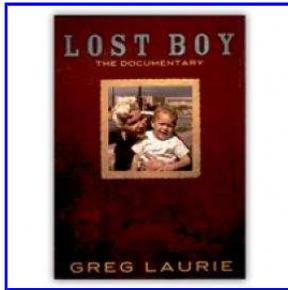


September 22 2008: Lost Boy - Greg Laurie



A dear lady at Central Baptist got the Greg Laurie autobiographical video, [Lost Boy](#) to share with the fellowship.

Now, interestingly, just a few weeks before, I happened to have been listening to [KGMS](#) on my morning commute, at the time Greg Laurie's program comes on.

I don't usually listen to it, because it's usually more evangelical than practical use type stuff, but this time he was telling part of his personal story. Even more interestingly, just last semestre, I and some young people went to an "Overflow" event at the University of Arizona, which is a Christian rally put on by some college area churches and campus ministries, and the guest speaker told us his life story about being raised by an abusive, alcoholic mother and her violent boyfriends and periodic husbands. Greg Laurie's story on the radio was just like that. And the video tells that story in greater detail.

Unlike the "Overflow" speaker, Greg didn't get introduced to Christ at a young age, and didn't escape the weirdness and lostness of the drugs and rock music and youth culture of the late '60s / early '70s. On the other hand, he was in the middle of the "Jesus People" revolution in Southern California at that time, and came to Christ and got plugged in at Calvary Chapel under Chuck Smith. In time, God's claim on his life surfaced, and the youth Bible study he led turned into its own church. Just like Calvary Chapel exploded with a harvest of young people, Laurie's new church exploded as the "Jesus People" generation plugged in.

Of course, being sensitive to practical church models, this phenomenon registered with me. Some observations:

- **Cultural Setting** - Chuck Smith and Greg Laurie weren't successful because of any strategy they planned. They just happened to be in the right place at the right time. God was doing something in the Pacific hippie communities there. The "Jesus People" revolution wasn't something that any evangelist or denomination started; it was an organic, "grass roots" (literally) movement from the young people themselves. Some young believers chose to be *real*, moving beyond the cookie-cutter religion of their parents (like Greg's grandparents and aunts and uncles) to actually *live Jesus*, and this clicked with their searching peers.

Is it possible for a church to be truly successful, in real terms, if God isn't doing something by and for Himself in that church's backyard? Perhaps a church would be better advised to pray for God to do a work like that in their area.

- **Pastoral Style** - The quality that attracted Greg and the other young people to Calvary Chapel was Chuck Smith. Now, from what I understand, Calvary Chapel had already been there, it was an established church, and Smith didn't really have a reputation for being a winsome, charismatic-style preacher. No evidence that Calvary Chapel was particularly significant before the "Jesus People" started coming. But Greg recalls that (1) Chuck was real - he didn't put on a different face at church than the one he had at home or in a small group - and honest, and approachable; and (2) he loved young people - not as potential church members, or objects by which his church could grow and become "successful" in the usual church "success" terms, but as human beings worthy of love and respect.

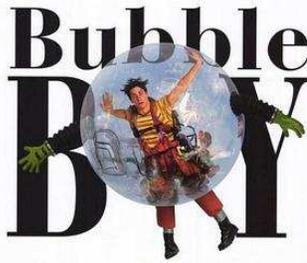
Greg himself didn't set out to be a preacher. He started out as a cartoonist, and was "pushed" into leading a Bible study, and had an accidental experience at the beach where he had his calling revealed to him. God's leading in his life - particularly with the real-terms success he has seen as an evangelist - is clear, and not something Greg consciously chose.

Pastors are called, not self-made.

- **Church Model** - Calvary Chapel reached out to the young people on their own terms. The music was their own music, not something planned by the church staff. The ministries - like Greg's cartooning talents put to use to create a very effective gospel tract - were guided, not directed. There were constant activities - yes, a Sunday morning service, with music, Chuck's teaching, and overflow crowds - but also Bible studies and small groups and personal study teaching tapes and study guides for week-long engagement.

In contrast, the Episcopal church that hosted Greg's original Bible study threw them out when it became too large, and Greg wasn't "on staff". Their top-down control structure, and their ideas of propriety and format were more important than encouraging something powerful that God was doing - right before their eyes, and they were too blind to see it.

For me, it was pretty sobering to see what God had done in that time period, more so even than Greg's personal story of "Lost Boy" to God's servant. Yes, it was the hippie culture, the revolutionary time of personal definition and throwing off moral restraints and assumptions, a time that continues to affect us today. But it was also the time of the "Jesus People", a movement of God to empty and searching young people. It would be wonderful to see God do something like that in Tucson, and for churches in the Mid-City area to be able to respond to it, and be transformed beyond traditions and comfort zones and anything they could imagine.



The fourth point in "unChristian" is how Mosaics and Busters perceive Christians as living in a bubble, isolated from the real world. The Barna Group's research indicates that outsiders (and many insiders) 16 to 29 years old have certain impressions of the Christian culture:

- **Old-Fashioned.** 3/4 of young outsiders feel this way. 7/10 say that Christianity is out of touch with reality. Young people lead a fast-paced, media-soaked lifestyle, and Christianity doesn't keep up.
- **unSpiritual.** Church is just a list of "dos and don'ts". There's no spiritual vitality or supernatural reality. *BORING*
- **Non-Intellectual.** Christians don't think. Their faith stifles curiosity.
- **Isolated.** Christians live in their own little world, with their own little language and their own little rules, rather like a club.

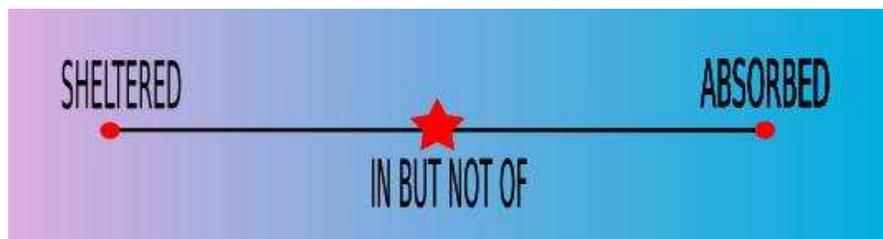
At this point, I was thinking, "yep, sounds like most of the churches I've been in. Especially the Southern Baptist ones." But then Kinnaman asked some questions on why these impressions should be surprising, and these questions apply well beyond merely the traditional church setting:

1. If Jesus is really the path to a supernatural reality, why isn't it apparent? I note that Paul says it should be: "For the Kingdom of God does not consist in words, but in power" (I Cor. 4:20). I also note that the fastest growing religious format in Central and South America is Charismatic Christianity.
2. If the Christian Worldview really integrates all aspects of life and reality, and provides working answers to the tough questions, why isn't it more visible?
3. Why is there no evidence of Christian engagement in the culture (outside of partisan politics; more next week)?

After a few pages of presenting a profile of the Mosaic and Buster generations, including their deep problems with violence, broken families, hypersexualization, substance abuse, loneliness, and desperation, Kinnaman makes some observations about how Christians find themselves in a bubble: Overcommitment to Christian Activities (Sunday, Wednesday Night, Smallgroup, Saturday projects, church parties, etc. leave little time or opportunity to engage with outsiders), Shielding Children from Media Influences, and Shielding Ourselves from Media Influences that Might Incite Personal Sin Patterns. However, I found his list of "Why Should We Engage?" more suggestive of the real problems:

- **Responsibility.** We are supposed to be "salt and light". Personally, I think we are so conditioned to do "evangelism", and so uncomfortable with it, that we have already run away from the more important "salt and light" role.
- **Fear.** Of what others may think. Or do to us. Now, Kinnaman quotes I John 4:18, but this "fear" is "fear of God's punishment", not "fear of other humans". More to the point, I believe fear (in general) indicates a lack of trust. But faith is exactly trust, that we are delivered from judgment by Jesus' sacrifice. If we will trust God with our souls, why can we not trust God in our dealings with other people?
- **Avoiding Being Offended.** Which is similar to fear. Not wanting to be offended drives much of the political correctness in our silly civilization. But Christians should expect it. Jesus said it would be inevitable (John 15:20).
- **Helping the Desperate.** This would fall under the category of "Love your neighbor as yourself", the Second Commandment. Which is taught in theory in our churches, but not as a practical expectation or life-guide.
- **Be Prepared.** Kinnaman presents Daniel as a believer who prepared himself to be ready for opportunities that God would put in his way. Again, traditionally, whether in sermons or Sunday School lessons, the church has been long on teaching theory, but not application.

The jewel of this chapter is the point made about *BALANCE*. There are two extremes that we must avoid, that render us useless or even counterproductive as Christians - either being so separate from the world that we are isolated from it (the "sheltered" position described in this chapter) or so close to it that we are indistinguishable from it (the "hypocritical" position of [Chapter 3](#)).



Of course, where we want to be is between these extremes, "In the world, but not of it" (John 17:14-18). We need to practice purity while living in proximity to a sinful world. We will have no influence if we live at either extreme, but we ought to have maximal influence in the middle.

The rest of the chapter makes a case for Christians to be "missional" to the diverse subcultures that comprise our Western civilization; to form relationships with people by entering their world and establishing trust. A number of instances for this are given, including the "Intellectual", "Loner", "Self-Injurer", and "Fatherless" groups.

Strategy aside, I thought this chapter has been the most directly applicable of them all, and speaks to what the Church must do in all of its instantiations, traditional and otherwise: Reject Isolationism. Instill a Christian Worldview. Engage the World while being Surrendered to Christ in Purity.

August 30 2008: [Hope or No Hope for a Civilization](#)

A few weeks ago, Element Pastor Jeremiah McDuffie delivered a sermon as part of his "Jonah" series. The text for the sermon was chapter 3, where Jonah finally obeys God, preaches a very simple (and utterly unsympathetic) message, and the Assyrians respond, bottom to top, by turning to God in repentance.

Now, in contrast, Jeremiah also obeyed God, willingly and with a heart aching for the restoration of his mission field - his own nation of Judah. However, even though God told him to prophesy to Judah and call them to repentance, He also told Jeremiah (verse 7:16), "Don't bother praying for them; I won't hear it." There was no nation-wide repentance coming, and God knew it, but He sent Jeremiah to preach so the people would have no excuse.

So there was hope for one nation (the Assyrians in Ninevah), but no hope for the other (the Jews in Jerusalem), but in both cases, God sent His servants to preach repentance.

Furthermore, the response of the people had nothing to do with the attitude or methods of the preacher. I tend to sit between the Calvinist and Arminian camps on the question of Total Depravity, and whether we humans are capable of responding to God on our own, but I certainly see the support for the Calvinist position that even saving faith is the Gift of God (Ephesians 2:8). In this model, God granted the Ninevites the grace to respond to even a surly message, and withheld that grace from His own people in spite of the tears and pleadings of the Weeping Prophet.

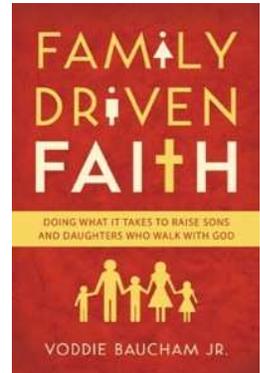
It makes me wonder where we are today. It appears that people in Asia and Africa and perhaps Central and South America have been given grace to respond to the Gospel even under adverse conditions. But North America and Europe, formerly the source of missionary fervour, are in the last stages of hanging up on Christianity, in spite of feverish work by Evangelicals and Emergers, and even a reinvigorated Catholic Church.

Being in that North American context, and deeply concerned for it, I understand how Jeremiah felt. I don't know if there *is* hope for America. Perhaps God is removing His grace from America to make way for the world system of the Last Days. He hasn't told me, like He told Jeremiah, but then, God was still writing His Bible in Jeremiah's day, and (in spite of what my charismatic brothers believe) today, we have the finished work. Like Jonah and Jeremiah, we just have to obey God, to live according to the Great Commandment and the Second

Commandment and the Great Commission as best we can, including "Go and make disciples"... even if the disciples are few.

August 9 2008: Review: Family Driven Faith

After my sister and brother-in-law alerted me to Voddie Baucham, and gave me some contacts (see [here](#)), I got his book, [Family Driven Faith](#). I have now read it and have a better idea of where he is coming from. I have to say, this is a great book, for many reasons, and Baucham is a very good writer and comes to the topic with a lot of experience.



The first four chapters sets forth the foundation of his thesis - the problem of why so many young people hang up on Christianity and the Church after graduation is due to the lack of spiritual development which can only come (biblically and practically) from the home. Yet parents lack a priority on the spiritual development of their children, and also a Christian worldview that enables them to see the world and their priorities in perspective to the reality of the world as God made it. Chapter 8 adds a bit more to this by pointing out how much material prosperity influences us.

The next three chapters have some great how-to suggestions for building an environment for spiritual development in the home. Here, Baucham makes his case for three phases of spiritual training: Obedience, Catechism, and Discipleship. There seems to be some ambiguity on this last phase between some of his recorded messages, in which Discipleship = hands-on, personal demonstration of the Christian life by the parents, and this book, in which Discipleship = Education, specifically homeschooling.

It is also here where Baucham acknowledges his role in making proposals to the Southern Baptist Convention that parents ought to pull their children out of the public school system. At least for two years now, this proposal comes up to the Convention, and it has been voted down. I understand where Baucham and his allies are coming from, but in the aftermath of the media circus over "Boycott Disney" and "Women Submit to your Husbands", I don't think the SBC needs to add "Pull Out of Public Schools". Besides, making such proposals to a convention of independent churches who acknowledge no governing authority of the denomination doesn't seem to make much sense. The second part of Baucham's proposal, that the SBC "establish affordable educational alternatives", might have flown better on its own merits, since the SBC already exists in large measure for the maintenance of theological seminaries - a different, higher form of educational alternatives.

The last two chapters set forth Baucham's model for the Family-Integrated Church. Now, chapter 10 pretty much repeats the same four principles of the

FIC as presented on [his church website](#), and four tips for transforming a church into an FIC:

- **Promote a biblical view of marriage and family.** Total agreement here.
- **Promote family worship and discipleship.** Again, total waving-wildly agreement.
- **Promote Christian Education.** Which means homeschooling, disclaimers notwithstanding.
- **Promote biblically-qualified leadership.** Excellent point. Paul sets out some criteria for selecting a pastor, and they are all character indicators and how well he manages his family, *NOT* how well he preaches or organizes a good Sunday Morning show.

Chapter 9 was my favorite. There are two dominant themes in this chapter, and the larger one is an argument against age-segregated youth and children ministries:

- **It isn't biblical.** I rather appreciated his remarks about Purpose-Driven Youth Ministry (PDYM), a model that I have championed myself. The principles of Purpose-Driven Church are eminently scriptural, but their application to youth development is questionable. I suppose as part of the larger PDC ministry in a church, a PDYM makes some sense, but on its own, yeah, there's some "Fallacy of Composition" ("the characteristics of the whole will be shared by its components") going on there.
- **It works against the biblical model.** Yep, I've witnessed how a youth ministry can usurp parental responsibility.
- **Doesn't work.** In light of the failure to retain young people or building a biblical worldview within them, it's hard to argue against this one.

Then Baucham deals with some objections to abolishing the segregated youth ministry model:

- **Parents won't.** In which case, a segregated "in loco parentis" youth ministry is the wrong solution. Come to think of it, this is how the federal government has operated in our times, of taking responsibilities away from the private sector because "they aren't doing it well enough". We've seen how well *that* works out.
- **Kids without Christian parents.** Baucham admits this objection carries the most weight, and I believe this is where his argument falls apart. Voddie and his wife Bridget are themselves refugees from non-Christian dysfunctional family structures. Now, maybe an age-segregated youth ministry wasn't their path to God, but for sure it wasn't a Family-Integrated Church either. Now, Baucham proposes that such orphan kids could sit with the intact families during the Integrated worship service, but this sounds like an awful weak solution to a huge culture-wide problem.

- **Kids can mentor other kids, a la Titus 2.** But the mentors in Titus 2 are mature adults, not other kids, and so again, the segregated model prevents the biblical model of Titus 2.
- **Youth Evangelism.** It's not working, says Baucham. Of course, I would say *nothing* is working, for youth or adults or children, and his FIC contributes nothing here, other than a corrected understanding of evangelizing the children of church families. He's right; getting young children to make a decision and baptizing them is really settling "parental anxiety".

The other thing I see in this chapter is the tension between homeschooling and non-homeschooling. Education is a persistent part of the FIC, and "education" invariably includes reference to, if not promotion of, homeschooling. Of course, Baucham's family is a homeschool itself (even the Christian private school attended by his older girls was unsatisfactory). Now, at several points he gives a disclaimer that homeschooling is a necessary feature of FIC. In fact, in the endnotes for Chapter 10, he writes

Many so-called family-integrated churches are merely cloisters of homeschool families that have grown weary of the segregated methodologies of most churches. Many of these groups classify themselves as house churches, although they lack many of the fundamental elements of the house church movement. These cloisters are often introverted and have little interest in missions and/or evangelism. This is not what I am referring to here.

However, I see nothing in Baucham's model that would prevent this development. Homeschool families associate with one another, sharing resources, socialization opportunities, and of course a common perspective, so it is no surprise that they form "cliques" even within larger, more-inclusive church fellowships. Now, I know that homeschool families fall along a spectrum from merely practical to downright ideological, but every time I encounter a clique of homeschool families in a church setting, the ideological flavour prevails. Their cliques are exclusive, segregated from non-homeschool families. The attitude of elitism and legalism are unmistakable. Now, maybe all the families in the "clique" are not the ideological variety, but they are not the disapproving, judgmental face that "outsiders" like my own family see. So, unless a Family-Integrated Church took explicit steps to head off this sinful attitude, I can't see how there can be any other outcome than an exclusively homeschool church.

This is my perspective on homeschooling: it is a great idea - for those willing and able to do it. It is also a historically minority position, since there is a fundamental economic (and spiritual-gifts) principle of *specialization*: Activities

will gravitate toward those with natural (or spiritual) advantages. Engineering is best done by those gifted with technical aptitude. Farming (for better or worse) moves toward large, efficient operations. Pastoring is done by those gifted by God to do pastoring. And teaching is best done by people with a knack for teaching. This was true before the Federal Government intruded into public education, as communities established schools and hired teachers (e.g., Laura Ingalls from "Little Schoolhouse on the Prairie"). This was even true in the Deuteronomy 6 climate quoted by homeschoolers - rabbinic schools where the boys were taught to read Hebrew and memorize Torah. It is only in our silly Baby Boomer generation where the Federal Government is seen as the solution to all problems, and adults in general (including parents) are conditioned to surrender all their responsibilities to social programs (such as public education and the teachers unions). Parents surrendering the raising of their kids to programs - whether state schools or church ministries - is a characteristic of our times. *This* is the problem. Homeschooling is *one* solution to this problem, but it is not inherently *better* - or more biblical (Old Testament prooftexting notwithstanding) - than other solutions.

Furthermore, I disagree with Baucham that public schools are *necessarily* destructive of faith. Children who are not trained spiritually and supported by parents who have a solid Christian worldview will certainly have a vacuum that the godless secular system is all too ready to fill. However, children who *do* have authentically Christian parents involved in their lives *will* be able to engage a hostile world a la Psalms 127:5.

So the *real* problem is parents - and youth - who lack a solid Christian worldview. Certainly the children's best source of such a worldview is their parents, but the *only* source for the parents is the church. For that matter, if the parents and the church are working together to develop a Christian worldview, including in an integrated youth ministry, then the parents are fulfilling their responsibility to "raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" *and* the church will "continue steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine". If the church fulfills her mission to "make disciples" - not only of parents, but of *ALL* people, including the homeless, widows, orphans, single-parent families, single adults, *all* walks in life - then we will have that complete Reformation church that Voddie Baucham is looking for. As it is, I believe that Baucham's Family-Integrated Church is too narrowly focused to be "salt and light" in our dark world.

August 7 2008: [Evangelism in Alabama](#)

So here I am again, spending the week in my second favorite place - Huntsville, Alabama - to help a Redstone Arsenal electromagnetic effects test organization prepare for an upcoming test of TOW-RF. I've found a radio station - [WAY FM 88.1](#) - that's kinda like KLOVE. Plus, since I'm on my own, I can visit with my

Woodland Hills Baptist friends for Wednesday Night prayer meeting.

First off, Woodland Hills is in an interesting spot. It appears to be a mostly elderly church (not unlike Central Baptist, Tucson), and they've had a rash of deaths. For whatever reason, the numbers on this Wednesday night are lower than I've seen on previous visits. And yes, most of the prayers offered are for health concerns. But I hear that WHBC has seen seventy five decisions for Christ so far this year! But then I hear that few of those decisions have become committed (that is, attending) church members. WHBC, being a struggling small church, is probably more sensitive to the loss of new believers than larger evangelistical churches, and outside of Pastor Gary Lawson, who is very evangelistical, I don't know just how evangelistical WHBC is in general. Their discipleship strategy appears to be nothing more than the traditional Sunday School, so I wouldn't be surprised that it is ineffective.

But anyways, Pastor Gary told a story how he was at a gas station fueling his postal truck (he is NOT a full-time pastor), and a lady came over to buy some stamps. This encounter developed to the point where the lady stated she was from a catholic background but was searching for God after a car accident caused her to miscarry her twins. Pastor Gary listened, comforted, and prayed with her - loudly, with the idea that he loves Jesus and he doesn't mind who knows it. (Maybe that's possible in the South; I would think in Tucson, it might result in him loosing his Post Office job!) Oh, yes, he gave her a card for the church and invited her. If there was a "Sharing of the Gospel Message", it was not mentioned or emphasized - Pastor Gary was teaching us clearly that *he was being real*, and God provided an occasion for him to minister *out of his realness*.

The next day, I'm listening to WAY FM, and the show host, Wally, of [Total Axxess](#), is telling a story of being on an airplane, and a young man sits next to him. A conversation develops, and Wally learns that the man is an atheist, and the man learns that Wally is a Christian. So Wally merely asks questions, like "what was your path to becoming an atheist?" The man explains the personal fallout of having a Jewish father and a Catholic mother who argued about what religion their children should have. The two spent the plane ride in an amicable discussion. Afterwards, on the radio show, Wally is confessing his fear that perhaps he should have "Shared the Gospel Message" with the atheist. But he didn't, and he hoped that the experience would serve to remove barriers to God for the atheist later in his walk through life.

So my takeaway from these two stories:

- Being *real* with people, listening to them, not judging them, actually caring for them, is more important than our religious "Share the Gospel Message" indoctrinated duty.
- Americans we meet more than likely have already had some experience (probably unfavorable) with a Christian religion, and their greatest need is

NOT to be given the "Gospel Message".

- For all that, American Christians find it hard to shake the burden of "Sharing the Gospel Message", and just be focused on living with Jesus.

August 6 2008: Family-Integrated Church



My sister and brother-in-law have recently introduced me to Voddie Beacham, a Southern Baptist pastor in Texas who is not merely intellectually accomplished (several books, highly-demanded speaker) but puts his teachings into practice in his own family and his [church](#). At this point, I have listened to his "[Centrality of the Family](#)" speech, and I've gotten his "Family Driven Faith" book. What he says interests me greatly, and while I haven't had time to really explore his thought, I have some first impressions.

He makes some points that I totally agree with:

- A high percentage (75%) of young people are leaving the faith - **TRUE**
- The family is the fundamental unit of society, and must be an important part of the church - **TRUE**
- Much of Paul's instructions (and Old Testament laws) set forth family roles and in-home spiritual training - **TRUE**
- Youth ministries in traditional churches tend to replace this parental spiritual training role - **TRUE**
- Youth ministries and the overall Church need to equip parents to disciple their own children - **TRUE**

However, after these points of emphatic, flag-waving, stand-up-and-cheer agreement, Voddie and I part company.

Voddie extrapolates from these points and proposes the "Family-Integrated Church" as the solution. The basic idea is, as the title of his speech suggests, the Family should be Central to the Church.

Which sounds pretty good at first, but I think there are two serious problems with it. First, if the traditional nuclear family is Central to the church, and everything in the church is structured around the two-parent family, then anything that is *NOT* a traditional two-parent family is outside - at best, uncomfortable, and at worst, excluded. Where do singles fit in? How about orphans, or youth whose parents are not believers? What about single-parent families? Widows? Homeless people? The Church should have a place for *ALL* those who claim Jesus as Lord.

According to the [outline](#) of Voddie's church, a Family-Integrated Church includes at least four characteristics: (1) Families worship together, (2) No systematic age segregation, (3) Evangelism and Discipleship through homes, and

(4) Education as a key component of Discipleship.

- Now, #1 I have no problem with. The church should be an extended family, and the children of all should be recognized as part of this extended family when it gathers together for communal times like the weekly "worship" service.
- The "No Age Segregation" really means "No Standalone Youth or Children's Ministries". Which means, all the ministry to all the youth and children happen within the "central" family structure. I've got a big problem with this: in every Baptist church I've been in, a significant portion of the youth group effectively had no parents. Some were homeless - living with friends or on the street. Many had come to Christ on their own, through the influence of their friends or the minister, and their unbelieving parents gave them no support for their spiritual interests. Others came from single-parent homes, primarily with a mother and no input from a father-role. There seems to be no place for such in a Family-Integrated Church. Children's Ministries are similar. If we understand that most people come to Christ before the age of 18, then outreach to children is a critical effort, and ministries like [Child Evangelism Fellowship](#) are very important. In a FIC, it would seem that only the children in the *central family* can be reached.
- Similarly, #3 has a problem. Not with Discipleship through the home; the *primary* (if not necessarily the *only*) discipleship influence on a child's life should indeed come from her Christian parents. But evangelism? Again, yes, the children in these families will be evangelized, but it is hard to imagine how anybody outside the family (not even "neighbors") are going to be reached. Seems to me that the Great Commission is crippled in a FIC.
- The last point, "Education as a Key Component of Discipleship" actually decodes to "Homeschooling". I'm aware of a few homeschooling churches in Tucson. I guess they would not want to be identified as a "homeschooling church", so maybe they use the euphemism "family-integrated church", but it doesn't change the facts. There's nothing inherently wrong, and much that is inherently admirable, in homeschooling, but as the *central, dominant feature* of a Christian church... well, I've got more to say about that later.

And this brings me to my second concern about the "Family-Integrated Church" where the family is central. Uh... *Jesus* is supposed to be central.

To drag up my past again, there are churches where evangelism is central. You would think that bringing people to Jesus would mean that Jesus is central, but it is not. Getting people to make a (emotional) decision, assert the truth to some propositions about Jesus, and getting baptized so that we can feel like we have done our duty is not really about Jesus. Especially, abandoning these new

believers to the proven-incompetent "discipleship" ministry of Sunday School and Sermons is not really about Jesus. Yeah, Jesus is in there, but *evangelism - making converts*, is central, not Jesus.

I've been in religious-club churches. The rulers of the church, or the little old people, want their music, their padded pews, their stained glass, their Sunday clothes, and they will fire the pastor after three years if he dares to suggest there is more to Christianity than that. Yeah, Jesus is talked about, and He is the subject of their songs and sermons... but He isn't *central*. Religious traditions are.

We are certainly familiar with liberal churches, that put a premium on service activities, or political activism, and often heretical positions. Again, Jesus is nominally in there, but there's no way He is *central*.

So any church, including a "Family-Integrated Church", that elevates something besides Jesus to *centrality*, is missing the boat - and perhaps is engaging in a form of idolatry.

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I would offer something in contrast to Voddie Baucham's FIC proposal: Take the propositions above, and add another:

- According to Barna (and our own experience), American Christians have a very shallow commitment and understanding of Christianity - **TRUE**

So the real problem is that parents of families in churches are shallow Christians. Along with the singles, the youth, the orphans, the widows, the new believers, the pastoral staff. Fixing the *real* problem might give those parents the will to disciple their own children, as they become disciples themselves, along with the other, non-traditional family structures in the church. Then perhaps we all, *as the Church*, can influence the culture that God has placed us in, rather than becoming exclusionary.

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Some links:

Voddie Baucham Ministries website

<http://www.voddiebaucham.org/vbm/home.html>

Voddie's downloadable messages

<http://psalm305.blogspot.com/2007/03/voddie-baucham-mp3-sermons.html>

"Centrality of the Home" speech

http://www.voddiebaucham.org/vbm/Podcast/Entries/2007/1/17_The_Centrality_of_the_Home.html

The for-sale version

<http://www.visionforum.com/search/productdetail.aspx?search=baucham&productid=58773>

Grace Family Baptist Church

http://www.gracefamilybaptist.net/GFBC_/Welcome.html

GFBC as a Family-Integrated Church

http://www.gracefamilybaptist.net/GFBC_/FIC.html

GFBC's Homeschooling Position

http://www.gracefamilybaptist.net/GFBC_/HSG.html

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UPDATE: Another thought struck me today - in his speech, Voddie makes remarks about the Emerging Church. Now, the remark is more addressed to his Southern Baptist audience, in terms like "you have issues with the Emerging Church", so it isn't clear that Voddie himself shares those concerns. Given his highly conservative point of view, I would expect he does, that he paints *all* Emerging churches with the Brian McLaren brush. But really, at root, the idea behind the Emerging Church movement is that the traditional modernist institutional church is broken, and that new church forms are required to address the new cultural situation.

In those terms... the "Family-Integrated Church"... *is Emerging!*

Wow. Just like the traditional denominational churches, Emerging Church is spread across a liberal-conservative spectrum. Who'd a thunk it?

July 31 2008: Iron Man: Moral Confusion

I recently saw the movie [Iron Man](#), another adaptation of a Marvel comic book hero to the big screen. A geek like me would appreciate the technological focus of the story - and I did - but there are some interesting morality aspects of the film that I picked up on, which the garden-variety geek may not have. At least four of these aspects are captured in particular characters:

Afghan Warlord: This guy is just evil. He is holding Tony Stark captive until Tony can build an advanced missile system for him. He is coldly willing to wreak frightful torment on Tony's assistant (putting a red-hot lump of metal in his mouth) to learn why it is taking so long. He deals



with the Corporate Officer to acquire weapons to terrorize and conquer the villages in his neighborhood. He directs his underlings to line up the men of these villages against the wall and execute them with machine gun fire. All for his own personal advancement and benefit. There's *nothing* redeeming about this character - he is the prototypical comic book villain

More interesting, Americans would recognize this guy as Taliban - and therefore extremist Muslim. However, there is no connection with Islam and his actions - probably a conscious decision by the screenwriters. There is, in fact, NO religion at all in this movie. That's part of the problem...

Corporate Officer: This man was the friend of Tony Stark's father, and helped him build a corporate empire on weapons manufacturing, and for most of the movie, we see him as Tony's friend and partner and mentor. It isn't until Tony steps on his values (by threatening to shut down the weapons business) that he secretly turns against Tony and ultimately attempts to kill him. We also find that it was *he* that was supplying weapons to the Afghan Warlord. However, there is no overt suggestion that his actions are motivated by personal gain. He is merely a soulless corporate figure, acting in the interests of the Company, the Board of Directors, and the Shareholders.

But even this is confusing. The last time he visits the Warlord, he spares his life, but orders his "bodyguards" to execute all the Afghan mujahadeen present. Is this an act of evil, or merely of caution, to avoid being followed and ambushed for foiling the desires of the Warlord? Does it matter? It is clear that human life means nothing to him.

Young Journalist: Here it starts to get interesting. She confronts Tony the Military-Industrial Complex Leader, with evidence that his weapons kill people. But in the next scene she is in his bedroom having sex with him. So

- Defense Industry that Builds Weapons that Kill People: **MORAL EVIL**
- Sex Outside of Marriage (even with Leader of Defense Industry that Builds Weapons that Kill People): **MORAL NEUTRAL**

At this point, some people would be reading this and say, "Come on, David! How can you compare "sex outside of marriage" with "killing people"?" But that's exactly the point! Comparing moral issues requires a moral standard! There is NONE in this movie! Characters make up their own moral decisions on what they *feel* is right or wrong. The screenwriters have selected positions on moral issues that they know will be shared by a 21st Century American audience - who also have NO independent moral standard to base those decisions on. If this is the case, and there actually IS no independent moral standard, then when you carry the proposition to its logical conclusion, we have no basis to condemn either the actions or the motives of either the Corporate Officer or the Afghan Warlord!

Weapons Genius: The hero is Tony Stark. His escort of American soldiers is ambushed and destroyed by Afghans using Stark Industries weapons. He himself is critically (and permanently) injured by these weapons. He sees how the Afghan Warlord is stockpiling Stark Industry weapons, and using them to terrorize and conquer and brutalize and murder local innocent civilians. So when he escapes, he returns home with this enlightenment and intends to shut down the Stark Industries contribution to weapons proliferation.

Now, prior to this experience, he was the sheltered son of a Military-Industrial Complex Leader, and believed in the "conservative" principle of defending the nation with the best weapons that can be designed and built. But upon his enlightenment, rather than taking steps to ensure that these weapons would only be used by legitimate "friendly" national militaries and not fall into the hands of evil Taliban-like forces, he moves to shut down his weapons industry entirely! So he went from

- Building Weapons for the Military to Defend the Nation: **MORAL GOOD**

to

- Building Weapons that Kill People: **MORAL EVIL**

And of course, once again, this aligns with the (particularly the liberal) American popular notion that "Military" is an undesirable thing perpetuated by "conservatives", and all weapons, including personal firearms owned by individuals supposedly protected by the Second Amendment, are evil and should be destroyed.

But Tony's confusion gets worse. Seeing the destruction wreaked by the Afghan Warlord and having his Moral Indignation aroused, he builds a weaponized powered suit of armour and flies over there and rescues innocent civilian villagers and destroys Stark Industries weapon systems. So

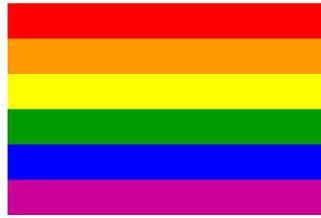
- Weapons Used by Afghan Warlord's Forces to Kill People: **MORAL EVIL**
- Weapon Used by Me to Kill Afghani Mujahadeen and Destroy Their Weapons: **MORAL GOOD**

So we are brought to the conflict between "Weapons Are Bad" (the not-so-subtle message of the movie) and "Weapons Are Necessary" (which makes the movie even watchable).

But this is still a fallout of having no independent moral standard to judge whether weapons (inanimate tools) are good or evil, or whether the motives of persons (selfish, evil Afghan Warlord or superhero Tony Stark) are good or evil. The only viable independent moral standard is the character of the One True God, as revealed in His message to us (the Bible). But don't expect *this* angle to

be worked in any movie adaptation of a Marvel Comic!

July 26 2008: UnChristian: Anti-Homosexual



The third point in the "unChristian" book where young outsiders (and many young Christians) have a problem with Christianity is the perception that Christians are anti-homosexual. To a large extent, this perception is justified, with Reverend Phelps and his followers running around with "God Hates Fags" signs. And, like the story in the book, I've sat through anti-homosexuality sermons where the pastor said, verbatim, "God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve." I think this last emphasizes the brokenness of the church model where the pastor delivers a Sunday morning sermon to the audience, including unbelievers invited by their friends, but that aside, there IS mocking, unkindness, fear, exclusion, revulsion, judging committed by individual Christians against individual homosexuals. This is definitely unChristian, and it is wrong.

However, like the book emphasizes, the homosexual issue is complex. Christians aren't mocking or feeling revulsion against murderers, adulterers, or drug pushers, but murderers, adulterers, and drug pushers don't present themselves openly to society, defending their lifestyles, and demanding to be accepted as normal. It is certainly true that homosexuality, a sin, is no worse than other sins in the eyes of God. But other sinners, unlike the practitioners of homosexuality, don't identify themselves with their practices, or have an agenda of normalizing them.

The book makes the point that there is a spectrum of homosexuals, some who are ashamed and still "in the closet" and others who are stridently activist, and that Christians should realize this and treat every homosexual on his or her own merits. This is true. However, the *real problem* is that the homosexual activists have been *very successful* in their campaign to convince young people (inside AND outside the church) that homosexuality is a good, natural, and normal lifestyle, that this should be taught in public schools starting at a young age in spite of the objections of their parents, that homosexuals deserve the right to marry as much as anyone else, and that homosexuals should be able to adopt children. And, more importantly, any resistance to this agenda is an affront to individual homosexuals, and is "hateful" and "intolerant". So Christians can treat individual homosexuals with acceptance and dignity as befits human souls created in the image of God, but the moment any suggestion is made that homosexuality is NOT normal and good, and that society ought NOT permit marriage and adoption in such cases, the fingers are pointed and the howls are heard.

Even in the book, this tension is unavoidable. In the section "Expressing

Concern for Kids", discussing homosexuals adopting children, Kinnaman writes,

I recognize that it's offensive to homosexuals to say that a child needs both a father and a mother; it's a difficult part of what Christians believe. However, though this is an important conviction, Christians have to avoid rhetoric that dehumanizes people, especially in interpersonal interactions.

Well, I don't know that this notion of what a family is (especially in light of nature (humans reproduce sexually) and thousands of years of human experience) is so difficult. But we can't avoid "rhetoric that dehumanizes people" if anything we say short of complete acquiescence is identified and denounced as "dehumanizing rhetoric" by the dominant paradigm.

So Christianity is in the predicament where we can't do anything right on this subject in the eyes of a generation that has been successfully indoctrinated. I will agree with Kinnaman that Christians must cease from a negative emotional reaction against homosexuals and live in love toward them. But this will NOT change any negative perception outsiders have toward us as long as we maintain the biblical authority that homosexuality is sin, and that God (not the State) created the family with a father and a mother in heterosexual union.

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Incidentally, I believe that this will be the watershed issue in America. As Kinnaman points out, the Buster and Mosaic generations that have been so successfully indoctrinated by the homosexual agenda *will* eventually come to power, and the majority position (mostly older people) that passes Marriage Definition constitutional amendments will eventually be pushed aside. At that time, laws will be passed (such as Canada and some European states already have) outlawing any objection to homosexual normalization, and Christians will have to choose to be silent, or to speak out and suffer confiscation and imprisonment (as we have already seen in Canada). Unless the United States experiences revival from God that turns this indoctrination into salvation, this trend will be irresistible here, too.

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UPDATE: There's probably no end of news stories out there, but courtesy of The Volokh Conspiracy, I found this article:

<http://volokh.com/posts/1217288105.shtml>

which illustrates both effects. First, the school principal who is alarmed by the lesbian student, declares that homosexuality is "wrong", and takes action to suppress speech about homosexuality: I can't imagine that he is not a

self-identified Christian. For something like this to happen in a public school last year is very much out of keeping with the way the NEA and the ACLU and the other forces of political correctness would dictate. So here is our characteristically "anti-homosexuality" Christian being ugly and bigoted and intolerant and disrespectful. Hateful. At least, by the report in the news, which, since *that's* what gets in people's eyes, is what counts. Second, the reaction of the student body: Very much pro-homosexual. If 3-5% of Americans are homosexual, it was *way* more than homosexual teens reacting with slogans and signs and body marks. There's a lot of pro-homosexual sentiment out there, in High Schools and elsewhere. And just *where* do we think that sentiment is coming from? And do we *honestly* think that sentiment or the motive force behind it will just dry up and blow away?

July 25 2008: A Christian Approach to UFOs

Last night, I and some young people went to hear [Mike Riddle](#) speaking at the July [AZOSA](#) lecture. I've heard Mr. Riddle speak before, and I was impressed before with his communication abilities and command of the material, so I had high hopes. Tonight, the subject was UFOs. Of course, the position was that UFOs are not spaceships with aliens from other worlds, and Mr. Riddle made three points in support of this position:



1. Life cannot arise naturally

The materialist accepts the possibility of extraterrestrial aliens because evolution is a principle of reality, and can happen anywhere, anytime, so it should not be surprising that intelligence has evolved on other worlds to the point of achieving space travel and superior technology. However, this materialist, evolutionist belief requires the spontaneous generation of life from basic chemicals. Mr. Riddle laid out a good argument why this is actually impossible:

- The Miller Experiment certainly produced amino acids, but only by assuming that no oxygen was present. Oxygen is a corrosive to life molecules. There is no evidence that the early Earth atmosphere was methane, ammonia, and no oxygen; rather, there is evidence to the contrary.
- And if there were no oxygen, there would be no ozone to block ultraviolet light, which would also destroy life molecules.
- It does not help to propose that life molecules formed deep underwater, away from free oxygen and UV light, since water would hydrolyze the life molecules, and destroy them.
- Any natural means of producing amino acids by necessity forms "right-handed" and "left-handed" molecules in equal proportions;

however, functional life molecules require exclusively "left-handed" amino acids. A collection of all "left-handed" amino acids outside of a life organism will decay and recombine into a 50% mixture. This is true in dead organisms as well. So the Miller Experiment didn't model the formation of life so much as the formation of death!

- A prototype "cell" of a collection of life molecules would require a membrane to separate them from the surrounding hostile environment - a cell wall. But a cell wall is itself a combination of life molecules! It is also highly complex, and has a purpose, and would not form on its own. Here is "intelligent design" and "irreducible complexity" in an unavoidable context.
- A cell is an enormously complex machine, out of reach of even our engineering capabilities.
- DNA stores an incredible amount of information. In scientific terms, information cannot arise from random processes (i.e., "noise"), it must have an intelligent source.

All these arguments for the impossibility of the materialistic origin of life - as admitted by prominent evolutionists - but they still believe in evolution! *Because they want to.* In the same way, people who believe in alien beings do so *because they want to*, in spite of sound logical and scientific reasons why such beings are impossible.

2. Interstellar travel is physically unfeasible

Mr. Riddle spent a little time explaining interstellar distances in terms of the speed of light, how long it would take to get to the nearer stars, let alone the nearer galaxies, and how much energy it would take to accelerate and decelerate for such a trip, and how interstellar matter (dust, gas) would prove an insurmountable barrier to speed-of-light travel. He then made an interesting point: Speculating about going faster than light is not science, it is science fiction - "Hollywood", as he put it.

This was the weakest part of his presentation, I thought. Just because *our* science indicates that faster-than-light travel is impossible doesn't mean that a *more advanced* science would find it so. Even our science admits the theoretical possibility of "warp travel", albeit with fantastic energy requirements. So claiming that "science says it is impossible" puts us in the same place as medieval churchmen defending Aristotle.

3. Extraterrestrial intelligence is incompatible with the Fall and Redemption

Back to Genesis: God made the universe, and He made it in six literal days, and He made it "good". When the first human earth being rebelled against God and sinned, God put an entropy curse on the *entire universe*. It was no longer "good". Then Jesus (God in human flesh) came and died to redeem human earth

beings from their rebellion.

If it is scientifically impossible for life to originate naturally, it is not impossible for God to create it (obviously, since we are here). And there's no logical reason why God could not have created intelligent life elsewhere in the universe.

However, those beings would be afflicted with the Curse from Adam's Fall, and have no access to Jesus for redemption.

This line of argument won't work for non-Christians, of course, but it ought to serve to dissuade Christians from believing that UFOs are what they purport to be. Unfortunately, as noted by the "unChristian" authors and many, many others, American Christians tend NOT to have a biblical, Christian world-view, and if they *want to believe* in aliens, even contrary to the implications of Christ's redemption... they will. And do.

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For me, the lecture was less than satisfying. It started with a list of natural phenomena that have been cited as "UFOs": Venus (27% of all UFO reports), clouds, weather balloons, even the experimental aircraft being tested at Area 51. Then Mr. Riddle went through these arguments why extraterrestrial intelligent space travellers are impossible. Finally, he dismisses the claims of UFO encounters with "we rely on scientific evidence, not stories of personal experience." In other words, if there is no reliable documentation, it didn't happen, and people who say it did are just deluded.

This just doesn't wash. You can't just dismiss the weight of anecdotal evidence this way. There is no scientific proof for ghosts, yet the universal experience of mankind indicates that *something* is going on. The Christian can be certain that ghosts are not the spirits of dead people (or animals, in some cases), but that doesn't mean that *something* isn't happening. In the same way, there may not be scientific proof for UFOs (in spite of 80% of Americans believe there is, and the government is covering it up*), but it's hard to believe that ALL alledged sightings are explainable natural phenomena or just overactive imaginations. I wish that Mr. Riddle had explored some [alternate views of UFOs](#), like the Probe guys did.

Still, it was a good lecture. I appreciated it, and I hope my young people did, too.

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* Interesting, after coming back from the lecture, I went to the store for groceries. On the way back, I was listening to a talk radio program, where a man was being interviewed who (among other things) had "proof" from "old-timers" - knowledgeable insiders - that the government was indeed hiding information about UFOs!

"The Truth Is Out There..."

July 22 2008: UnChristian: Saving People



In Kinnaman's book, the second issue with contemporary Christianity that turns off unbelievers is the passion to make converts. He makes the point that evangelizing Christians approach this "duty" with many misunderstandings of their efforts. These include several "myths" that Kinnaman lists, including "the best methods expose the largest number of unbelievers to the message." As a veteran of "crusades" and "revivals" and "outreach campaigns" in various churches and Baptist associations, I was always aware that this "campaign" mentality was a big turn-off for my friends, and I always wondered why the pastors didn't realize, like Kinnaman reports, that we turned away far more people than we brought in. I think my fellow church members realized this, and therefore all but the most serious or indoctrinated "soul-winners" were reluctant to participate in "Pack the Pew Night." Another misunderstanding is how much a turn-off it is for a Christian to make friendly overtures *in order to gain a hearing for the Gospel* instead of a genuine interest the other person. Again, I've been in too many door-to-door visitation projects, or shopping mall "witnessing" trips, so I know where this comes from, and again, it amazes me that the professional staff ministers who set up these projects don't understand how counterproductive they are.

I'd add another: "Bring your unbelieving friends to church." I did this some myself, with uniform lack of results. I still see children and teens doing this, thinking that exposure to a sermon, and church people doing their Sunday Morning stuff, will hopefully get them "saved".

But Kinnaman reports the biggest surprise: Most of our potential candidates have already been exposed to the Gospel! 82% have been in church services. 65% have had discussions with Christian friends about faith. 53% have already been asked to make a commitment to Christ. Many are *de-churched* young people.

Yet we treat our friends and neighbors like benighted heathens, and our primary activity towards them is to tell them the story of Jesus. They already know the story, better in many cases than the biblically-illiterate church people trying to tell them.

I think that the best part of this chapter is the recognition that the Church has bought into a very shallow idea of "becoming a Christian". Our evangelical model is "assert the truth of some propositions about Jesus and say this magic prayer". Then you're in the club, and the only expectation is to attend the

weekly music and sermon hour. In reality, Jesus calls us to be *disciples*, and to take up our cross, deny ourselves, and follow Him. It's a path that should involve every aspect of our lives.

The Barna Group has refined a list of markers for a maturing Christian:

- **Worshipping God Intimately and Passionately.** More than singing nostalgic songs for half an hour a week.
- **Engaging in Spiritual Friendships with Other Believers.** Where Jesus is the basis of the friendship, not some other mutual interest.
- **Pursuing Faith in the Context of Family.** Parents leading their children in "family altar" time, and living authentic Christian lives before them. Children honouring and obeying their parents.
- **Embracing Intentional Forms of Spiritual Growth.** Personal devotions and prayer, not because of a church program, but because *you want to know Jesus better!*
- **Serving Others.** Neighbors, family members, workmates, whom you know their real needs, and not as a church growth stunt.
- **Investing Time and Resources in Spiritual Pursuits.** Involvement in church ministries, sacrificial giving to charities, mentoring younger people - to serve Christ, not a church program.
- **Having Faith-Based Conversations with Outsiders.** Because you love them like Jesus loves them, not in order to see them "saved".

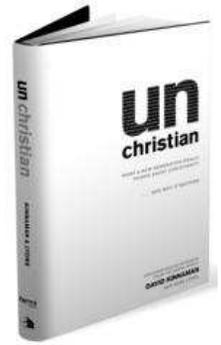
This is a good list; it probably isn't exhaustive, and you might argue some or question how biblical they might be. It is certainly a better picture of a real follower of Christ than "asked Jesus into her heart at some time in the past". If outsiders see this, rather than the shallow faith of typical church people, they may be more inclined to listen.

More importantly, if we are really serious about following Jesus, and less hung up on the forms of decision-based evangelism that church leaders tend to push, then maybe we will treat outsiders like God-created persons, worthy of love and friendship, rather than potential converts.

This change of focus must occur deep into our church culture. Which probably won't happen unless God does it.

July 19 2008: UnChristian: Hypocrisy

I got this book, [UnChristian](#), when I learned how it was an assessment of how non-Christians are turned off by our institutional forms of Christianity, which is a subject I am keenly interested in. Yes, it is a product of the Barna Group, by its president, David Kinnaman. Yes, I know George Barna has a reputation for bitterness toward the traditional church structure, and that many church leaders are inclined to write off anything he has to say. Possibly since I am perhaps a tad bitter as well, I'm not willing to write him off like that; besides, Kinnaman is not Barna, doesn't come with the same experiences and prejudices, yet his reading of the data brings him to similar conclusions. "Where there is smoke, there is fire", so I will read the book and draw my own conclusions.



The book starts off with its major premise: A high percentage of young (16-29 year old) non-Christians, and a similarly high percentage of young self-identified Christians, have a significant negative reaction to Christianity. Kinnaman then heads off the objection of "Jesus *said* we would be disliked" by suggesting that there is some substance to this negative reaction, that perhaps the Church is doing UnChristian things that at least contributes to this negative reaction. He lists six points of particular accusation made against Christians, and deals with them in later chapters:

- **Hypocritical:** Christians say one thing and do another, especially about moral subjects
- **Fixated on Making Converts:** Christians are too focused on getting people "saved", and really don't care about people for themselves
- **Anti-Homosexual:** Christians are hateful toward homosexual people
- **Sheltered:** Christians are old-fashioned, boring, and out-of-touch.
- **Too Political:** Christians are primarily motivated by a right-wing political agenda
- **Judgmental:** Christians are quick to judge others

As I've been reading, I totally agree with some things Kinnaman states, and I've got reservations about others, but I *DO* agree that these topics emphasize the need for reformation in the American Church.

Also, as I read and think, my interest is not so much the *image* of Christianity, that is, our relations with "outsiders". I believe that if we did the right things, rather, actually had an integrated Christian worldview, and the Church was *REAL* and consistent within itself, then our relations with outsiders would fall out automatically. My personal feeling is that we have become so concerned with the "outsiders" (after decades of "Evangelism" and "Church Growth") that we are not functioning correctly within. Many of Kinnaman's observations confirm my beliefs.

Hypocrisy - The Problem

Kinnaman makes an interesting observation about "hypocrisy": the Buster and Mosaic age-groups he is concerned about are themselves hypocritical, that they are used to stretching the truth (or more) on their MySpace pages or job applications and such, anything to get the desired effect. I'm not sure that "hypocrisy" is such a moral neutral as that, but if it is not - and they view Christians negatively for being so - or if it is - and they view Christians as nonunique in being so - then it is bad either way.

So what makes Christians hypocritical? It is that we claim that Christianity is about "being good", and then we aren't good.

When asked "What are the priorities for Christians to pursue in their faith", the top answer was "being good." Apparently this priority is strongest in the older groups ("Boomers"), who by and large are in control of church culture and its teachers and most visible representatives.

And yet, other studies indicate that the moral performance of Christians (in terms of sexual practices (including divorce), getting drunk, lying, cheating, stealing) is not different than non-Christians.

There's not a lot of challenge to this statistic. So we say that the primary indicator of being a Christian is moral purity, and yet we are not morally pure. This would certainly disqualify Christianity from being taken seriously.

But it gets worse. What "being good" means is decaying. Younger generations of self-identified Christians have attitudes about sexual practices (including homosexuality), gambling, intoxication, etc. that are much closer to their unbelieving peer group than the older generation of Christians. So even the passing of values of "being good" has failed, and the new generations are increasingly unable to portray a picture of what "being good" means.

Hypocrisy - My Take

The primary corrective that Kinnaman suggests is *transparency* - admitting that we are not perfect. I think this is valuable, and I will go on record that my job performance for my company leaves a lot to be desired, and my sexual thought-life, and the way I use (uh, waste) my time. I think "being good" is important, and *I don't measure up* - even though I'm trying to.

But I think the more important point is made by Kinnaman *before* he makes his "Shifting Gears" recommendation:

Older born-again need to look more carefully at what Jesus teaches, that spiritual maturity is demonstrated in a life as an *outcome* of the condition of a person's heart and soul, that behavior follows belief.

Jesus said (I paraphrase): "Love God, and Love Others. All the rest of the Law falls out of these two." If we focus on loving God and loving other people (that is, love as ACTION and not as a useless feeling of affection), then we will "be good". Conversely, if we examine ourselves and we are not "being good", then our love for God and others is suspect. The most important marker of a Christian is that he/she *loves* - and is repentant about failing to do so.

This needs to be practised by individual Christians - and taught to younger Christians in the Church. The "Be Good" goal needs to go in the trash can. Jesus set us free from that.

July 16 2008: Starting a New Church

I probably should say, a new denominational church, or a new Southern Baptist affiliated church, since a denomination, which has The Right Way to do everything, has The Right Way to start a church, and church planters either have to do it this way to obtain denominational funding or have been so indoctrinated that they can't think of any other way. At any rate, I saw this in action last Sunday.

Part of starting a church The Right Way involves the *Preview Service*, which is essentially a dry run of conducting a weekly worship service, with the help of other startup or established churches, to give a taste of things to come to any prospective members. [The Foundry](#) is a startup in Corona de Tucson, a small but growing community southeast of Tucson. Since he is also a starter (and seems to think along the same lines), our pastor, Jeremiah McDuffie, enlisted our help at their second Preview Service last Sunday.

It turns out a few other churches besides Element had shown up. One church had brought a "portable church", a series of rollaround carts containing A/V equipment and area screen curtains to set up a worship auditorium in places like the public school lunchroom where we were meeting. Another church brought their worship band. Other churches (like ours) brought volunteers to do stuff. We were posted at the signs directing visitors to the lunchroom and at the door to smile, shake hands, pat backs, act friendly - the role is "Greeter".

The time to start arrived, so inside, the band started up and the projector started displaying slides with the song lyrics and animated backgrounds. The "Greeters" remained outside for 10 to 15 minutes to meet any late arrivers, and then we went in ourselves. After a few songs, there was a "Children's Time" with the pastor, and then the children were shuttled off to "Children's Church" so the adults could listen to the sermon without interruption. The startup pastor delivered his sermon for about half an hour, and then there was closing music. Very clean, polished... stiff, orchestrated. Then the volunteers packed up the "portable church", stacked the chairs, and left.

During the music, I was sitting with a friend who is pastoring a successful startup and who didn't exactly do it The Right Way. He was pointing out the other church groups, and from what I saw, of the 30-40 adults there, almost all of them were volunteers from the other churches.

Before we left, the pastor's wife asked for feedback for how to do things better. How to do it better... It seemed to me that it was done very well. For a particular audience. For an audience of young church people expectating a worship service with contemporary worship songs, drums and guitars, computer projection visual aids, child care, and a sermon. But for an audience of spiritual seekers looking to find out what Christianity is really all about, I'd say it misses the mark.

Seems to me that The Right Way of starting a church appears to be *marketing the church*, with PR strategies like "Greeters" (performing a role calculated to set potential customers at ease) and websites and road signs (we saw a few on the way back, promoting the August 3 "Grand Opening" service). But is this really what Christianity is all about? A flashy worship service? Programmed live entertainment?

I wonder if The Right Way really "works", if the denomination really has evidence that this is a successful strategy. From where I stand, it sure seems like this strategy is focused on selling the church rather than celebrating the Christ. Seems like the participants are focused on creating an organization rather than being organic and real. For myself, I am unsatisfied enough with the depth and realness of my Christian identity. I am still looking for a local church to be real and help me be real, a church where people are free to be themselves as members of a family rather than an organization, and where the focus is on growing closer to Jesus rather than the quality or style of a weekly event (can you even call it "worship"?) or attracting new members. I am thinking that The Right Way really isn't very real, and isn't likely to result in the Real Church I'm looking for.

So I don't know if I'll help at The Foundry next time.

[July 7 2008: Who really goes to Hell?](#)

I've discovered an interesting site, [Transterrestrial Musings](#), a blog by Rand Simberg, who is an aerospace scientist of some note. He is also a self-declared agnostic (or practical atheist) and libertarian, although it takes a bit of digging through his site to discover this in responses to comments to his posts. Fascinating reading, really.

[At one point](#), he is critiquing Christianity, and says:

"But if hell be "complete separation from God,"

something that I've had all of my life, bring it on. All it gets from me is a shrug."

Wow. This really matches up with what C.S. Lewis and others have pointed out: God doesn't send anybody to Hell. People go there because they want nothing to do with God.

Note that Simberg's remarks are inspired by a Geraghty quote from National Review, [here](#), in which an Obama remark is analyzed.