

June 24 2008: Media and an Integrated Worldview

During our trip to Disney World, we saw the various spectacles, like Carousel of Progress (Tomorrowland), Spaceship Earth (EPCOT), the dinosaur ride (Animal Kingdom), and the Walt Disney biography (Hollywood). Since I have been sensitized to look behind the immediate, I took away some thoughts:



Disney is a media company. Walt was all about ideas, media, communication, dreams. Very successful at "propaganda" - that is, media presentations to reinforce an idea, like "Dreams can come true if you just believe", "technological progress", and "dinosaurs lived millions of years ago, and were rendered extinct by a giant asteroid collision." The presentations are well-done (high quality), and thousands of people see them in a context (Disney World - total fantasy immersion) that makes them open to such messages.

In contrast, Jim Bakker was (is?) a televangelist, whose successful media operation (PTL; "Praise The Lord") funded the construction of [Heritage USA](#) (Here's Jerry Falwell shooting the waterslide). At one point, Heritage USA was the third biggest drawing park, after Disneyland and Disney World. There was a lot of money, and a lot of planning, and the quality was good.



After Jim and Tammy Faye had their marriage problem, and Jim went to prison for fraud, and Heritage USA had its tax-exempt status revoked (which really it should never have had in the first place), attendance fell off, and now it is essentially abandoned. Today, hardly anybody remembers Heritage USA. How did it come to have so little influence, compared to Disney? Even the parent company, Trinity Broadcasting or PTL Ministries, has nowhere near the influence as Disney. Why?

Suggestion: Message. The Disney message is aimed squarely at American (or 21st Century Secularist Western civilization). The Heritage message was aimed at the superficial Sunday-morning christianity that I've remarked on here before. Heritage USA is merely the amusement park analog of films like "Timechangers".

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So now comes the [Creation Museum](#), funded and operated by [Answers in Genesis](#). Which we also visited, so I can compare the Disney propaganda experience with the Answers propaganda experience. The quality is excellent... but again, the message is a bit focused. Again, the audience is entirely Christian (Evangelical, mostly). Some of the displays are targetted at believers (like the Biblical Inerrancy exhibit, which I thought was out of place in a *Creation Museum*), and some of the displays are targetted at unbelievers (like the emotion-filled crucifixion film, followed by Gospel tracts and decision cards). The most successful exhibits I thought were those that merely presented the evidence for the message - Size/age of universe, genetics, recent dinosaurs, the Flood. Disney doesn't need to target an audience, or make assumptions about who is there.

So how much influence will the Creation Museum have? We will see...

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June 10 2008: Open Letter to Pastors

I've been in lots of churches, and all of them had pastors who wanted their church to grow. Well, maybe not North Edwards Baptist, California, since there wasn't anybody living in the area who could be added, and Pastor Deussenberry was too old to care, and was soon to retire and take up being the chaplain at a funeral

home. All of these pastors worked hard themselves to grow their church, and pretty much all of them wanted the membership to help. If you are reading this and you are a pastor like that, this is my note to you.

I want to be part of a growing church, too, but one where *God* is doing the church-growing, not the pastor. Not attractive programs. Not a great music or worship ministry (entertainment). Not clever market techniques from a pastoral convention or pulled from a book written by some successful church-grower.

You want me to invite my friends to church? So do I - to a church where Jesus is the focus, not the friendships or the activities or the group culture. Certainly not to a church where the focus is growing the church.

I want to be part of a church that is on-fire for God. I want to invite my friends to observe a church that is on-fire for God. I want to be on-fire for God so that my friends will see something intriguing and desirable in me, that will move them to accept my invitation. I want to be on-fire for God so that the invitation will be given eagerly, inviting them to a delightful part of my life, rather than merely responding to my duty.

So, pastor friend, do you want your church to grow? Then quit trying to grow it. After all,

Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain  
that build it. (Ps. 127:1)

Your best angle at church growth is to work toward setting the people on-fire for God, to getting them plugged into a passionate relationship with Christ.

Does that seem like a trite statement? Maybe. Is it easy? No way. Is it something you get out of pastoral "how-to" books, or tips from a conference? Not that I've heard. In fact, from what I've heard, every successful instance of this kind of church was localized, unrepeatable, home-grown... *when the pastor pursued a relationship with Christ and got on-fire himself.*

I'd would follow a pastor like that. Who would lead me closer to his Friend, and not merely to his professional goal.

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June 8 2008: A Charismatic Concert



I have a few musical groups or individuals that I admire and appreciate. One of them is [Jeff Deyo](#), who recently had a concert in Tucson. Of course, concerts by anyone in Tucson is noteworthy, and we tend to go to them, but FREE ones, by JEFF DEYO, well, you just don't miss those!

The thing I appreciate most about Jeff Deyo is that he is a *worship leader*, not merely an entertainer. The difference is that an entertainer performs for a passive audience, while a *worship leader* draws the audience into an active season of praise to God. [Newsboys](#) tend to lead worship (although they are tremendously entertaining as well). [Rush Of Fools](#) (also in Tucson recently, with Todd Agnew) do, too. The difference shows up most prominently in the video overheads; *worship leaders* will have the words to the songs projected, and encourage you to join.

Jeff Deyo did this. He also lead by example. I don't know anyone who is as intense as Jeff, bouncing around

with his arms in the air, then on his knees, then back arched and head thrown back belting out his song into the mic. It was infectious.

In the first hour, he got four songs in. Yes, about fifteen minutes per song. One of them was my favorite:

More love, more passion,  
More of You in my life.

More faith, more passion,  
More of You in my life.

More joy, more freedom,  
More of You in my life.

And I will worship You  
With all of my heart,  
And I will worship You  
With all of my mind,  
And I will worship You  
With all of my strength

For You are my Lord,  
You are my Lord.

They were long, because there was lots of repetition. Not many lines, but they were sung over and over and over and over again.

Then things got wierd. Jeff told the audience that they didn't need a worship leader, that they could sing to God on their own, and encouraged them to do so. After a slow start, people all over the theatre were singing their own little songs. After about twenty minutes of this, Jeff started singing his own little song,

You lift me up, Lord

over and over... another twenty minutes worth. It was still going on just before 9:00, when I collected the young people and we left.

I had seen this before, when the college people got to lead worship. A young man was on the stage with his guitar, singing a worship chorus. He got stuck on a phrase, singing it over and over and over and over and over and over... Obviously in an ecstatic state.

An altered state of consciousness. Other religious groups do this - hindus with their yoga and repeating the sacred syllable OM. The Hare Krishnas with their drums. Sufi muslims. Charismatic Christians.

Jeff's song says (quoting the Great Commandment, Matthew 22:37-38) we should worship God with all of our hearts. And so he was. But it also says we should worship with all of our minds. But he had disengaged his mind into an altered state of consciousness. Worship had ended.

It was wierd, and I'm glad we left when we did. But I still appreciate Jeff Deyo and his *worship leading*.

Especially on CDs (where we don't get into the charismatic stuff so much)

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May 31 2008: Relationship with Christ

In a recent article, [Mark Roberts](#) reported on a weblog debate between New Testament literary critic Bart Erhman and theologian N. T. Wright hosted by [BeliefNet](#). The point to the debate was supposed to be the question of *theodicy*: "How can a good God allow suffering and evil in the world?"

In his studies, Bart Erhman has come to doubt the truth of Christianity, and he has written books like ["Misquoting Jesus"](#) to get others to question their faith as well. At the beginning of the debate, Erhman stated that the theodicy question was key for his loosing his faith, and now he cannot believe in the God of the Bible or in Jesus Christ. In response, N. T. Wright was probing for what kind of faith Erhman had in the beginning, that he lost. In [this article](#), Bart Erhman states that he had a personal relationship with Christ.

Stop for a moment. What is he saying? Erhman is an agnostic at best, quite likely a functional atheist. He says Jesus isn't real, isn't God. So how can he now, in his atheism, say he had "a personal relationship with Christ"?

I can't think of any other way to reconcile this situation than this: Jesus is an imaginary friend. For an atheist, a Christian's "relationship with Christ" is the pretense or delusion of having an imaginary friend, a comforting fiction. So when Bart Erhman says he had "a relationship with Christ", what he must really mean is that he enjoyed the delusion of having an imaginary friend that he and the other deluded Christians called "Jesus".

This hits me where I live. A big part of *my* testimony is that Jesus is "real" to me, that we communicate, that I'm aware of Him guiding my circumstances, that my loneliness is satisfied by the presence of a Real Person. I suppose the atheist *must* dismiss my "relationship" in this way, for it is an unanswerable personal experience. So the "relationship" testimony is not enough; it must be accompanied by evidential "proof" that the Jesus I have a relationship with is a Real Person, who actually lived according to biblical and extrabiblical history, and who actually returned from the dead according to eyewitness testimony.

Or maybe the best assurance the atheist has that Jesus *must* be an imaginary friend, is that most Christians live as though He were nothing more.

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May 19 2008: How Should a Church Choose a Pastor?

It happened again. My former church has lost a College Pastor. (Usually, it is Youth Pastors.)

And once again, the senior pastor is apparently hand-picking the replacement himself, through manipulation of the Personnel Committee. This time has a new twist, though. The preferred replacement is a former College Pastor of this church, one whom the senior pastor got along with, mostly because he got (numerical) results. No, this church had done this sort of thing before, calling a former staff member to return. What is new this time is...

He would be coming on-board as "Co-Pastor", on equal footing with the senior pastor, responsible for activities beyond the College Ministry, and presumably on terms other than "employee" answerable to the senior pastor. That last is a good development all on its own; a staff "pastor" of any sort should be called by

the *church* and answerable for his performance only to the *church*, not at all to the senior pastor. But when this young man was there before, he meshed so well with the rest of the church, and served so admirably, that there was widespread speculation that he might some day (if he survived to be around long enough) be called as the senior pastor's replacement. Small wonder, then, that that speculation should return full-force in response to the "Co-Pastor" concept.

Some people welcome this possibility. Others object, under the notion that "the proper way to choose a new pastor is with a Pulpit Committee."



Some thoughts here:

1. My first reaction is to immediately recognize "the proper way". Or rather, "the way we have always done it." Since I observe that, in general, the church in the West is in decline, how much is this due to insisting on doing things "they way we have always done it"? And how much more so in the selection of the shepherd? Which in this case is kind of funny, since those people in this church who want to do things like selecting a new pastor in the "traditional way" in many cases have been burned by this pastor's actions. Hey, the "proper way" worked out real well for you last time, didn't it?
2. The title of the Committee really gives away the story. *Pulpit Committee*. Like the most important thing was installing a preacher behind the pulpit. And that's exactly how these Baptist Pulpit Committees work - they go around looking for someone who can deliver a sermon. Their vote on who to present to the church "in view of a call" is the preacher that they thought preached the best. The most entertaining and engaging speaker. Even doctrine takes second place to rhetoric. There's no thought of how good a *pastor* he might be, no way to tell in the short exposure they have (often a single Sunday Morning service), and often, because frequently these Pulpit Committees are not above "stealing" a pastor from another church with a better offer and greener pastures, they can't ask the members of the victim church what they think of their own pastor.
3. I know it's a sore spot in Baptist churches, with their tradition of autonomy and independence, and in America, with our sense of democracy and self-government, but "democracy" is not necessarily the best way to do things, especially for a church which is supposed to be under God's reign, and particularly for the installation of the shepherd which God intends to set over the church. Truth is not determined by majority vote, and neither is God's Will.

In my mind, a *pastor* is one who is supposed to have the best interests of the sheep in mind. Even a man who hasn't been such a great *pastor* but sincerely loves the flock is in a better position to know what the sheep need than the sheep do themselves. Who better, then, to select his own replacement? On this theory, I quite approved when Travis Fullwood was looking for a church planter to invite into Central Baptist, with the understanding that the new pastor may well be his own replacement.

I understand there is room for abuse. I think if the pastor tries to appoint a relative, or a close friend, or someone who is beholden to him, through which he can continue to influence the church, that this is an evil

**thing, and the church needs to have the constitutional authority to prevent this from happening.**

**But just to prefer "the proper way" out of a blind sense of tradition is just foolish. And of course, to me, anything merely traditional is suspect.**