

Thoughts on Christianity and the Church

August 29 2011: Left, Right, and Truth



I don't do politics here, or current events, really, and not that any of this is especially "current", but this is a worldview and ultimate-truth matter. As everyone knows, London has seen a tremendous riot of lower-class young people that shocked the nation. Of course, the pundits were filling the

blogosphere afterwards, speculating on the "why", and the answers of course fell along "liberal" or "conservative" lines: government cuts, poverty, family breakdown, liberal policies, welfare state. Similarly, the answers reflected the political leanings of the writers, with those on the "left" calling for a return to redistributionist policies, and those on the "right" calling for severe punishments for the apprehended rioters. A pretty good summary of the situation is provided by [Allister Heath \[1\]](#) of City A.M., a London business newspaper. Mr. Heath adds a comment on how the crisis will reflect on the English Prime Minister's career. Note how all of this - causes, responses, and analysis - all revolve around *government*.

In a similar development in the United States, young black men have been developing a variation of the "flash mob", where, instead of coordinating a large gathering via text messages to sing a song or perform a dance in public, they rob a store or assault white bystanders. Because of the suddenness of the attack and the number of conspirators, they perform their crime without fear of authority. Notorious examples of this practice have been [reported](#) in Philadelphia, Chicago, and the Wisconsin State Fair [\[2\]](#). Of course, the



pundits on this side of the ocean immediately start scribbling, again from their "left" or "right" political perspectives, and the results are pretty much the same as the English case. Again, the ultimate focus is on *government*.

But nobody has gone deeper: what has happened to our civilization's foundation that these things are even thinkable? And it *is* foundational - we have abandoned truth. In a post-modern world, there is no reason to do or not to do anything. In the lack of a mental/intellectual reason, emotion will guide the will. In fact, the false truth model the Western world has adopted - evolution is fact, we are just animals - simply encourages amorality. The only reason there is any good left at all, and that there are people outraged by these events, is that we are still coasting on the remnants of when the civilization *was* based on truth.

This truth is, the God of the Bible exists, and is the source for all reason, motive, and standard for judgment. The present world-wide culture has replaced God with the *government* as the supreme authority and hope for stability and justice. Unfortunately, "left" and "right" are locked in a struggle for what sort of government there will be. But the *real* grief is how many believers - church members - who *should* recognize and defend and promote the ACTUAL Truth, are themselves advocating "left" and "right" political positions and looking for a *government* solution.

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1. www.cityam.com/news-and-analysis/allister-heath/britain-s-crisis-the-real-causes-chaos-streets
2. www.nytimes.com/2010/03/25/us/25mobs.html

July 30 2011: Making Music and Culture

This is the [Tucson Symphony Orchestra](#) [1].



I haven't ever seen them perform, but I certainly intend to one day. Not only because of my "Tucson" schtick, and not because they are a wonderful leading musical phenomenon that people flock from all over the world to hear them. It is a symphony orchestra of a small-to-medium size American city with pretensions to high civilization - in short, it is *local culture* - everyone knows about it (even if they have no interest in it), it commands respect, it is always in the news (though often with the reviewer criticizing it), and it draws people from all over the city and influences their thoughts and attitudes and perhaps even their very Worldview.

It's *culture*. That's what it does. That's why they do it. That's why people are willing to support it by gifts and bequeathments and volunteering and all that sort of thing. It is not the private property of a monarch or a club - it is *public*, and it is there for all the people of Tucson.



And this is the [Tucson Boy's Chorus](#) [2]. Where a symphony orchestra is a "typical" cultural fixture for a city, the TBC is unique to Tucson. All the same, it, too, is a cultural phenomenon, intended to influence people's thoughts and ideas - *plus*, the TBC takes its western songs, rope tricks, prop cactus act on the road. They've gone as far as China as "good will

ambassadors". Tell me they don't intend to influence people!

Now, *this* is [Reveille Men's Chorus](#) [3]. It is the answer to "Tucson Boy's Chorus" by the homosexual community in Tucson. Their website makes no apologies for their intent for "outreach", they even have a list of objectives they intend to fulfill. They are also "famous" in the sense that a lot of people in Tucson know about them - outside the homosexual community, that is - and they tour around the country (and outside of it, on occasion), singing and unabashedly attempting to change people's minds and hearts.



Now, let's suppose that the homosexual community had meeting places (yes, well, of course they do). Let's suppose that these meeting places came up with the idea of putting together musical groups like Reveille for their own private enjoyment. We could imagine they would chip in and pay for a choir director and costumes and lights and an A/V system so they could enjoy the choir they put together. Obviously, a bunch of homosexual meeting houses with their own little choirs isn't going to have the same large-scale impact that a Reveille Men's Chorus is going to have. So they don't do that - instead, they chip in and pay for a community-wide Reveille Men's Chorus which has a *far* better chance at achieving their stated goals of "outreach".



Okay, got that? Now, here is your typical church choir. Or perhaps, not so typical; this outfit has costumes and a little orchestra. Little churches have little choirs, and big churches have big choirs and orchestras and handbell ensembles and praise teams and elaborate lighting and A/V systems. For what? For internal consumption.

The church were I am attending has recently had its music minister leave for a "calling" at a church in another city. While he was here, 100% of his time, 100% of his salary, 100% of the expectations the

church and the pastoral staff placed on him was to develop a music program for Sunday mornings. Congregational singing. Soloists. The "orchestra" (three people). The praise team. And the 15-person choir. All for internal consumption, all for entertainment on Sunday Morning.

Now, at this point, some might object: "What about the Christmas Pageant? What about the Easter Play?" Okay, what about them? Who really comes to them? Are they city-wide events? I know they are advertised as such, and the nominal "christian" church members who only come to church services on those two dates might come. But really, compared to the Symphony Orchestra or the Boy's Chorus, how much influence do church spectacles really have? **Virtually None.**

The church is being outdone in the attempt to influence our culture by the homosexual community! There *is NO* Christian counterpart to the Reveille Men's Chorus.

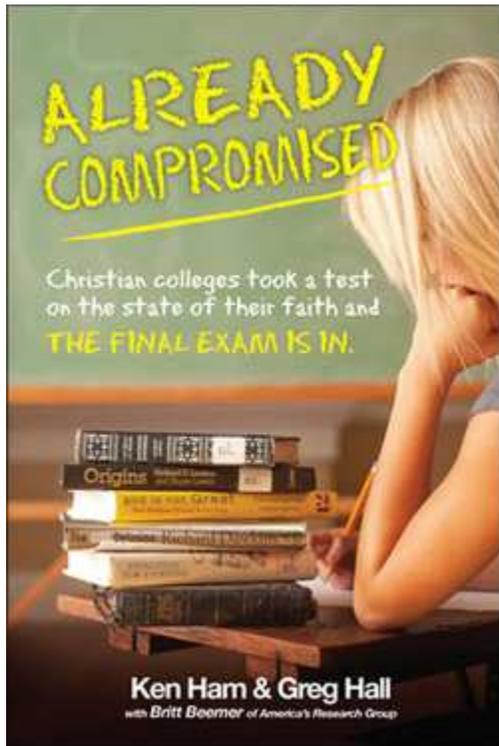
What I would like to see is a church, or better a bunch of affiliated churches (hmm, like the Southern Baptist churches in Tucson...) catch a vision and change the job description of the music minister. Instead of spending 100% of his time, salary, talents, training, and focus on "christian entertainment on Sunday morning", how about attempting to influence culture *outside the walls of the church building*? How about partnering together and laying aside the usual competition and insularity between church fellowships, and coordinate the sizeable resources of talented (and even gifted) people in the churches, and put together influential groups that operate *out in the culture*? With the financial backing of churches in partnership and the volunteer power of many hands, the churches could field choirs and orchestras and rock bands (playing at the Rialto and the Reid Park Bandshell and so on) and influence our local culture in a powerful way.

We have a better mission than Reveille. We ought to be at least as public-oriented.

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1. www.tucsonsymphony.org
 2. www.boyschorus.org
 3. www.reveillemenschorus.org
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July 23 2011: Already Compromised



I knew Ken Ham had released his new book, the "sequel" to *Already Gone*, and I knew what it was about, so I wasn't really intending to get it. But a few months ago, Ken Ham was at Calvary Chapel Tucson for an weekend Origins conference. We went, and afterwards, at the "resource table", Jerri bought a good number of books - including this one: [Already Compromised](#) [1]. It lay there on the kitchen table until we went on our little Mt. Lemmon Summerhaven vacation weekend, and I took it along and read it sitting in a deck chair out on the cabin porch.

It's 236 pages long, but page 170 forward are taken up by four appendices. The text itself is chapters alternating between Ken Ham, presenting the results of the survey performed by Britt Beemer and his America's Research Group polling organization and commenting on them, and Greg Hall, president of Warner University, providing his perspective as one who lives in academia. It was a pretty quick read, a bit over a day. The thesis of the book is that many colleges originally founded to advance the Kingdom of God, prepare pastors for the ministry, and educate young believers now have faculties and administrations who do not hold the Bible as the reliable Word of God, and therefore contribute significantly to young people questioning and frequently abandoning their faith.

I already was aware of this, so from this perspective, the book didn't really contribute much to my understanding other than statistics that quantify how bad the situation really is. I am also not sure that there is a remedy to the problem.

My children attended Desert Christian High, a private "Christian" school, along with other children from families who were affluent enough not only to send their children to an expensive private secondary school, but also to expensive private "Christian" colleges, like Calvin and Dordt. These parents are like many other "church people" I've known, who practice a comfortable, institutional, traditional form of

"Christianity" that includes placing their children in children's programs and youth ministries and private schools. I've been with these kind of children in youth ministries and camps, I've observed that any commitment to Christ is, for very much the majority, very superficial and lacking any reinforcement at home beyond *expectations for behaviour*. These kind of parents are unlikely to be concerned with the spiritual health of their children, and many of these DCHS parents are sending their graduated seniors to the same "Christian" colleges they themselves attended. In other words, they don't usually "shop around", and if they do, it is "brand appeal" more than spiritual authenticity or doctrinal faithfulness they look for.

On the flip side, I've known a lot of parents in churches I've attended who *aren't* affluent enough to send their children to private schools. In chapter 9, Greg Hall cites a statistic that 36% of Christian parents select a secular school because of finances. He thinks that figure is too low. I'm inclined to agree. Tuition at a private Christian university is not merely more expensive than, say, a state university; it is *orders of magnitude* more expensive. I know we can't send our children to a private Christian college; it has strained us to keep them in this expensive private "Christian" high school. In fact, I would say Christian colleges and universities accommodate a very small minority of the children from Christian homes. This is why the book didn't hold much interest for me - I think the authors are fulminating about a corner case. The real problem is a decay of spiritual fiber in all areas of Western culture, certainly including the institutes of higher education, both secular and religious.

Professors or Pastors?

On the other hand, at least up to now, *most* Christians are in churches. Most young people are in churches, and probably very much the majority of those are in children or youth ministries. Seems that a **true** "sequel" to *Already Gone* would be a survey of church pastors and their beliefs. I've been around many churches, in Tucson and elsewhere, and I've come across a few pastors that held to the "Genesis can be interpreted in terms of millions of years and evolution" compromise. Given that the *Already Gone* book lays out the case for young people hanging up on the church in high school, middle school, even as early as elementary school, and that they're not likely to get any systematic apologetic support for believing that Genesis is literally true under a pastor who doesn't believe it himself, I would say this is a much greater threat to Christianity than compromised professors in expensive private "Christian" universities that a small minority of these young people,

with the seeds of doubt already rooted in their hearts, will be subjected to.

This is my main beef with the book. The book is aimed at rank-and-file Christians, particularly parents, and the only advice Ham and Hall can offer is "check out what your candidate Christian college really believes and teaches", and that really only to those parents who are loaded enough to seriously consider sending their children to such schools. A much better approach, in my mind, is to survey **pastors** for their beliefs about Genesis, so that *any* of those lay Christians can challenge their own pastor. Seems like a potentially much better "bottom-up" strategy.

Now, truly, those pastors come by their compromised beliefs somewhere - and we already know where. Seminaries and ministerial colleges. This is where I can express some pride in my Southern Baptist heritage, due to the "Conservative Resurgence" of several years ago. The Bible-believing majority in the denomination used their voting rights in the Convention meetings to put trusted authorities in control, who then acted to purge the seminaries of liberal influences. As a result, pastors being trained for the ministry receive a better background in Southern Baptist schools.

Unfortunately, this effect was not effectively extended to general education institutions like Baylor University or Grand Canyon University, right here in Arizona. Furthermore, even in our Southern Baptist seminaries, we will have celebrity intellectuals like Dr. William Dembski - who, while being a key "Intelligent Design" promoter, [still applies the "millions of years and evolution" interpretation to Genesis \[2\]](#). He gets away with this because the litmus test on the *seminary* side is "inerrancy", not a faithful, plain-meaning interpretation of scripture.

Scientists or Pastors?

This brings up one of the interesting things that I appreciate about the book. In the ARG survey, science professors at these "Christian" universities were questioned along with the religion professors. While the two groups had similar proportions of answers to "do you believe in the inerrancy of the Bible" and "is Genesis 1-2 literally true", they differed remarkably for questions like "did God create in six literal 24-hour days" and "do you consider yourself an old-earth or young-earth Christian". It seems the *scientists* have more scripture-honoring positions than the *theologians*!

This simply reinforces my observation that church pastors are much

more concerned with preparing this week's sermon and managing the church staff and overseeing program activities than really thinking through their positions on controversial subjects. It's easier for them to believe what the "scientists" are saying (although they don't seem to listen to what *Christian* scientists like the ones at Creation Research Institute and Answers in Genesis have to say). It's easier for them to accept what their teachers and heroes in the theological schools say on the subject - even though those professors don't agree with the *scientists* in their own schools!

You would think that these pastors would at least notice local creation science groups like our own [AriZona Origins Science Association - AZOSA](#) [3]. However, what I notice is, in spite of AZOSA moving around the city to whatever church is willing to host them (and it's hard to find churches willing to host), *it is rare to never for the pastor to show up!* Or even mention the meeting; there are always a few church members who come because the meeting is at their own church building, after all - but always only very few. It's simply not important to them.



Now, I have it in mind to explore the possibility of offering myself as a creation science speaker in Tucson-area churches, representing AZOSA, and maybe showing up with some other AZOSA people in our cute little shirts to sell books, magazines, and videos. I suspect that there will not be very many pastors willing to surrender their time in the pulpit, and certainly not to someone advocating a controversial concept like "a literal Genesis".

The Manager Effect

And this leads me to another fascinating aspect of the survey reported in the book. The survey included university presidents and vice presidents. The most striking part of this comparison is that, in the very schools where the scientists believed much more biblically faithfully than the theologians, the vice presidents tended to be more aware of the discrepancy, but the presidents did not! In fact, *none* of the presidents believed (or at least admitted) that evolution was being taught as true in their schools, when the religion professors freely acknowledged that they were so teaching. Furthermore, while the presidents were convinced that there would be consequences of teaching unbiblical matters, the vice presidents knew that such

incidents often escaped consequences.

Now, Ham and Hall were very charitable in speculating on why the presidents would be so ignorant of the true state of their schools. Perhaps, for instance, the presidents were preoccupied with presenting their schools in the best possible light to families in the market. I would put a different spin on it: This is how management operates in general. As an employee of a major defense company, I have always been very much aware that the top-level management was utterly clueless about the state of any one program or even about all of them. They only care about the bottom line, of profit and bookings numbers. In fact, even the Program Manager tends to not be very knowledgeable of the inner workings of the program. Nothing is ever really seen unless and until it becomes a problem with serious threat capacity. Even then, it takes a good deal of explaining (usually) before the manager understands; usually he/she commands large-scale and inappropriate reactions to a problem, which generally makes it worse. This is how managers work. Whether they are just focused on other things (like cash flow, or public relations, or next Sunday's sermon) or they are surrounded by intermediate managers (like production managers, or vice presidents, or associate pastors) with a vested interest in "spinning" or "slanting" the news to the boss, the manager doesn't have an accurate understanding of *how things really are*. This is true in industry. This, according to Ham and Hall's research, is true of university presidents. And elsewhere, I've seen statistics that indicate church pastors have an unreasonably optimistic view of the state of their congregations.

Summary

In the end, it was a pretty good book, in terms of being interesting. In terms of being useful, it was rather focused on parents and high school graduates exploring private Christian higher education options. That's a pretty narrow segment of the Christian community; I would rather that Ken Ham and America's Research Group had focused on church pastors, something of vital interest to pretty much all Christians. In spite of this, the book gave some valuable insights regarding how theologians uncritically accept evolutionary concepts that many of their scientific counterparts reject, and also how college presidents tend to be unaware of the doctrinal orientation of their faculty. Both of these points are applicable to church pastors as much as to the academic personnel who are the subject of this book.

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1. www.answersingenesis.org/PublicStore/product/Already-Compromised-Book,6823,224.aspx
2. blogFOUNDERS.org/2010/03/tom-nettles-responds-to-paige-patterson.html
3. www.azosa.org