashedly intentional.

What they say about themselves: In many churches (evangelical ones, at least, that make no assumptions about who comes to a service), visitors are given a "welcome packet", an introduction to the church to be reviewed at leisure. The "welcome packet" says a lot about the church, not only by the words, but what it *is*. For instance, the "welcome packet" you get at most large modern-styled churches contains literature describing the ministries and opportunities they offer. This says, the church is trying to attract religious consumers who are looking to serve their own interests. The "welcome packet" we got when we visited Calvary Chapel contained primarily a audio CD of a Robert Furrow sermon. This said to me, regardless of the actual words on the CD, that Calvary Chapel is the church of Robert Furrow. The "welcome packet" we got at TCC was an explanation of *why* they do what they do. This said to me, the church has a purpose, and they want you to know what it is.

(Now, we've visited other churches, who *didn't* give us a "welcome packet", or even a card to record our visit. What does this say? Maybe,

thanks for coming but we don't really care if you come back or not?)

The "welcome packet" from TCC included basically three sorts of things:

- Background information. This includes the history of TCC, the bio of David McAllister, and an introduction to the branch church pastors.
- Doctrinal information. This includes a "How to Get Right with God" brochure with the gospel message, a "Why Should I Get Wet?" brochure with an explanation of baptism, and a "What Separates Christianity From Every Other Religion in the World" flyer with a brief apologetic statement and links to other TCC resources. Oh, and a Statement of Belief, a brochure about the basic doctrinal positions of TCC.
- "Why" literature. In some cases, this is an introduction to their events and ministries, like small-groups and the weekly "Extra Learning" (EXL) session. In every case, the intro includes the "why". For instance, the flyer on the "Kid Zone" children's ministry states, "Our intention is to prepare them to someday make the decision to get right and live right for God", and goes on to explain the plan for going about it. The most interesting article in this category, however, is the brochure that just comes right out and says it: "Why We Do What We Do At The Tucson Community Church (Our Philosophy Of Ministry)".

This brochure starts off by saying that TCC doesn't want to be a "normal" church, and describes what "normal" churches are - "designed for people who are already right with God". TCC is "bent on growth", and unapologetic about their "seeker-sensitive" services. They have opportunities for those who "are already right with God" to grow and connect, such as EXL, small groups, seminars, and ministry activities like visiting, counselling, teaching, and other such things that TCC claims is often done at "normal" churches by paid staff. This brochure states clearly that TCC "will not and can not be the church for everyone... If we try to be everything to everyone, we will end up being nothing to anyone".

Oh, yes, the "welcome packet" also included TCC business cards... for visitors to take and pass on to other potential visitors! Yep, I'd say they're focused on "growth" and "advertising"!

The content of the sermon: The morning service consisted of two essential features: One, a music time with a large band (there were almost as many people on the stage as in the audience) performing songs (written by the pastors - probably McAllister) that were too complex for much audience participation (hence, "performing", rather than "leading worship"). This is probably consistent with the "seeker-sensitive" approach. Two, the simulcast message from Pastor McAllister - "How To Live Your Life On Purpose", a message about Mordecai and Esther; the discussion points included:

- We Start By Caring About The Things That Really Matter
- We Resist The Temptation To Just "Make Nice"
- We Refuse Excuses Or Arguments That Seek To Justify Wrong

My favorite line from the sermon: "The important thing is not the *what*, but the *why*."

Now, I recognize that, 52 sermons a year, it's improbably that *all* or even a *stiff majority* will be directly related to the mission of the church. This was the case when I visited Saddleback Church a number of years ago. Warren makes a point to reiterate the Purposes of the Purpose-Driven Church at least once a year, which leaves lots of weeks for sermons on other topics. Yet, when a church and its pastor have a vision, it seems to show up directly or indirectly it just about everything that is said and done.

I really enjoyed visiting TCC and heartily appreciate the intentionality I found there. Perhaps a good bit of the "how to fix the church" stuff I've been reading over the last few years is driven by the recognition of the need to be intentional about God and ministry. Perhaps the fundamental thing wrong with the modern church is that, at best, there is only lip service to intentionality, and a very real tacit commitment to preserving 19th century traditions.

.....

So, would I endorse The Cool Church? Maybe... except for two flaws, both of which I believe are fatal.

First, I think there is evidence that TCC is strongly structured around David McAllister. Very much like Calvary Chapel is structured around Robert Furrow, and how First Southern Baptist was dominated by the personality of Ron Hart. Churches that are centered on a finite human are limited in what they can become. Possibly, TCC, with the use of the

McAllister Simulcast, could overcome the limitation better than Calvary or FSBC have, but it's still a man at the heart of the church, and not God. Take the man out, and the church will struggle at best, or crumble at worst.

Second (and related) - there is no prayer. Like nearly all the other churches in Tucson, there is no weekly event in the life of the church committed to seeking God's will and power. Having prayer in small groups, or promoting individual prayer, which most of these churches do, is good and necessary. Yet, the absence of prayer at the core belies any notion that the church is serious about knowing God and following His Will.

At the same time, if the choice were between a church which has no vision and no prayer (which is most churches in Tucson, it seems) and TCC, I would certainly go with TCC.

.....

thecoolchurch.com

February 12 2010: Are Sermons Ineffective?



Recently, the CODEC research center at St. John's College in Durham released a study for the College of Preachers about the effectiveness of sermons. Apparently, the results of the study are not encouraging.

An article in [The Christian Post](#) [1] summarizes some of the findings (along with the small sample size of the study - 193 protestant respondents), including how only 17 percent said "sermons frequently changed their attitudes towards others or helped them look afresh at controversial or topical issues". The direction the article takes can be seen in the leading statement:

Congregations may look forward to the pastor's sermon, but when it comes to bringing about a change in their attitudes or lifestyle, preaching appears to have little impact.

And a statement midway through:

The results have prompted the College of Preachers to conclude that sermons are better at helping people to reflect than challenging them to act.

And the summary statement:

"The digital age isn't killing off preaching, but what the survey suggests is that too much preaching is doing too little to motivate people to look at the world differently and therefore live in it differently," said College Director Paul Johns.

I note that the Christian Post article gathered a good number of comments, from preachers, apparently, who seem to agree that things should go beyond the mere sermon to the Holy Spirit who should be motivating the sermon. Or a departure from it!

Southern Baptist Theological Seminary president Albert Mohler responded to the study findings [in his own blog](#) [2]. Now, Dr. Mohler acknowledges there is a problem. However, he makes some remarks that defend the institution of the sermon. For instance,

The preaching of the Word of God is the chief means by which God conforms Christians to the image of Christ.

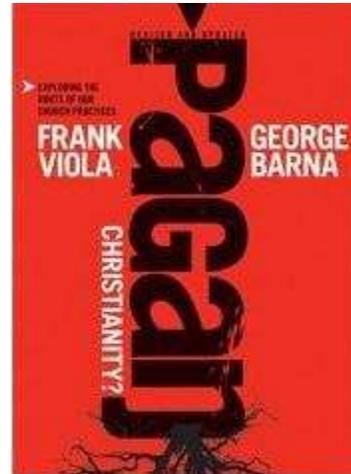
(A curious idea, since I thought it was the Holy Spirit who did that conforming work.) Dr. Mohler goes on later to state our hope for revival in the West:

In any event, there is no hope for a recovery of biblical Christianity without a preceding recovery of biblical preaching. That means preaching that is expository, textual, evangelistic, and doctrinal. In other words, preaching that will take a lot longer than ten minutes and will not masquerade as a form of entertainment.

Time and time again, God's people have been rescued by a recovery of biblical teaching and preaching. The right preaching of the Word of God is the first essential mark of the church. As the Reformers made clear, where that mark is absent, there is no church at all.

Yet in the literature I've read, revival was not marked by preaching, but by prayer and conviction and repentance.

Now, to be honest, formerly, I never had any notion that the sermon was not an indispensable part of God's plan for the church. I would have been solidly in Al Mohler's camp. But for a long time now, I've become aware that the Western church is in a lot of trouble, even the Biblically-committed parts like my own Southern Baptist denomination. We are not seeing people coming to Christ, we are seeing our young people hang up on the church, we are seeing divorce rates and teen pregnancy rates and abortion rates just as high inside the church as outside. But we don't see any slacking in sermons, or (as near as I can tell) the Bible content of sermons.



Then I read [Pagan Christianity](#), in which the statement was made that the sermon was an unbiblical adaptation of pagan Greek rhetoric. There's lots of controversy over Barna and Viola's positions on the institutional church in "Pagan Christianity", and there's good arguments on both sides [3]. It seems to me there are two camps: One, which would include Barna and Viola, propose a change in status for the sermon. The other, which includes Al Mohler, defends the current status of the sermon as preeminent and necessary. I'm going to come down in the middle. I deny that the sermon as we know it should be abandoned. I also deny that the sermon is the most important event in the life of the church and must be perpetuated as it is.

As a software engineer who appreciates the Capability Maturity Model ([CMM](#)) and the self-optimizing development process, I recognized the principle behind [Purpose-Driven Church](#): "Gather metrics on your process. If it isn't working, improve it. If you can't improve it, throw it away and try something else."

It is clear from just about every direction that the model of church in

which we rely on the Sunday morning sermon to win the lost and train disciples just isn't working. The Western church *must* assess the disciple-making process. The method isn't as important as the end result. Preaching will cease some day, but human souls will not. The sermon may be useful tool, it may even be Biblically necessary (to grant the pro-sermon camp the point), but it not the most important tool or perhaps even the best.

Recently, my family and I have been visiting around at other Tucson churches. None of them have been phenomenal disciple-making powerhouses. All of them have Sunday morning services with pastors delivering good, Bible-based sermons. Very few have prayer meetings.

Draw your own conclusions.

.....

1. www.christianpost.com/article/20100122/survey-sermons-fail-to-inspire-change-in-believers/index.html
2. www.albertmohler.com/2010/01/20/how-will-they-hear-without-a-preacher
3. Mark Driscoll, theresurgence.com/pagan-christianity.
Ben Witherington, benwitherington.blogspot.com/2008/07/pagan-christianityreview-part-three.html.
Andy Rowell, www.andyrowell.net/andy_rowell/2009/04/ben-witherington-on-frank-violas-pagan-christianity-and-reimagining-church.html.

I take issue with some of Driscoll's and Witherington's positions. In I Timothy 9:17, modern translations say "work hard in preaching and teaching", but my NASB says the original language is literally "work hard in the Word". So it's a modern cultural bias to read "preaching" into "in the Word". Also, the speeches of Peter and Stephen in the book of Acts were not sermons delivered to a church body, but evangelistic messages delivered to large groups of Jewish nonbelievers, and Paul's message on the Areopagus was more in the spirit of a philosophical discourse to the unbelieving Athenian Greeks. No question there is a place for Billy Graham-style evangelistic preaching, but this is *not* what we understand by preaching a la sermon in church on Sunday morning.

.....

www.paganchristianity.org/

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capability_Maturity_Model

www.purposedrivenchurch.com/en-US/AboutUs/WhatIsPD/What+is+PD.htm

February 6 2010: Church and Teenagers



I was recently on a business trip, and when the work day ended early and I found myself back in my hotel room, I turned on the cable television (something I try not to do) and just happened to come across a program called "[Snapped](#)". The story was about a young girl, Jacqueline "Nikki"

Reynolds, who was adopted at a young age by parents who were *very active in their church*. She was doted upon, given every benefit and advantage her adoptive parents could offer, and as a teen was brought up *in the church youth group*. An old story, she went to a public school (I'm not sure a private school would have been different), "fell in love" with a boy she met, and became sexually involved with him. As usual with teen romances, there were break-ups, but every time, Nikki would feign being pregnant, and manipulate the boy into staying with her. She "couldn't live without him."

Finally, her subterfuge was found out. Her parents put her in counselling with *the church pastor*, and the boy was free to make the break-up permanent. But Nikki's self-interested "love" turned cold - if she couldn't have him, nobody would. She formed a plan to kill him. First, in a counselling session, she asked her pastor if murder could be forgiven. The pastor said "yes". Next, she intended to visit the boy and kill him. But the time for the counselling session stood in her way. To avoid being taken to the counselling session, she resolved to kill her parents. At the time she was to put her plan into action, her father left *for a church function*. So Nikki stabbed her mother to death, then lost her nerve, called the police, and the wheels of human justice started grinding.

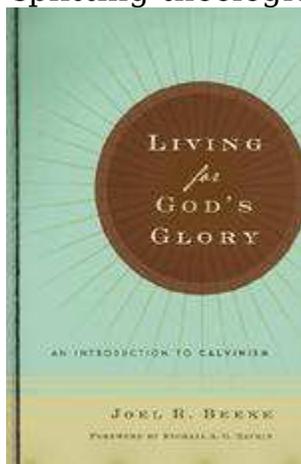
Of course, the spin put on the story by the television program was to focus on her church background: how could a child raised so intensively in a church setting by such devout parents have committed

such a heinous act? I found an independent source for the news story [1]. I also found suggestions that she may have inherited psychological problems from birth mother [2]. I found other suggestions that adoption contributes to this sort of problem [3](although I don't quite know what the adult "victims" of adoption would have preferred - grow up in orphanages, or the state foster home system?). But in any analysis, whatever other contributing factors there may have been, it is clear: **Church raising didn't help this child.**

Now, I don't know the details of what kind of church, or what kind of youth group, or even what kind of parents they were, but as a youth worker myself, and as one who has seen plenty of evangelical church youth groups (at camps, rallies, concerts, etc.), I have my ideas. In fact, since my family is currently visiting other churches now, I've been looking at a fairly typical sample of church/youth group situations:

- The church emphasizes doctrine and behavioural expectations rather than a relationship with Christ resulting in inner lifechange.
- The youth group is focused on *growth* and *retention*, and the key to this is teen-oriented entertainment programs, perhaps including summer camp and mission trips, to draw young prospects into the group and hold onto them afterwards.
- Church-member parents of teens are minimally involved in their children's lives or the youth ministry, and expect the youth ministry to instill "proper" values in their children.

Church Emphases: A long-standing tradition in the western church is "splitting theological hairs". My current reading (*Living for God's Glory: An Introduction to Calvinism*) confirms this with the long-running debate between Calvinism and Arminianism. So when Nikki's pastor told her that "yes, the sin of murder can be forgiven", technically, he was correct, as an academic answer to an academic question. I suppose he would have assumed a question about murder from a teenager would have been academic; he had no reason to suspect her motives. But the fact that he responded to even an academic question with an academic answer *indicates this was his culturally-conditioned default response*. A better answer would have been, "Why do you ask?" Even better, "Who cares? Where are you in relation to Jesus?" There is a time for theology and academic doctrinal answers,



but a counselling session with a troubled teen is not it.

Churches have expectations on behaviour. If there is a ministry meeting, or a committee meeting, the members are expected to attend; we could assume something like this called Nikki's father away from home that evening. Church members are expected to attend worship services; attendance is taken as evidence of being right with God. In some churches, participation in church-wide programs is expected, such as the evangelism projects in a former church of ours; refusal for any reason, even critiquing the program, is grounds for having your salvation questioned. Teenagers are under particular expectations - dress a certain way, don't smoke, don't drink, don't do drugs, don't listen to certain kinds of music or go to certain kinds of movies, sit attentively during the worship service and don't pass notes, et cetera, et cetera. In all cases, whether adult or teen, there is no real concern with developing a character or a devotion to Christ that would *naturally result* in agreeable behaviours, there is only the expectation of the behaviours themselves. So when Nikki's behaviour proves unacceptable, it is time for counselling.

Youth Ministry Focus: I have to give youth pastors a break. There are some out there (the younger, the more likely) who are all about fun & games, but there are a lot I've talked to (and read about in ministry-focused magazines) who are genuinely interested in the spiritual development of their young people. However, given the rarity of young people who are genuinely spiritually growing - and the statistic that as many as 75% of those young people hang up on the church - it doesn't work very well. Nikki is quite in character with church youth, who are taught about Jesus and moral concepts ("sin requires forgiveness", "murder is sin"), yet who are just as likely to engage in sexual activity as non-church kids.

What are youth pastors to do? Just like the churches their ministries are part of, success is cast in terms of numbers. A successful youth ministry is one with lots of young people. Senior pastors expect the youth pastor to have a "successful" program. Peers compare each others' ministry sizes. Churches and Personnel Committees rate the youth pastor, set wage raises, make hire/fire decisions, on numbers. So often, then, the structure selects for program-building rather than disciple-making. I am sure it was the same way in Nikki's youth group.

Parental Involvement: It was always rare, in our youth group or in any whose youth pastor I spoke with, for parents to get involved in any way. Even for parents to offer their houses for activities. Youth pastors

(including me, in my brief stint) could dream or plan of working with parent groups, or doing parenting training. It just doesn't happen; most parents seem to draw the line at fundraising activities for camp. And yet, parents complain, and hold the youth pastor responsible, when the above-mentioned expectations of teen behaviour are not met.

One thing I've observed is the "purity ring" phenomenon. Parents expect the youth ministry to hold a "True Love Waits" sexual purity education series for their kids, ending in a ceremony in which the kids make a pledge and get silver rings to remind them to be pure until marriage. It wouldn't surprise me at all if Nikki went through a course like that. And yet, her parents knew about her sexual involvement with the boy, and the fake pregnancy business. Their response? Put her in counselling!

Of course, I've also noted that parents are not different than the rest of the church in looking for external behaviours rather than an inner change. In homes where I've visited, parents will express regrets over their kids' tattoos or piercings or the messages on their tee shirts. I ask the kids during youth-group time, "do you have family devotions?" I've never heard "yes".

I would expect that Nikki's parents, like nearly all the church youth parents I've known, didn't do any spiritual discipleship in their home, but rather expected the pastor and the youth group to do the job.

.....

1. articles.sun-sentinel.com/1999-11-18/news/9911171112_1_insanity-reynolds-plan-death-penalty
2. www.amfor.net/killers
3. www.adultadoptees.org/forum/index.php?action=printpage;topic=3985.0

January 20 2010: Our Response to Stereotyping

Recently, John Mark Reynolds wrote an essay (blog post) commenting on [how ignorant so many Americans are about Christianity](#). At one point, he makes the observation,

"... these devout Christians have learned to hide their views in order to blend into the background"

This stopped me in my tracks, because that is pretty much how I am living.

The question is, *WHY?* Reynolds offers this suggestion:

"It is no fun to be in a room where everyone assumes a particular view and you do not hold it. Only the very brave, the very wise, or fools rush to expose their minority opinions. Few of us are brave or wise and fools simply confirm the stereotypes. The rest of the very religious keep quiet and so nobody learns."

I could go further and note that Reynolds recognizes that these ignorant Americans are unwilling to have their ignorance relived. "Nobody learns" because nobody wants to. Why waste the effort in futility?

And of course (in my sustained tirade against contemporary western church culture), one considers the churches they know about. Why expose your neighbors to Christianity when the next step would be "Invite them to Church"; that is, bring them to the default Sunday Morning "worship" service, where, chances are, their stereotypes about Christians and church will be confirmed?

But I suppose, at bottom, we say nothing because we lack confidence - confidence that the early evangelists had by way of the power of the Holy Spirit. Something uncommon in contemporary western Christianity. We need revival. Our churches need revival. *Then* maybe our ignorant neighbors might see something real, something powerful, *something they want*, that would lead them to reconsider their stereotypes more effectively than anything even the brave or wise could say.

.....

www.scriptoriumdaily.com/2010/01/14/ignorance-allows-certainty-but-punishes-with-narrowness/

January 10 2010: Lessons from a Phoenix Visit

We recently took a overnight vacation trip to Phoenix (see the [Family page](#)). Among other things, we visited Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin West, the Phoenix Irish Cultural Center, and the Arizona Science

Center. Each of these visits provoked some reflections on Christianity to me.

Taliesin West

At the last stop of the tour, the guide informed us that Frank Lloyd Wright did some of his best work designing church buildings, even though he himself was not religiously inclined. Taliesin West is an amazing place, and some of the other buildings he designed (Imperial Hotel in Tokyo, Guggenheim Museum in New York) are amazing buildings. I could expect that a church building that Frank Lloyd Wright designed would be beautiful and unique.



[First Christian Church Phoenix](#), designed by Frank Lloyd Wright

But such a church property would cost a lot of money in real estate taxes and building maintenance. I've read - and with First Baptist, personally experienced - how a large building diverts a good share of resources away from ministries, and ultimately can become an albatross around the neck of a struggling congregation. I suppose, further, that a Frank Lloyd Wright design could easily become designated a Historic Landmark, further inhibiting the primary function of a church to serve God and community.

Yet God is a God of beauty. If we worship God in art, music, and dance, surely we can worship God in architecture. Surely there is a place for elaborate, large, unique buildings in the Christian worldview. Like the basilicas and cathedrals of Europe and the Near East. It does seem that something like that ought to be shared among the churches of a region, a resource to be used and enjoyed by all, rather than the exclusive property and burden of just one. Like First Baptist in Tucson - what a magnificent auditorium. I wish it could be supported and shared by many evangelical churches in Tucson. As it is, when the struggling fellowship who currently owns it finally surrenders, it would just join the ranks of other downtown Tucson church buildings that have been converted into theatres and such, or just torn down. What a shame.

Irish Cultural Center



We were guided around the cultural center by a lady who was obviously proud of her Irish ancestry and to be part of the Irish ethnic community in Phoenix. When we went into the Hall, she pointed out the statue of Saint Patrick on the fireplace mantle and told us his story, ending with, "if you believe in St. Patrick". Then she pointed out some features in a mural (specifically, a celtic cross) and commented that in Ireland, Christianity was melded with the native paganism rather than simply being imposed. Finally, we saw a solstice banner hanging from the rafters, and she mentioned that a druid group had celebrated solstice in the hall.

I don't know where this lady was herself; I suppose as a tour guide she would want to be religiously neutral. However, I didn't pick up any sympathy toward Christianity, and the comment about "melding" Christianity and paganism indicated a misunderstanding of how Christianity would conform to any given culture rather than syncretizing with it (that is, putting Jesus in the pantheon with the other Gaelic gods). And the fact that some Irish-Americans actively embrace paganism and druid practice highlights the problem:

If one's ethnic identity becomes more important than the truth, then that identity has become a "god". If the choice of religious belief is driven more by ethnic heritage than a desire to know and live in conformity to Truth, then that ethnic heritage becomes an evil thing. Perhaps even to the point where, if observing one's ethnic heritage involves enabling false religious beliefs, then one should disassociate with the community - abandon the celebration of the identity, but not renounce it.

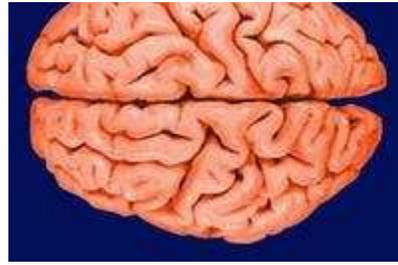
Arizona Science Center

The Science Center was more or less a children's museum with lots of hands-on stuff with a technical or scientific angle. Downstairs, there was an extensive exhibit about psychology and the brain. Two things in particular caught my attention: a presentation about brain development and learning, and a kiosk about teaching animals (apes) to communicate with a symbol keyboard.

- **Brain Development and the Soul:** The



brain is in different stages of development during childhood and adolescence. Is human personality merely a result of brain activity and response to stimuli? As we age, bits of our brain shut down, and we lose memory. Are we losing ourselves as we grow old - or in the case of Alzheimer's or dementia, are we entirely lost? Yet through all stages, from infancy to advanced age, we have a characteristic approach to life and choices of action and unique values and interests that are influenced but not generated by our environment - or everyone in the same setting would have the same personality. We are more than our brains.



- **Animal Communication:** There was a brief account of how apes (and maybe a few other kinds of animals) could be taught to communicate with humans using a keyboard with symbols instead of letters, and a comparison with teaching a severely retarded human girl in the same technique. This raised the question about the nature of intelligence, and what the difference between animals and humans might be.



I have no doubt that animals are intelligent, and communicate. The experiment glosses over two points, however:

1. The animals didn't invent the art of using the keyboard - the humans did. This is similar to the Stanley-Miller experiment intended to demonstrate how organic compounds could be produced in the "primordial atmosphere" naturally, without the influence of intelligence. Of course, the experiment fails on this basic level, because the scientists themselves injected their own intelligence into the experiment (by trapping the organic compounds formed). Invention of symbolic language isn't a difference in degree of intelligence, but of category.

2. What did the animals communicate? Selfish desires? Certainly not philosophical concerns like, "what happens after I die?" or "what is the meaning of my existence?" Questions like these reveal a spiritual nature that humans have and animals don't. Spirituality goes beyond intelligence.