

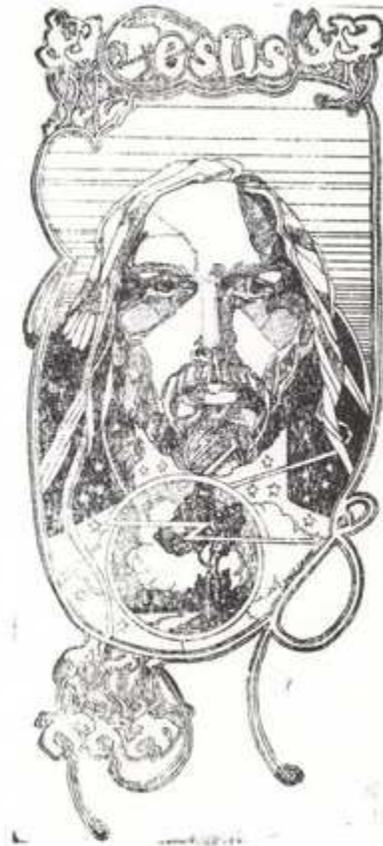
Thoughts on Christianity and the Church

February 14 2011: Tent Revival

Sometimes we see odd things show up in our neighborhood. A few weeks ago, it was a big tent on a vacant lot across 22nd Street from our usual grocery store. The sign said "tent revival". I went by (grocery runs) a few times at night, and never saw more than four to six cars outside. But this was down my alley, so on a Saturday morning I dropped in for some photos.



I met the point man, Jim Merriman, of Christ Is The Answer USA Tent Ministry. Turns out he is also a web designer and maintains the [Christ is the Answer](#) website [1]. He explained to me that their organization is an outgrowth of the [Midwest branch of the Jesus People](#) [2]. Seems that, concurrent with the Jesus People movement in Southern California, the phenomenon with Calvary Chapel and Chuck Smith and *Love Song* and all the hippies and disaffected young people turning to Christ (which I already knew about), there was a similar movement in Milwaukee and Minnesota and Michigan. I didn't realize there were *hippies* in the Midwest!



But the circumstances were similar. In the same way as the attendance at Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa outgrew the permanent facilities, and they set up a big tent, so in Milwaukee the Jesus People met in big tents. The evangelist associated with the Milwaukee movement was Bill Lowery, and Bill is still touring with the Christ Is The Answer USA Tent Ministry as they travel around the country with their panel trucks and flatbed, setting up in vacant lots where they can. Their music group, *Joyful Noise*, performs and then Bill preaches.

Unfortunately, when I did my little visit was the last week they were going to be in Tucson. This week was also when we experienced a record cold snap! Homes all over the city suffered broken water pipes as the nightly temperature plunged to 11 degrees! We had frozen pipes, too, but fortunately escaped anything worse. But we weren't too inclined to sit in the little plastic chairs in the unheated tent in temperatures like that! So even though I intended to have my family take in the show one night, we never did.

The thing is, that's pretty much all it would be. A show. Religious entertainment, just like Sunday Mornings are in pretty much all established churches. The church people aren't much interested (they

get enough of that on their weekly Sunday Morning visit), despite CITA-USA approaching the churches wherever they go and inviting them to participate in the "revival".



For my part, I would have liked my family to experience something like a [Billy Sunday](#) [3] revival meeting. Preaching in a tent. But that's as close as we would likely come.

God was doing something with Billy Sunday and Gypsy Smith and the other revival-circuit preachers, and the time came in their own lives that God stopped doing that something. Persisting with the formula (tent meetings) was not going to reproduce the results when God had already stopped with it. In the same way, God was doing something with young searchers in the early 70's in Southern California and the Great Lakes region with preachers like Chuck Smith and Bill Lowery. It wasn't the tent. So

dragging around a tent is novel, certainly - don't know if it is novel enough to draw in unbelievers, let alone seekers, and apparently not enough for church people looking for church-type entertainment. But it has no grounds for expecting God to work with it.

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1. www.cita-usa.com
 2. www.facebook.com/jesuspeople
 3. www.billysunday.org
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January 14 2011: An *Already Gone* Testimony



Wow.

I follow Ken Ham and Answers in Genesis on (among other things) Facebook. Since he was named in this blog, he posted the link, so I followed up on the [deconverted Baptist \[1\]](#) Jake Turner's story. And I agree with Ken Ham, it is sad. I drew a number of points from his deconversion story.

Sent to Christian private school. Described his parents as being good Christian church-goers, but never describes his church experience, only his school experience. Don't know if it was a *church* school, but it sounds like one, with rules and attitudes that reflect a (autonomous, established) church more than a Christian educational para-church ministry. I would hope that his parents were involved in his life - spiritual environment at home, answers to questions - but there's no mention of this.

"Accepted Jesus Christ as his personal savior" - formula for believe, "ask Jesus into your heart", and pray the magic prayer. Like Paul Washer and others, I understand that this does *NOT* make someone a "once saved always saved" Christian. I've known too many young people who "prayed the prayer" and were no more Christian than a stone, yet were "discipled" in Sunday School and sat through innumerable sermons with nothing other than negative effects.

Problem with guilt - especially sexual thoughts - led him to seek forgiveness and "begging him to save him over and over again". Misquotes the Bible as saying "a man is never worthy of God's love and can only have a relationship if he begs forgiveness of his sins." Actually, it's

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

So God already loves us, we are already and always worthy of His love because we bear His image. We have life if we "believe in Him" - not to "believe the proposition that He exists and the biblical history of His deeds is true", but rather to love Him because of His love and trust in

the forgiveness we already have by His crucifixion. Repentance from sin and the struggle against temptation follow the relationship ("If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." John 14:15), not precede it, not as a prerequisite to obtain it. Asking forgiveness for sin ("If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." I John 1:9) is part of maintaining the relationship that we have with Him; if we never had it to begin with (as Jake makes clear he never did), there is no relationship to maintain through repentance.

Exposed to silly weirdness, like "the Smurfs were satanic", and unloving legalism, like a girl who became pregnant through rape would be expelled from the school because "having a child out of wedlock would violate the school's code of conduct". This is in the same vein as denouncing *Harry Potter* because it has magic in it, and tattoos (even fake children's toy rub-on tattoos) because they violate the interpretation of Leviticus 19:28. Much better than judgment and condemnation would be the promotion of positive things, like *Pilgrim's Progress* or *Lord of the Rings* or *Narnia* stories - or even the positive aspects of *Harry Potter* - and school policies that emphasize true Christian virtues like compassion and accountability and a pursuit of Christ over rigid, out-of-context legalism.

Started before high school. Never given proper reasons to believe, just "indoctrination". Never taught about evolution. This is amazing, but not surprising. My children attend a Christian private school (a para-church ministry type school, rather than one affiliated with and controlled by a traditional-style established church), and they learn both evolution and scientific creationism and the pluses and minuses of both. Yes, if children in a church school are taught only biblical creationism and all references to evolutionism is only in deprecatory and mocking terms, then this could be considered "indoctrination"... but I defy Jake and any atheist to defend public schools which do precisely the same in the othe way, to teach only evolutionism and belittle creationism - how is this any less "indoctrination"? Unless we are already applying a circular definition of "indoctrination" as teaching something false (that is, we believe to be false) as true, and something true as false.

But the larger issue than origins science is Worldview. As Ken Ham and Britt Beemer make clear in [Already Gone](#) [2], the pattern for young people leaving the church and the Christian faith starts way back in elementary school when they are taught Bible as doctrine and mythology rather than fact backed up by history, science, and logic;

they are never given reliable reasons to believe that what they are being taught is actually true, and their resulting doubts are never dealt with, perhaps even discouraged, as they grow up until they reach an age when they recognize they have nothing.

Jake's story is sad. But it is not unique. It is rather a living testimony of the *Already Gone* effect that describes 66% to 90% of the young people in traditional evangelical churches. Jake's story puts a serious, coherent voice to the general analysis in Ham and Beemer's book.

When I followed the post on [Ken Ham's Facebook page](#) [3] and the many comments, I saw that Jake Turner himself commented on the ugly nature of many of the other comments (by Christians) and denounced them for attacking his parents. To the extent that this is true, these Christian commenters miss the point. Jake is not at fault. He may be unregenerate, he may never have been a real Christian, even though being brought up in a Christian family, in a Christian church, in a Christian school, but that may describe *the majority* of young people in the same circumstances. His parents are not at fault. They may have been traditionalists, thinking the Christian school and the children and youth ministry would raise their kids in the faith without any more input on their part, but that describes what is likely *the majority* of church-culture parents. No, the real fault lies with church professional staff and lay elders and deacons who suspect that something is wrong because the young people are disappearing and the church population is "skewing old", or they see church magazines or attend conferences or hear about any of a plethora of books like *Already Gone* offering theories on what is going wrong with western Christianity and proposing strategies to deal with them - and yet **do nothing to change**, because they themselves prefer the traditional church culture just like they have always known it.

Until *THE CHURCH CULTURE* changes - and we go beyond "pray the magic prayer" as the path to Conversion, and Bible teaching and storytelling in sermons and Sunday School and anti-family age-segregated children and youth ministries and schools as the path to Discipleship, and hysteria and cold legalism rather than Worldview as the framework for Christian life and practice - we will continue to see more Jakes emerge from our churches.

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1. bmejake.blogspot.com/2010/12/from-baptist-to-atheist-my-deconversion.html

2. www.answersingenesis.org/get-answers/features/already-gone
 3. www.facebook.com/home.php#!/aigkenham/posts/155277681190722
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January 8 2011: Expectations for Leaders and Members

Another excellent article by T. M. Moore at the [Colson Center](#) [1], in which the current direction of Public Education in the State of Massachusetts is offered as a model for the church.

First off, why should we look to the State of Massachusetts, particularly the secular, government-run, teachers' union operated public schools? Isn't the Bible our guide for Christian life and service? Why should we even acknowledge Greek philosophy, Peter Drucker-style management technique, or the fact that Massachusetts rates Number One in educational achievement? Mr. Moore offers that

Jesus would often point to the obvious *wisdom in everyday things*, so it's just possible that churches might find in the example of the State of Massachusetts a way to improve their own influence in the nation.

I find this a refreshing contrast to the "Bible is Sufficient" crowd or those who condemn Rick Warren for being influenced by Peter Drucker. Jesus would hold up birds and flowers as examples of God's care as He taught - it was *original*, and His listeners were astonished that He wasn't just offering "Bible Interpretation" as all the rabbis (and the current lot of preachers) do. Yes, He is *God*, and clearly had the authority to present original teachings, but the teaching He presented was to *USE OUR MINDS*. The Parables were examples of contemporary practices and events (many of which we are no longer familiar with, and so the parable loses its "bite") to impart a spiritual message. Why can we not do the same with business management strategies and educational initiatives?

Find the Good and Praise It!

So what is there to praise in what Massachusetts is doing in their public schools? Mr. Moore makes two points:

FIRST, *require more of pastors and church leaders*. Moore starts by emphasizing that the mission of the Church is *making disciples* -

something I am well aware is NOT happening in our established churches today. He says that "we should only allow those to be pastors and church leaders who have proven themselves competent" at the holistic process of producing disciples who embrace a Christian Worldview and understand what "worship" really means.

In my experience, churches don't have any more expectation from their church leaders than that they toe the line on certain doctrinal issues (in Baptist churches especially, things like Ordination of Women and Divorced Men being Deacons) and do the Sunday Morning "worship" service stuff - lead a stirring music program or preach a moving sermon. So the seminaries and Christian colleges are adept at producing this kind of minister. Even church planters focus on meeting the expectations of church people and other potential Sunday Morning "worship" service attenders.

We need more than this. We should *require* more than this.

SECOND, *raise the expectations bar for church members*. I agree with Moore on what churches require from the members -

- Keep coming to the Sunday Morning "worship" service
- Keep giving money to the church
- Keep from "scandalizing" the church

Beyond that, church members can do pretty much whatever they want. They can attend "discipleship" programs. Or not. They can even practice immorality (and if it gets bad, we just say "they're being carnal"). In fact, churches exert a lot of energy to attract potential members by offering them things they "like". Including in many cases, regrettably, watered-down doctrine and compromise.

Moore states that we should expect members to develop their spiritual gifts, be involved in works of ministry, growing in their relationship with Jesus (not just increasing their stock of Bible knowledge), and living out a "witness for Jesus Christ" - a consistent Christian Worldview. That is, *expect this* - not merely offer optional programs that we hope will have this effect.

Now, while I agree with Moore that the church must become more rigorous in both (a) requirements on pastors and church leaders and (b) expectations for church members, I see this as another chicken and the egg problem. Church members (especially the traditional-minded Pulpit Committee) looks for a pastor who they "like", who fits their

expectations of putting on a good Sunday Morning show. Likewise, a pastor is going to do the usual things (and maybe a few unusual "culturally-relevant" things) to attract new members to "join" the church and keep the current ones happy. It's my old complaint about "Big Churches" (which turns out to be just as true of established "Small Churches"); it's *really, REALLY hard* to get both staff and membership together on a change of course. Yes, it takes the leadership of the pastor(s), but it takes the resolve of the membership to assess and follow. This appears to be very rare in established churches, and I'm really looking more to church plants to make this happen.

But are church plants any less susceptible to the traditional expectations? I was directed by a friend to this article on the Resurgence (another great emerging-church type resource) about [the difficulties of church planting in the inner-city \[2\]](#). Of course, the difficulty is, as quoting Mark Driscoll, in "getting things up and running".

Wait... what "things" need to get up and running? A meeting? A paradigm of coming to some location (probably a store front or rented public school auditorium) and singing religious songs and listening to a guy lecture? Is it exactly the church-culture *expectation* for what a church should be that is difficult to "get up and running"? In fact, the article suggests a reason why more church-plants aren't located in the inner-city is that church planters are "fearful for their 'livelihood'". That is, the traditional model that a pastor gets his income from the members who show up at meetings and give money. This is more than just "walking by sight instead of walking by faith" - this is a fundamental misunderstanding of what the church is, and what an inner-city church would look like.

I would have something more in mind of a man, responding to the call of God (rather than cooking up an inner-city mission project in his own head), having a real job for a living (like Paul's tentmaking), embedding in the inner-city community and building relationships with his neighbors, doing that intentional disciple-making that Mr. Moore recommends, and building up a core of committed disciples - not recipients of church program benefits - who will **pray together** to *BE* the sort of church that God wants there. Forget holding Sunday Morning "worship" services and preaching sermons. The Church is about making disciples, not singing and preaching; those are just means to an end, and if they don't work (and the observation is that they *don't* work in the inner-city context), then find something that

DOES.

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1. www.colsoncenter.org/the-center/columns/worldview/16130-a-modest-proposal
2. theresurgence.com/2011/01/08/bleak-odds-the-inner-city-church-plant

January 6 2011: Revival



As mentioned earlier, Chuck Colson was a major part of establishing the Colson Center, and it

has a sister or daughter organization, [The Worldview Church](#) [1], dedicated to discussions among pastors and church leaders. They have a free e-newsletter and of course I get it; the latest issue is about Revival.

As usual, some of the articles linked from the newsletter I don't really agree with, such as the "[Nicholson's Syndrome](#)" [2] one by T. M. Moore, which warns against the dangers of an arrogant "we can do this better" attitude by those intent on changing church culture. Which would describe me. However, I think there is an implied false dicotomy. I don't think Mr. Moore would think that the church is fine the way it is, or we just need to work harder at what we've always done. All the same, while this traditionalist attitude is one extreme position, the "throw everything out we can do better" attitude is the other extreme position. There should be something in the middle, some Aristotelian optimum, that makes all church culture (that is, *not proven orthodox doctrine*) negotiable and seeks God for what *He* wants us to do, rather than seeking what we think is a good idea. *This* is my position; therefore, I advocate we start with [focused prayer](#).

But more on the the subject of Revival, the two articles I really appreciated were [this one by Tim Keller](#) [3] on the sort of revival effects he has seen at his start-up, [Redeemer Presbyterian](#) [4], compared to his experiences in school and his readings of the

experiences of Lloyd-Jones, and also [this one by Donald Whitney](#) [5] about how similar the spiritual decline of the period immediately following the American Revolutionary War is to our own day. I find this latter article very encouraging, that as bad as things are, even with the encroachment of the homosexual agenda (from which the societies in Bible times which permitted this - Sodom/Gomorrah and Benjamin - never recovered), God can still send revival and transform society.

Both articles, implicitly or explicitly, make the point that revival, which is what we so desperately need, is a condition bestowed sovereignly by God, and there is nothing we can do to bring it about. In fact, I'm thinking of the prayer emphasis that preceded the Great Awakening; I couldn't say that *even this* was not God working, that God, rather than responding to the prayers of Christians concerned enough about the conditions of their society to seek Him earnestly in prayer, in fact *put the burden on their hearts in the first place* as the first step in His intention to bring revival. If this is the case, the prayerlessness we see in our churches is merely the indicator that God has not yet started (and perhaps does not intend to start) the revival process in the West, and there's nothing we are going to do with our clever church growth strategizing or back-to-fundamentals traditionalism to bring it about ourselves.

Now, however, the *flip side*: If God *does* bring revival to us, is the church ready to respond? If we see a massive outpouring of His Spirit on our society, and people crowd into churches or respond to out-of-doors preaching, what is the current church structure going to do? What we've always done?

- Pray the "magic prayer"
- Get them to "ask Jesus into their hearts"
- Regard the job as *Done!*
- Put no expectations for repentance or personal holiness and living out a Christian worldview; nothing beyond attendance at the Sunday Morning "worship" service and giving their "tithe" to the church
- Offer nothing beyond optional "Bible Study" in Sunday Schools or small-groups or age-isolated, family-agnostic ministries

In other words, will we subject a new generation of revival-fired believers to the same shallowness-inducing church culture that is crippling the last generation and turning the current generation (of young people) away from the church and the faith?

I'm thinking we need to be a bit more intentional than that, both for those last and current generations, and to *prepare* for the next generation of revival-fired believers... even if we can't produce those flames of revival by anything we do ourselves.

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Also in the same issue was [this excellent installment by Daryl McCarthy \[6\]](#) (actually drawn from [this work at the C. S. Lewis Foundation \[7\]](#), but with nifty graphics added) about how Celtic Christianity, as structured by Saint Patrick of Ireland, saved the West, how Irish monasticism, as compared to Roman Catholic brands, aimed at living a Christian worldview, and - especially to my point - how Saint Patrick and his monks included a holistic mental training in the pursuit of Christ; it wasn't "Bible Only". If the Irish monks laid a pattern of both Biblical and Classical literacy which radically transformed their society, and the modern church lays a pattern of "easy-believism" and "shallow Christianity", and we see our society rejecting God in ignorance, apathy, and even hostility... which is a better pattern?

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1. worldviewchurch.org/
 2. worldviewchurch.org/insight/401-if-you-have-these-symptoms
 3. worldviewchurch.org/columns/featured-column/399-revival-even-on-broadway
 4. www.redeemer.com
 5. worldviewchurch.org/columns/featured-column/385-revival-was-the-churchs-only-hope
 6. worldviewchurch.org/worldview-challenge/400-hearts-and-minds-aflame-for-christ-irish-monks-a-model-for-making-all-things-new-in-the-21st-century
 7. <http://www.cslewis.org/journal/?p=14>
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January 2 2011: Ideal Church: Living in Community



Another of my heroes is Chuck Colson, famous for his part in the Nixon Watergate affair, who came to Christ through the trials of the investigation, loss of reputation, and conviction and imprisonment. But he's a hero because of his deep mind and understanding of the concept of the "Christian Worldview", which led him to start [Prison Fellowship \[1\]](#), including *Breakpoint* (his daily radio spot), the Centurions program for developing Christian Worldview leaders, and the Colson Center for a

Christian Worldview. Via the Colson Center newsletter, I found [this interesting article \[2\]](#) about Christians living in community, from the original context of Paul's letter to the Corinthians up to the Puritans living in New England. Now, Chuck Colson is really big on William Wilberforce, the 18th Century English parliamentarian who was the primary driver of the legislation to abolish the British Slave Trade. Wilberforce is an example of someone who lives out a Christian Worldview - it starts with belief in God, is followed by an understanding of what the Truth about God entails for one's personal lifestyle, and works out in *actions* to implement or embody God's Truth for human life. In Wilberforce's case, it was that God created man, and therefore no man has any legitimate right to "own" another man.



But Wilberforce didn't come to this conclusion on his own, and he didn't achieve this victory alone. He was part of a Christian community, believers who not only were united in this Christian Worldview or a particular manifestation, but who **lived** together. Their community was called the "Clapham Sect", after the borough of London where they lived in the same church parish. A short article of what the Clapham Sect was and who some of its prominent members were is [here \[3\]](#). I knew about the Clapham Sect, but a different article, [here \[4\]](#), goes into more detail about how it arose. Previously, I was thinking that the Clapham Sect members covenanted to buy dwellings near each other to achieve an explicit Christian Community objective. Apparently the situation was more nuanced than that.

- **Pastor-led** - Their Anglican priest, while he was not himself part of the Clapham Sect, appears to have planted the foundational ideas with his Biblical-faithful teaching, and encouraged the Sect members to *live* in accordance with their Christian beliefs.
- **Within the established church** - It wasn't really a "sect" or a "Dissenting" group, but the members remained fully within the communion of the Anglican Church.
- **Already in community** - Many of the Sect members were already members of the "parish" of their local Anglican church under their teaching priest, and by definition of "parish", were already living near each other.

I had gotten the impression that, just like I (and others) are in more or less a "rebellion" or "rejection" of the current established traditional church culture, Wilberforce and his peers must have been outside the weak and powerless "come to Sunday Morning services" kind of Anglican church one finds in the pages of contemporary Jane Austen novels. Which is more than merely a stereotype; there is a *reason* why the Anglican Church is so poorly supported by modern English people, and the schism occurring in the Episcopal Church in America today, and it started way back with the state-sponsored Church of England, even before Wilberforce's day. But just like the Clapham pastor was committed to more than mere preservation of church traditions, so today there may be pastors in American protestant, even Southern Baptist churches, who would encourage and even institutionalize the formation of the Christian Worldview. Certainly Colson and his Centurions and fellow Christian Worldview leaders are not leaving their established church homes. At least, not overtly, but neither are they praising their churches either - which leads me to believe that (a) their churches are exceptional, or (b) they aren't really much connected with their churches or look to them to reinforce their Worldview paradigm, but just attend services and participate in the other, mostly irrelevant and merely traditional activities. Based on what I've seen myself in a lot of churches, I'm thinking (b). In fact, at least some of the church leaders or pastors who are on the Colson Center forums or write articles seem to be defending the traditional forms.

In earlier days, the "parish" model for churches was well-established. The whole "parish" thing came from Catholic and Anglican churches in villages, and the protestant churches in America more often than not ministered to farming families in rural areas. In these earlier times, people in those settings were already living in community. It was likely

the same in cities, where people lived in walking distance of their usual destinations. After the automobile changed everything, the "parish" or inherent community-forming forces declined. In fact, my own Central Baptist Church was "planted" along with many other small churches as a result of a denominational "neighborhood church" strategy. This may have worked at the time, and many of the members of Central Baptist originally lived near each other in the neighborhood, and formed their close relationships, and even as they gradually moved out to other areas in the city, they continued to drive their cars (in some cases, quite a distance) to continue those relationships. But this is no longer *community*; when you have to drive 10 to 20 minutes just to see your old friends on Sunday Morning, this becomes the *only* time you see them. Telephones and Internet utilities do not have the same power to

- share resources like cooking ingredients or yard tools
- discuss living strategies, politics, or spiritual matters over the garden wall or at the mailbox
- work together on neighborhood projects like alley clean-up or graffiti painting-over, or after-school activities for children, or Community Food Bank drives

or generally, anything that will strengthen your Christian experience, hold you accountable to your brothers and sisters, and present the Gospel in "living color" to the unbelieving neighbors.



When Jeremiah McDuffie was just starting on "The Element" church plant, he led the Central Baptist youth group through Shane Claiborne's book [The Irresistible Revolution](#) [5], in which Claiborne describes the "Christian commune" that he and his fellows are living in. We all were impressed with the commitment to living a radical Christianity that they had, even if we couldn't imagine ourselves doing anything like that (and indeed, without the *parents* leading the way, it couldn't have possibly happened; another

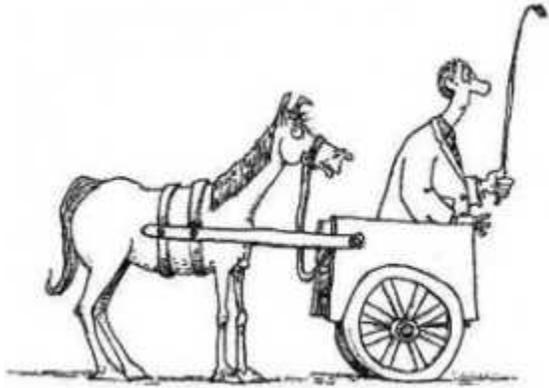
example of how doing *anything* as an isolated youth group is inherently limited). And of course, "The Element" didn't go that far, but we *did* try to connect with the people in the neighborhood. It might have worked better if "The Element" core people lived in the

neighborhood, and we started "living in Christian community" before trying to reach our neighbors, but as drive-in church-start workers, it was not going to work. This may be another reason why church start-ups work better in suburban areas (where the sense of community is stronger) than in urban areas. Or perhaps not; perhaps in inner-city areas (like the Iron Horse or Sam Hughes or 6th Avenue neighborhoods in Tucson) where the density is higher and neighbors can't *avoid* each other like they can in more spread-out areas like my own. But there are already communities of shared values in these places; to get a foothold, Christians would have to *intentionally move in* for the purpose of living in community and being "salt" in those neighborhoods. To Jeremiah's credit, he moved his family into the neighborhood where he intended to minister. This is likely why, on the numerous occasions I was urged to consider it, church starters in apartment complexes are expected to move into the apartment complex - besides the fact that only apartment complex residents are allowed to freely contact their neighbors or use the communal "clubhouse" resources.

Come to think of it, that's perhaps where the silly "greet others" part of the traditional Sunday Morning "worship" service came from - a weak attempt at community. Like anything significant, yea, even non-superficial, was going to come from a handshake, a smile, and a "hello". The "smallgroup" is another, more practical attempt to create community and a more intimate fellowship within the larger setting, but it suffers from the same "once a week" limitation of the Sunday Morning meeting time, and in every case, the smallgroup is an option the church offers, rather than an expectation. No, there is no substitute for the First Century pattern of *living in proximity*, which was easier to manage before the automobile enabled the "drive to the popular church" pattern and the resultant drop in commitment and relationship levels.

On the flip side, there are some potential negative aspects to living in community. The Colson Center article mentions how authoritarianism in the Puritan towns in New England gave rise to the stereotype that today's folk have about the Puritans. I wonder, however, how much this authoritarianism was due to the lack of exactly the church-state separation the Founding Fathers wrote into the Constitution - when the church leaders are also the municipal leaders, and there is no effective checks-and-balances system, it's easy for abuses to arise. The kind of problems that New England had (think *Johnny Tremain*) were absent from Geneva, where there were close ties between the Geneva

city council and John Calvin's church but no command link.



What is more problematic is the potential for Christians living in community who share a vision (or a *Worldview*) for affecting society to lose the "Christian" core when the vision becomes all-consuming. Hence [this article \[6\]](#) that draws the trajectory from Wilberforce's Clapham Sect to the adoption of socialist, even Communist political

characteristics, even identifying Jesus as a Communist. If this is indeed true, the social action aspect of their communal activism had led them away from a Biblical Worldview. Even today, there is a contemporary [Clapham Group \[7\]](#) that attempts to follow the lead of Wilberforce's community in Worldview-driven political and social activism, yet if there is a Christian component to this up-to-date Clapham Group, it is muted. And there is no indication that the members live in community, near each other in the same neighborhood, part of the same church family, accountable to each other for spiritual growth and moral purity and a pursuit of Christ.

In fact, one of the Clapham Group's causes is the fight against animal cruelty. To this end they have partnered with the Humane Society. Now, the Humane Society website has a ["faith outreach" \[8\]](#) page, of how they "reach out" to faith communities to advance their cause of the prevention of cruelty to animals, and how they have statements from Southern Baptists and other evangelicals and even hindus and atheists. This is a great example of putting the cart (some social or political cause) before the horse (the worldview or spiritual perspective that justifies the cause).



So it is quite possible for a group of believers living in community, or a church, or even an individual, to get fixated on a "What" and lose focus on the "Who". But this needs to be managed by accountability and church leaders who take the responsibility for the spiritual growth of the members, and does not *at all* diminish the importance of believers living in community, and the tremendous power this has for driving spiritual power through the church and the larger society. Much, *much* better than the drive-in church membership model we are

accustomed to.

Which is one reason why I'm really looking to see a church who "gets it", either established (nope, none of those) or a start-up, **in my neighborhood**. In fact, if I ever do run across a church who "gets it" somewhere else, I may go there, but I sure will be agitating for a mission or a spin-off to locate somewhere in mid-city Tucson!

(For more readings on Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect, visit [this resource](#) [9].)

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1. www.prisonfellowship.org
2. www.colsoncenter.org/the-center/columns/indepth/16095-restoring-community
3. free-at-last.org/1kit/Exhibition/ClaphamGroup/tabid/3796/language/en-GB/Default.aspx
4. anglicanhistory.org/misc/clapham.html
5. www.thesimpleway.org/index.php/store/product/the-irresistible-revolution
6. www.seekgod.ca/socialists.htm
7. claphamgroup.com
8. www.humanesociety.org/about/departments/faith
9. www.ttf.org/index/journal/detail/on-wilberforce-and-the-clapham-group