

December 31 2007: "I Want" in the Church

As suggested previously, the "I Want" motive for values and actions is found in both unbeliever and believer contexts. Unfortunately, when found in believers, it isn't the individual "I Want" that is so destructive a pattern of spiritual immaturity as when groups, or an entire church, is marked by a communal "We Want". For example...

Pastor

In Baptist churches, and maybe others, when the church needs a pastor, the members hold a "business meeting" and appoint a "pulpit committee" to do the looking. Most of the time, the committee members are picked to represent the communal "We Want such-and-such kind of a pastor" of the majority of members, and the committee then goes out to find the kind of pastor that "We Want". Usually, this is done by attending services in churches with pastors who are looking for a new place and assessing their sermon-delivery skills. When a candidate is found, there is usually a pro-forma interview by the elders or deacons to make sure the candidate's doctrinal positions are acceptable, but the ultimate point of decision is "We Want this kind of pastor." On the other end of the issue, after the pastor has settled in and is confident enough to point out matters that need to be addressed (such as spiritual maturity!), when enough people have their toes stepped on (typically in three years), the people say "We Want you to resign", and the process starts over.

Auditorium Decorating

The auditorium isn't just a place to meet; it is an expression of the styles and tastes of the membership. When the furnishings get shabby, or the paint faded, or the carpet worn, once again, the members hold a "business meeting" and appoint a "decorating committee". The committee dutifully collects quotes and samples and swathes, and presents them to the membership for selection. Everyone then votes on what "I Want". Always there is someone who doesn't get what "I Want". Sometimes bitter feelings remain. Sometimes, people leave - sometimes half the church.

Music

Isn't this a controversial issue anymore? Which is "better" - traditional hymns, or contemporary songs and choruses? Both sides offer "objective" reasons why their style of worship music is "better", but it's clear there's a lot of "I Want" behind the scenes. Ultimately, "I Want" is at the root of one of the most divisive issues in our churches today. Is it possible that seekers are not so interested in the style of music as in a more God-focused than self-focused worship?

.....

That's just three examples of how spiritual immaturity, revealed by the "I Want" motive, is crippling the mission and testimony of the church in America today. The situation will not be resolved by addressing symptoms - how pastors are chosen, or auditorium decorations, or music styles. The problem is spiritual, a discipleship issue, a matter of self-denial and submission to each other.

Interestingly, there may be nothing churches can do about this! The leadership needs to program toward spiritual maturity. But the congregation lacks spiritual maturity, doesn't "I Want" to be so challenged, and won't let the leadership do it. It may be another God-only thing, calls for revival.

December 29 2007: I Want vs. God Wants?

Actually, I've been building this thought for a few months now, but when better than Christmas to consider the "I Want" effect? Kids are famous for leafing through the Penney's catalog (ooh, does that date me?) to make out their Santa list, and it's non-stop "I want this" and "I want that". No surprise, "I Want" is part of our mind, the volition part, and there's nothing inherently wrong with it. It becomes a problem, however, when my "I want" comes into conflict with someone else's "I want". In spiritual terms, that "someone else" is God.

	God Wants	God Doesn't Want
I Want	Wonderful!	PROBLEM!
I Don't Want	PROBLEM!	Wonderful!

- If I don't want something, and God doesn't want it either, then there's no conflict.
- If I want something, and it happens to line up with what God wants, then this is the ideal situation, where my will lines up with God's.
- If I want something, but God doesn't want it. then we have a problem. If the something I want is to do something or be something or have something, and I insist on doing or being or having it when God doesn't want me to, this can lead to the *sin of COMMISSION*.
- If I don't want do do or be or have something, and God does, then this is also a problem, and my refusal to line up with God's will can lead to the *sin of OMISSION*.

Let's see how this plays out for an unbeliever and a believer:

The Unbeliever

At the risk of provoking some hard-line Calvinists, I would state that, when Jesus died for us, He paid for the sins of **everyone**. Sins like lying, theft, even murder (even of millions of people) don't send a person to Hell. Rather, it is the exalting of one's own desires over God's. This is the lesson of Romans 1, that nobody has an excuse, that even people who have never heard about Jesus have had a revelation of God's existence and power in Creation, and it is their choice to serve their own passions and delusions that cuts them away from God. This is true for the benighted tribesman in outer Mongolia as much as the atheist or pagan in the United States.

But it is also true of people who claim to be Christians, too. It doesn't matter if you can quote the Creeds and know the Bible backward and forward (as many of our church people do), if you have exalted your desires over God's, then you are just as hell-bound as that pagan or atheist. In other words, it isn't enough to claim Jesus as **Saviour**; you must make Him **LORD**.

The Believer

Now, believers are subject to the same "I Want" problem as unbelievers. The difference is that they recognize this, and make some effort to conform their desires to God's. A believer's spiritual maturity corresponds to how completely or successfully they have subjected their own desires to God's. This is also the source of joy and peace in the Christian's life: To the extent that your will is lined up with God's, there won't be that conflict with the One who really counts (even though there *will* be conflict with other people - believers *and* unbelievers - whose desires are more opposed to God's, and therefore, to yours). Plus, there's nothing stopping you from being used in God's service, and therefore accomplishing something of eternal value, and fulfilling your created purpose. Plus, since your "wants" expressed in prayer line up with God's "wants", per I John 5:14-15, your expectation of answered prayer is greater. So it's obviously a desirable position to be in.

But it's hard. It is, in fact, the work of **discipleship**, and something the church needs to be doing. I'd argue that this is a candidate for the Greatest Problem of the Contemporary Western Church, that we put out too much effort to *accommodate* people pursuing their own "I Wants" over God's, rather than encouraging, teaching, and expecting the believers to "deny themselves" (Luke 9:23) and "be conformed to God" (Romans 8:29). Praise and teaching and fellowship are good and necessary things, but without the intentional alignment of our "I Wants" to God's, there will be no formation of mature believers.

December 28 2007: [Who is Loosing Christmas?](#)

I've got the the week off! And as part of my free-time, I've read through Mark D. Roberts excellent [Christmas Resources](#). One of these was about [celebrating Christmas in public](#), and specifically about the current move to remove all Christian religious symbolism from the holiday. This is especially poignant for Zonies, when our own governor [renames](#) the Christmas tree. In fact, this episode reflects accurately what Mark is writing about, in that her official position was to promote "diversity" (by eliminating diversity), but the underlying motive was more likely anti-religion, or anti-Christian.

But Arizonans elected her. And the board members of Target supported the [policy](#) to ban the use of "Christmas" in their ads, and continue to support the ban on [Salvation Army donation pots](#). Now, normally I welcome the efforts by groups



like [American Family Association](#) to fight for our citizen rights as Christians. However, I'm not sure how much getting Target to resume using "Christmas" in their ads (which happened) is defending our "rights" or even propping up the sagging cultural acceptance of Christianity in this nation. I think the fact that Arizonans elected Napolitano (supposedly because of her economic record) in spite of her proven anti-Christian positions on issues like abortion speaks more to the fading of Christianity as a cultural force. Ditto for the stockholders who approved the Target governing board (although, as a voting stockholder myself (not for Target, of course), I know how that really works). The first question is, can we effectively change this fading trend by being negative, as the AFA tends to operate? The second question is, can we - or should we - attempt to change the trend at all?

I'm beginning to believe that that answer to the first question is "No". Yes, "we" got Target to change their position. Yes, Ford is suffering (whether from "our" boycott due to their avid support of homosexual normalization, or from the general malaise afflicting all American automakers, is probably not discernable). Does this "in your face" adversarial approach advance the cultural acceptance of Christianity? Not according to Southern Baptist church planters, who are choosing "contemporary" names like "Journey" or "Oasis" or "Element" to hide the fact that they are Southern Baptist affiliates. Seems that, especially in the West, Southern Baptists have a negative connotation due to (among other things) our boycott of Disney (which may or may not have had anything to do with the exit of Eisner) and our position on the subjection of women (which is how the media spun "wives, submit to your husbands"). Apparently, as the light of Christianity fades, we Christians are more widely known for what we are **against**, rather than what we are **for**. This negativity works against any cultural re-acceptance which AFA or Southern Baptists may hope for, and assures that low-scale "victories" over Target or Ford will ultimately be lost.

But I'm not the only one asking "are we winning?". And I'm probably not the only one asking "should we even try?".

In my personal devotions, I'm reading through Jeremiah. The point to this book is, there was no hope for Judah, and God knew it, yet He sent Jeremiah as a prophet to warn them anyways. God even told Jeremiah, "don't bother praying for Judah" (14:11). So there's a limit to cultural activism, whether by a prophet explicitly sent by God to His Chosen People, or by Christians fighting for our "rights".

On one hand, if we really *are* approaching the End Times - the entire earth has been exposed to the Gospel, the machinery for the one-world government of Antichrist is in place, the controversy over Israel is approaching crisis levels - then the Great Apostasy foretold by Paul (II Thessalonians 2:3) should be expected, and we Christians cannot prevent it, certainly not via political activism.

On the other hand, if there still is time, if there still is hope for America and the West, it is past time to recognize that Christian political activism - whether cultural, like AFA fights for, or judicial, like [ACLJ](#) tries to do, or in the government, with some misplaced hope in the Republican Party or some hopeless third party startup - **hasn't** really worked, isn't working **now**, isn't **going** to work, and we are fools to "continue doing what we've always done in the hopes of getting a different outcome". These activities are *good*, they are *necessary*, but they are NOT our hope for ultimate restoration. At best, they are delaying tactics, to buy time for the Real Strategy. Which is...

In Jeremiah, I note that God's hangup is, yes, with the oppression of the poor, sexual immorality, perversion of justice, but more so with the spiritual deadness that was *behind* those symptoms. Idolatry. Phony worship. Misplaced faith/trust. In other words, *spiritual* problems with God's people. In the same way, the problem with

America is foundationally in her *churches*. Not merely being positive rather than negative, or doing God's Love projects (like Mark describes in his article), but a spiritual refocus on God, through spiritual disciplines like prayer (and fasting) and obedience to Christ. A spiritual transformation that will naturally result in positivity and Love service and an effective non-programmatic evangelism. When our churches are healed, then we will have the sort of positive influence on the larger culture that might result in Arizona citizens rejecting anti-Christian governors, or stockholders rejecting politically-correct Target board members. At that point, Christmas becomes part of the culture the way it Should Be, organically, and not through religious imposition.

December 8 2007: Contemporary Church Strategy

The Problem

I've been in a lot of Baptist churches growing up. I've visited several Baptist (and other evangelical) churches in Tucson. I've spoken with a lot of evangelical adults in Bible studies at work or conferences and lectures here and there. I've been around a lot of Baptist and evangelical youth groups and their leaders at camps, rallies, and evangelistical events. So I hope I can make some observations and express some opinions about our evangelical culture based on a bit of experiences.



American church people approach church the same way they approach other aspects of life:

- **House:** Is the location where I like, are the schools good, are the neighbors like me?
- **Job:** Is the salary better than other offers, how are the benefits, is the chance for promotion good?
- **School:** Are there famous professors in my major, what are the recreational facilities like, how high is tuition?
- **Exercise:** Is the gym equipment up-to-date, do I like the paint color, is there daycare for my kids?

Some of these things are reasonable considerations, some less so, but all are self-interested: "What do you have to offer me?" Everything in life is subject to analysis of how *I* benefit.

The Americans who call themselves "christian" are not different. We move into a new area, or we become dissatisfied with the goods and services offered by our current church, so we go church-shopping.

- Is the pastor a talented and entertaining speaker?
- What kind of music do they play for the service?
- Are there fun programs for my children or teens?
- What social activities do they have?

Most/all of the churches I've been part of, visited, or associated with are interested in growing numerically larger. They actively work to attract new members just as much as businesses work to attract customers. And, since the group from which they hope to draw new members is the same post-baby-boom self-interested

consumers that businesses go after, churches use the same strategies.

- Pastors are motivated to develop their preaching skills, and pour tremendous effort into sermon preparation
- Professional music ministers are sought who can assemble choirs and bands and orchestras
- Children's Ministers and Youth Pastors struggle to invent entertaining programs
- All manner of social events are planned, such as senior citizen outings, softball leagues, musical concerts, even motorcycle rallies and surfing competitions

And so forth. Then these offers are advertised, marketed to the group of religious consumers.

At this point, you have to step back and look at it: Is this *really* what church is supposed to be? What is "god" here - the Creator and Saviour, or "success" defined as numerical growth? Given the popular assessment of the Church as being "a mile wide and an inch deep", is it surprising when so much effort goes into appealing to people's "felt needs" and so little into the hardness of the authentic Christian life: discipline, self-denial, personal holiness, "Take up your cross and follow Me"?

What is worse is, since this is the church's approach to attracting and retaining membership, it inescapably marks the approach to evangelism. "Bridge events" are planned to attract non-believers, or for members to invite their non-believing friends. Non-believers are enticed to participate in programs and social activities. "Seeker-sensitive" services are slick, professional, upbeat, stirring, with contemporary music and "life-application" messages. If another church or minister invents a clever approach to outreach ("F.A.I.T.H.", "God's Love in Practical Ways", etc.), other pastors implement it, hoping to get the same results. When a new believer is made, since they are already an American consumer, and that is how they were introduced to Christ, the pattern has been set; they become a self-interested religious consumer, rather than a disciple.

This has been the church's strategy for the past several decades. And we are losing. Megachurches get larger primarily by drawing consumer-members away from smaller churches. Smaller churches dwindle and die, largely because their "product portfolio" is required to retain (or more often, controlled by) the existing members, and do not appeal to potential consumer-members. Non-believers, who are looking for something spiritually satisfying, do not find anything the church has to offer interesting, and so go shopping for their own post-modern "truth" in Wicca or paganism or New Age beliefs.

The Answer

Surely, things can't keep going as they are. What we're doing is not working, and, "if you keep doing what you've always done, you'll always get what you always got." Something needs to change, and per the above analysis, what needs to change is the church's catering to American (or, rather, Western) self-interested consumerism. Christ was quite opposite from this point: "If you wish to save your life, you must lose it", and "he who would be greatest among you must be servant to all."

Furthermore, Jesus *must* be restored as GOD, the *reason* for the church's existence, the focus for all her thoughts, the goal of all her efforts. The church should encourage one another to seek, serve, and surrender to Jesus, whatever the personal cost. Survival and growth as an organization are secondary, even expendable objectives, in the strategy for Christ to be honored and obeyed.

When believers seek to conform to God, rather than having Him conformed to themselves - this is the path to *joy and peace*, and a confident faith that can face persecutions (which are already mounting in the West, even in the U.S.). When believers are plugged into God, beyond merely having selfish interests served, and practicing discipleship and experiencing life-change - this is what a spiritually-starved unbelieving world is looking for; this is what will bring curious non-believers, not to be entertained or served, but to witness what Christianity is really all about.

.....

The Bigger Problem

I can't see it happening.

I can't see it happening in big churches. There's too much infrastructure depending on dollars given by satisfied consumer-members. Even an effort to return to an authentic, sacrificial, self-denying Christianity would result in too much fallout to support salaries and property.

It's possible to see it happening in small churches, particularly small churches who are teetering on the edge of extinction, whose members are willing to allow change to survive. But even this very thing may balance against successful transformation, when "survival" (just like the big churches, only on a smaller scale) becomes "god". If a small church comes to the point of realizing that *Jesus* is more important than their *survival* as a corporate, property-owning body, *then* their might be hope for transformation.

It's more likely to happen in church startups. However, again, if the church starter pastor attempts to build a church on the same model as existing churches - that is, by appealing to "seekers" and prospective member-consumers on the basis of "felt needs" and "goods and services" and "benefits" - then obviously there's no gain, and no hope of real (beyond numeric growth) success. Certainly the terms laid down by the Southern Baptist Convention church planting agency for providing money encourages (if not outright preferring) the strategy of attracting sufficient satisfied member-consumers to pay the pastor's salary.

Perhaps the most likely place to see an authentic Christianity is in organic home-churches, which have no professional pastor to support (at least, not on a full-time salary) and no property to pay for - and no facilities for consumer-benefit programs and activities. Perhaps a home-church is the best place to look for an authentic Christianity - provided *that* is what you're looking for, and not great music or a fun place to park your kids.

December 4 2007: Evangelism in my Post-Modern World



I had an interesting experience today. The manager of a project had me and another engineer (who is also a Christian friend) at his desk working on the project schedule. At one point, he made a statement right out of the blue, perhaps to cover, explain, or defuse some perceived blasphemous remark he had made:

I used to be Roman Catholic, but now I am Druid. I got over all that Christian stuff.

Of course, my friend and I studiously accepted this statement without comment. I suppose that, were I of a quicker mind (I'm definitely not), or a more practised auto-response evangelist (see my remarks on evangelism [elsewhere](#)), or even less concerned about a religious harrassment accusation (which he had already committed, but it seems like Christians, whether on the job or on the street, are never the victims of "hate crimes", only the perps), I might have made a suitable response.

Of course, being the introvert I am (which may be part of my problem with being willing *or* able to respond quickly to things like this), I keep analyzing the event:

- Why did he say this? Was he *trying* to get a response? Was he disappointed that he did not get a response? Will the failure to get a timely response reduce the weight of my words and deeds in the future?
- What *would* I have said? At least identified myself as a Christian. But what beyond that would have helped rather than hurt?
- What can I do *in the future*, perhaps over lunch, to reduce the charge of "proselytizing" or "harrassment" at work? Ask him for more details behind his decision to switch? His reasons for thinking "Druid" has a better claim to being True than Christianity?
- Should I even do *anything* of my own planning, without being explicitly led by the Spirit?
- Can I even *do* or *say* anything that would carry any weight with him, since I do not have a friendship relationship with him, or have demonstrated Practical Christianity in any way I know of that would earn the right to a hearing?

But as this analysis boils, one thought comes clearly to the surface: I am focusing on the problem. Evangelism is not my purpose. Responding to a pagan challenge is not my purpose. My purpose is to know God personally and deeply, and surrender my life to the control of the Holy Spirit. I have no real hope (even with training) of being an evangelist (in the sense of "good news teller", as opposed to the usual "soul winner" connotation), or of living a life that doesn't contradict my evangelistic words, if I am not plugged into God. I have no hope of

responding immediately to a situation like this, with any grace, unless the Spirit makes the response through my mouth. I can't even assess a situation like this with clarity if the Lord is not guiding my mind.

With this perspective, an encounter with a pagan (or a bad driver, or an injury, or a disappointment) is not something requiring a response. It is a reminder that we need to be plugged in to God. When we really *are* under God's control, then we already made the appropriate response, and don't need to think about it any more!

November 14 2007: Another God Encounter

I think God has done it again.

I was in Ridgecrest, California, a few weeks ago, as part of a helicopter test (see travelogue [here](#)) at China Lake Naval Air Weapons Center. It's a military base, of course, so you need a visitor's badge to get through the gate. I had arrived the previous Wednesday and got mine from the test project leader, and used it the rest of the week. As it turned out, we managed to do all our ground tests that week, and the part of the test where the helicopter actually flies - the part of the test I was actually need for - was scheduled for Monday. A fellow Raytheon TOW person was going to show up on Monday to help, so the project leader gave me his badge to give to him Monday morning, since we were both staying at the same hotel.

Friday night, I put my China Lake badge, my Raytheon badge, and my friend's badge in the dresser drawer (to keep them out of sight of the maid staff). Saturday evening (after the day spent at Death Valley) I checked on them; still there. Sunday evening (after the day spent mountain climbing) I took all three badges out and put them on the table. Monday morning, I packed (I was leaving Ridgecrest that afternoon, after the test) and picked up all three badges and put them all in my pocket. I left the room, put the bags in the trunk of my rental car, and sat in the lobby to wait for my colleagues. I put my hand in my pocket to retrieve the badges and pulled out two - my friend's China Lake badge and my Raytheon badge. My China Lake badge was gone.

I retraced my steps down the hall to my room, and out to the car. Nothing. I looked all over the car, and unpacked my bags. Nothing. I went to the desk and asked if I could have a room key to look for a missing article, which they graciously gave to me. I carefully and thoroughly examined the room. Nothing.

I did this twice. Nothing. My friends showed up; it was already late for the morning's pilot briefing, so there was nothing but to hand over my friend's badge and apologize for being unable to come. They left, and I did the thorough trace-the-steps and unpack-the-bags and search-the-car and comb-the-room. Twice. Nothing.

So I sat outside in my car listening to the radio and passing the time, wondering what was happening to me. The darkness of morning gave way to the light of dawn, and I searched the ground under the car, the adjacent cars, and the track through the parking lot to the lobby. Nothing. I asked at the desk if anyone had turned in a lost China Lake visitor badge. Nope.

The time for the briefing was now over, so I called my friend on the cell phone.

"Is the briefing over?"

"Yes."

"Does it look like you can do this test without me?"

"Well, it turns out the helicopter is broken. We had to cancel the test for today."

After that bit of amazing news, the discussion revealed that the briefing had been very fruitful. The primary reason I was needed was because the China Lake test people had insisted that the helicopter could only land, for reconfiguring the TOW RF Transmitter, back at the flight line, some distance from the test range, so two "experts" were needed. The pilot and the rest of the Marine aircrew denied this restriction: "They're *helicopters*, we can land anywheres, and we do it all the time." With the pilots and the (now educated) test people, the test plan was rearranged to be exactly what we had wanted in the first place, and only one TOW-RF "expert" was required.

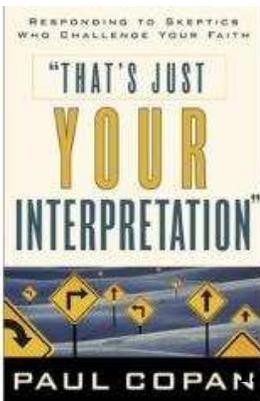
So it turns out that I wasn't needed for that day's test, which had been cancelled, and I wasn't needed for the rescheduled test, now that it was more efficient. I have to understand that this was God teaching me that He is in control of the situation, by taking me out of control.

But the most amazing thing to me is the bit about the badge. I *KNOW* I had put all three badges in my pocket just minutes before I reached back in and *it was gone*. Now, I might be inclined to believe (since I admit the power of the supernatural over the merely material) that the badge had physically vanished from my pocket. A skeptic would counter that, no, it merely fell out and landed in a location impervious to discovery, but this would have been no accident, and just as miraculous as the other.

Plus, if it really *was* a miracle, it wasn't the usual sort of "blessing" miracle, where God provides something that is needed, like healing or providing a resource. It was a "negative" miracle, removing something that was needed, or believed to be needed, in order that I would be forced to trust in Him and not myself.

Why shouldn't God work in unusual ways like that?

October 31 2007: Philosophers and Science



I've finished reading this book by [Paul Copan](#), who is a Christian philosopher/apologist specializing in post-modernity and relativism. When I started it, I thought it was a treatise on post-modernism and how evangelicals and other moderns can approach people who deny any absolute spiritual truth, rather more like his other book, [True For You But Not For Me](#) (which I haven't read, any more than the intro and reviews, but I need to). Actually, it is, but it proposes the following strategy:



TRUTH - Start by revealing to a post-modern friend that their assumptions of no absolute truth doesn't survive closer inspection.

2. **WORLDVIEW** - Proceed by exploring different worldviews, such as monism or pantheism, atheism, and theism, and demonstrate that theism offers the best answers to the basic questions.
3. **CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS** - Finish by defending Christianity as the best flavour of theism.

Now, I thought the first part was good, interesting, but somewhat light - only four chapters, the merest sliver of the entire book. But I suppose that this book is the sequel to [True For You](#), so I need to suspend my criticism

here. I thought the second part was okay, perhaps good where it counts (like the discussion about the problems with monism and reincarnation and karma), since New Age and spirituality (aka warmed-over thinned-out Westernized Hinduism) is currently the rage, and less so with the traditional objections of atheism, which I thought bled over from the Christian Apologetics section. I thought the last part was okay, too, although slightly missing the mark. The questions answered as part of Christian Apologetics are not the typical post-modern objections that I've run into. With youth, at least; maybe Paul deals more with adult post-moderns, but it seemed to me that this was more of your traditional "answering the atheists" style of apologetics, which is largely what apologetics has been for the past century or so. Some of the chapters are good answers for questions that bother even young Christians, like "How could Jesus, if He were God, be *tempted* in any serious way?" But in answering his atheist (or post-modern) questioners, I think he fell short in an important area: Origin Science.

He spends *two chapters* attacking young-earth Creationism. His premise is that when Christians insist that Genesis is literally true, and the earth is only thousands, not billions, of years in age, they embarrass themselves before sophisticated, erudite, scientific post-moderns and atheists who know the "scientific" "facts" cannot be reconciled with this position. My problem with what he writes in *two chapters* about the subject is that we have a *philosopher* assessing *scientific evidence* in a book dedicated to *Christian apologetics* (that is, "reasons to *believe*"). I think he gets his facts wrong.

- He states his belief that evidences for a young earth "appear to lack solid scientific support." He has the good sense not to explicitly include radiological dating in his list of evidences for an ancient earth; you can hardly find a more hole-ridden evidence for antiquity, yet it is precisely *that* one that is primarily used to justify the ancient earth position.
- He lists "fossil record" as an evidence for an ancient earth. In fact, he emphasizes that "geologists witness the fossilization process taking place in our own day with regularity." They certainly do! And it takes *days*, not *millennia*! Mr. Copan is fond of quoting Dr. Hugh Ross (an astronomer who has become a Christian but defends the ancient earth model and theistic evolution) to support his points, but I think Ken Ham gets the point here: *everything* about the fossil record screams "World-Wide Flood", not "millions of years".
- He is quite taken with the "Big Bang" evidences for the age of the universe, and is apparently unaware of the serious problems in the "Big Bang" theory, and of the existence of young-universe cosmologies.

I suspect that the reason Mr. Copan dwells so long on this subject is that it is a personal issue with him; he has a horse in this race, and he is taking the opportunity in his book to show it off. I believe that in a book about apologetics (presenting reasons why Christianity is TRUE), this subject should have been omitted.

- The "other side" (atheist, evolution, naturalism) recognizes that when Christians accommodate an ancient earth and trans-species evolutionism, they are *compromising*. They are not more willing to accept the spiritual truths of Christianity when we have already acceded to their Origins myth.
- On the other hand, people (especially young people) who *are* struggling with the belief in Christ see evolutionism and the "fact" of the ancient earth as "disproving" the Bible, and reasons *not* to believe. Assuring them they can have both is not addressing the actual point of their distress. On the contrary, the creationism ministries have volumes of testimonies from people who are relieved to discover they *don't have to believe* the atheist Origins myth!

- At best, the "old-earth day-age theistic evolution" position versus the "young-earth literal-Genesis" position is an in-house debate. If Christian theologians, scientists, and philosophers are divided on the matter, then it is hardly a good tactic to push one side on a potential believer just emerging from the darkness of post-modernism.

But then, I suppose I *would* react in this way, since I, too, have a horse in this race. When the young-earth position is one of my [reasons](#) to remain a Christian, I'm sensitive to having it attacked in a book purporting to defending reasons to believe.

October 19 2007: [What Doesn't Promote Spiritual Growth?](#)

Programs!

Here's an [article](#) in Christianity Today about what Bill Hybels and Willow Creek discovered after a bit of serious inward-focused research - that programs do *not* promote spiritual growth! Participation in church activities is *not* an indicator of spiritual vitality. Rather, discipleship - prayer, Bible study, living Truth - is the necessary path to spiritual growth, and *this* does not require or even benefit from elaborate and expensive (in terms of time, talent, and personnel) programs.

October 18 2007: [Another Encounter with the Divine](#)

God has done it again.

I was in Alabama again this week. Tuesday, I was headed south on Patton Road, one of the major connecting roads on the Arsenal, en route to the EMI test facility. I saw a FedEx truck off the road on the other side (northbound). There was a pickup truck ahead of me and a minivan some distance behind me. Apparently, the pickup truck was supposed to meed the FedEx truck. Instead of pulling off the road and waiting until it was clear to cross over, he stopped in the road with his blinkers going. I pulled up behind him, brake lights were on.

Apparently, the minivan driver didn't know what was going on. I became increasingly concerned as the minivan continued to approach at full speed. When it was clear that impact was imminent, it popped into my head to get off the road, so I pulled off on the (almost nonexistent) shoulder next to the truck. Just at that moment, the minivan came to a stop, tires smoking and squealing, right where I had been, and just short of hitting the pickup.

I suppose the skeptic would write this off as a fortunate coincidence, or my presence of mind. However, knowing myself, that I don't normally have any presence of mind (jab at self), I would have been far more likely to brace for impact and contemplate the hassle with the car rental company than trying to take evasive action. The fact that I didn't, and that the failure to move would have definitely resulted in a very bad accident, affirms to me that Someone was looking out for me.

Put this in my my personal [experiences](#) why I continue to believe there is a God who wants to relate to me!

October 12 2007: [Being Salt and Light](#)

You can find inspiration in the darndest places.

I was surfing, and encountered the website of [Rocket Team Vatsaas](#) (highly recommended). They have a series of Dogbert replies to stupid situations, including one to a stupid company who objected to them making a working model of their "Black Rocket" company trademark. Anyways, in the [response letter](#), RTV creates the image of people who

recoil... from a child puking in a crowded elevator.

This was pretty powerful to me. The normal reaction if a child throws up in an elevator is to back away, look the other way (which we do in elevators anyways), and escape en masse at the first time the doors open. But what would a Salt and Light Christian do? Maybe approach the kid? Ask if he's going to be all right? Maybe kneel in the vomit and hug him? Maybe (in the words of my young friend Corinne) "give him some water and a doughnut"?

I believe the other people on that elevator (especially the kid, and maybe his parents, if present) would be shocked that the Salt and Light Christian did something so far outside of what is "normal". I can easily see someone else, as the elevator doors open and people step quietly off, taking the arm of the S&L and asking, "why did you do that?"

But let's consider some modifiers to this situation:

- What is he wearing? Maybe, like those kids on the Huntsville-to-Dallas flight, the Christian is literally "wearing his faith on his sleeve." Or on his back. People are already aware that he's a Christian, and some (especially the younger ones) will have already formed an unfavorable opinion of him. At any rate, nobody will want to ask him why he did what he did, as the explanation is right there on his shirt, and the only thing left for them to wonder about is the motive.
- What is the motive? Is he actually moved by compassion for a fellow human creature, made in the image of God? Or is he fishing for a chance to "witness"? If he is actually motivated by love, then the act of love is enough. No need to say anything loudly: "I hereby assist you in the name of Christ!". No need to tuck a "God's Love" card or a Chick tract in the kid's pocket.
- What does he reply? When the person asks, "why did you do that", what does our S&L say? "Because I am a Christian"? Or "Because he is a person made in the image of God, and I wanted to love him like I would want to be loved"? If the former, would S&L not be at risk of activating the cultural distaste of pushy Christians who always want to "witness" to you, just like those types with the religious tee-shirts? It would certainly be the end of the conversation. Whereas, the second response reveals the worldview that produced the action, and invites further enquiry.

So I'm starting to suspect that I've been pretty deeply programmed by my evangelical upbringing, to look for every occasion to "witness", to declare that *I am a Christian* to those around me, and to feel guilty when I fail to do so (as I did on my previous Huntsville visit with my two friends). This is the mindset that induces us to perform actions *for the purpose of "sharing our faith"*, and wearing religious clothing. This is the mindset that (at least partly) has made Christians in the United States an object of suspicion and distaste. But Salt and Light are supposed to be attractive, not repulsive, and they are supposed to arise from us as natural products of our worldview and the filling of the Holy Spirit, not as artificial tools of our religious evangelism training.

October 08 2007: Failing to be Salt and Light

I recently was in Huntsville with two young unbelieving friends. The week passed well enough. I didn't do anything (to my knowledge) offensive or objectionable. We got along well together, including discussions about the sort of females we found attractive (I picked out most of Jerri's attributes from the list I was presented), and I got to offer "fatherly advice" about dating vis-a-vis marriage, which they graciously accepted. We criticized co-workers and the unpleasant manager on the Army side of our project - soldiers sharing our sorrows in the trenches. They got their beer, and I didn't, nor did I make any noises of judgment. I wasn't dull (I showed them the Space Museum and the entrance to a pit cave off a trail on Monte Sano). I swung my share of the load on the job.

Then we got on the airplane back to Dallas. A group of older high-school or college people from [Whitesburg Baptist Church](#) was on the plane, with their Bible-verse tee shirts and mission trip tags on their backpacks. They were animated, but not objectionably so (nothing like Junior High kids). And yet, the friend whom God had arranged to be sitting beside me, right behind the seats of the WBC kids, remarked in a deprecatory tone, "those Christians."

This experience leads me to a few observations:

1. Ordinarily, Christians will stay within their culture. Whitesburg Baptist is a "megachurch" in Huntsville. Megachurches (or even generally *most* evangelical churches) tend to be mainstream and traditional, focusing on keeping the members happy, rather than radical commitment. So it is not unusual (especially in the Bible Belt) to find groups of church kids travelling to retreats or mission trips or choir tours or camps or other manifestations of youth Church Culture. These kids will not behave differently than unbelievers (or sometimes worse, from what I've seen at Arizona Southern Baptist Convention-sponsored youth activities), but they will advertise their religious orientation on their shirts.
2. So what [Neil McClendon](#) had to say about Christians living in their Christian Culture and failing to be Salt and Light tends to be true for groups of church kids.
3. I can't rag on those churchy kids; *I* had failed to be Salt and Light. I had played a double life so successfully that my friend thought that I was not a Christian, and so was uninhibited to point out "those Christians" to me. This bugs me. A lot. If someone can't tell I'm a Christian without me telling them I'm a Christian, then something is wrong.
4. There wasn't anything objectionable about the behaviours of those young people. My friend had a negative perception of Christians apart from anything those kids were saying or doing. At least, as far as I could tell; perhaps my perceptions are colored by my background as a church person; perhaps my friend had his own experiences with church people that colored his perceptions. I'm not the only one to note this: a [Barna](#) associate has produced a book, [Unchristian](#), documenting this phenomenon.
5. So now I'm stuck. Proclaiming my Christianity, or proclaiming the gospel message ("witnessing" in evangelical parlance) appears to immediately raise barriers between me and those I wish to reach. So the standard evangelistic method is actually counterproductive! The evidence of a transformed life must be present before any words are offered.

I really don't know what to do with this, but it serves to reinforce my leaning that evangelism by itself, as

practised by Southern Baptists and other evangelicals, *doesn't work*. More and more, I'm convinced that I have to live with my eyes on Jesus, not on growing the church or the youth group, not on "saving" my lost friends. I hope these things will happen, but I can't put the cart before the horse.

.....

On a related note, the Sunday AZ Daily Star ran a New York Times [article](#) on how churches, or youth ministries, are using violent video games like Halo to attract people to church. I get a negative tone from the article, like "those Christians are inconsistent with their Thou Shalt Not Kill and using video games", or "those Christians are pretty desperate", or "churches just care about getting more people in". Maybe this is more of my colored perception. The fact remains, however, that the Christian Culture *is* putting the cart (church growth, attracting more potential members) before the horse (knowing Jesus, and living in radical commitment). *It isn't going to work*.