

Thoughts on Christianity and the Church

December 28 2010: Paul Washer

I am a (non-paying) "member" of sermonaudio.com. Yes, a website where churches can put their audio files (and videos) of their pastor's sermons for public access. So am I being inconsistent with my opinion of sermons? On one hand, I decry the sermon as being a discardable, distracting, ineffective aspect of the traditional church, and on the other hand, I am downloading sermons delivered at these "worthless" "worship" services. **No**. Sermons are communications, similar to books or pamphlets or web essays, and if the message is good, the verbal speech is a useful thing. The problem is two-fold: First, the sermon by itself is not an effective or sufficient tool for teaching or discipleship, but too many traditional-style churches, and pastors of those churches, view the sermon exactly as the one sufficient and necessary teaching tool. Second, even on sermonaudio.com, the Bible-story or Bible-application or denominational-prejudice sermons greatly outnumber the worldview or prophetic style sermons, thus providing confirming evidence of the general (but not universal) ineffectiveness of sermons.



But there are a few speakers on sermonaudio.com that can be depended on to consistently deliver worldview or prophetic or correctional type messages, and I've found that Paul Washer is one of them. Paul is the leader of the [Heartcry Missionary Society](#) [1], reflecting his beginnings as a missionary to Peru that formed so many of his convictions. I first heard of Paul via his "shocking youth message", which I got, and which led me to two of his other messages:

- [Reforming Modern Youth Evangelism and Discipleship](#) [2]
- [10 Indictments of the Church](#) [3]

Actually, all three audio messages are similar and raise the same points, and there are versions of these points in the FAQs and Statement of Beliefs on his [heartcrymissionary.com](#) site. The *10*

Indictments is the most concise statement of his complaints against modern traditional evangelicalism, so I will summarize the ten points as follows:

- 1. Bible is Sufficient.** Too much influence from modern sociology, etc., instead of the Bible. Don't need surveys of unbelievers (sounds like a direct slap against Saddleback). No clear examples. Misapplication of "don't consult mediums" to church growth experts.
- 2. Ignorance of God; we need to know God.** Self-help books in Christian bookstores. [Moralistic Therapeutic Deism fits here.] Not much "teaching" on who God is (again, "preaching" is primary means of teaching). [This speaks to my personal current call from God - to focus on God, to pray, to seek Him, not to do church stuff.] "Better not even to have a Sunday morning... greatest hour of idolatry... people worshiping a God formed out of their own hearts by their own flesh".
- 3. Failure to address Man's malady.** Condemnation is not the great Summum Bonum, but people need to see what they are. Comparison of old-style evangelism (conviction of sin) vs. new (spiritual questions and magic prayer) [Ken Ham's observation of "Jew" vs. "Greek" evangelism strategies fit here [\[4\]](#)]. On the other hand, are they "Jews" in churches who need to repent?]
- 4. Ignorance of the Gospel.** I think he nitpicks on soteriology, how Christ saves. I don't think this is a *necessary* component of salvation, or it would be more clearly spelled out in Scripture. [IS the Bible sufficient?]
- 5. Ignorance of the Doctrine of Regeneration.** Creedalism, "belief" is not enough, must be evidence of a "new creature". He has "declared war" on The Sinner's Prayer. Salvation is by faith, but the evidence of conversion is not the sincerity of belief but ongoing fruit in your life. "Tree is known by its fruit".
- 6. Unbiblical gospel invitation.** Not "heaven", but "God" people need to want. Repentance (hatred of one's sin) must be evident. Young people who leave the church - "not living consistent with your Christianity" or "never were truly converted"? Can't assure someone they are saved after a "magic prayer" or an invitation, can't write off doubt as "the devil's attack" if you were "sincere about asking Him into your heart". The idea that the "lack of personal discipleship" indicates a "Carnal Christian" has destroyed many lives. Anecdote of him working with a dying Canadian cowboy "til Christ was formed in him".

7. Ignorance regarding the nature of the Church. "Because of the lack of Biblical preaching, the so-called church is filled up with carnal wicked people identified with Christianity". Old question: Have unbelievers in the church to be exposed to the gospel, or is the church exclusively believers? (issue in Jonathan Edwards' father's time)

8. Lack of loving and compassionate church discipline. "Can't teach a goat to be a sheep". Discipleship must follow true conversion.

9. A silence on separation. Holiness is neglected. "And sanctification, without which no one will see the Lord." If no growth in holiness, God isn't working in the life. God disciplines a son. "Be not unequally bound".

10. Fathers are primary disciplers of their families. Sunday School must not circumvent family-based teaching. Youth group - "Companions of fools will be destroyed". Youth need to be with adults and not be conformed to "delayed adolescence". Outsider youth need to see families together, not more of what they have in their own lives (no parents involved).

Now, personally, I disagree with Washer on points 1 and 4, mostly agree on points 2, 3, and 7, and am nodding vigorously on points 5, 6, 8, 9, and 10. In fact, point 10 is one of my "intentional church" complaints about youth groups. Recently, I have been surveying church youth leaders about their ministry philosophies, and so far, *not one* has any intentional effort to involve families as families; all of them deal with young people as an isolated age group, and regard the parents as at best a source of youth workers and chaperones.

Washer leads me to reconsider a point I made earlier - is his point 5 (and correlary point 7) just a different way of making [Hymers' point](#) that the real problem is the lack of "real" conversions? I believe we *do* have a problem with discipleship, but if we have a deeper problem of trying to disciple unsaved people, no wonder it isn't working. Yet Hymers did not offer anything other than more gospel preaching; Washer is demanding a top-to-bottom reformation of evangelical church strategy and structure. Yes, he is still hung up on the centrality of the sermon, but he's hardly unique in that. But a *change in perspective* of the church **by the church** is precisely what is required before any structural changes can occur; maybe it takes forceful, confrontational preaching like Washer is doing.

I read web posts by other (usually traditionalists, even King James-Only types) who are quick to write Washer off as a heretic because of his insistence on repentance. But Washer is *not* stating that repentance from a sinful lifestyle and a pursuit of holiness must be a prerequisite of salvation, a "works" part, but is clear that "real" conversion (not the "easy-believism" of the "magic prayer" that I am also skeptical of) *will* be accompanied by repentance. If there is no repentance, if there is persistence in sin, it is evidence that there was never conversion in the first place. This would explain much of the young people I have known (and taught) who drifted away, whose lives were never particularly different than those of the frankly unbelieving young people in their schools and other hang-out places.

Where would Paul Washer put Ken Ham and *Already Gone*? Probably in the same place Hymers puts him - well-meaning but wrong. I think there needs to be a synthesis of the two positions. Ham does not address or consider "real" conversion in the problem of the 66% - 85% of youth who hang up on the church, and Washer and Hymers do not consider a comprehensive worldview-oriented education as a superior alternative to the "Bible-only" gospel preaching (**traditionalist**, for pity's sake, tried and proven FAIL) method. If we recognize that young people - even those raised in the church - perhaps *particularly* those raised in the church and potentially "inoculated" against the gospel - need to understand how and why the Bible message is true and reliable, moreso than the humanist propaganda they are being fed in public schools, then we may see them responding better in "real" conversion to the divine promises in that now-proven Bible message. And of course, parents are a fundamental component of that process, something that both Washer and Ham recognize.

So I appreciate the message of Paul Washer, and agree with most of it. I will admit the possibility that this agreement is based at least in part on a shared perspective that the traditional western church structure is "broken". But again, I recognize that Paul and I aren't the only ones who have come to that conclusion.

But yet, however much I appreciate Paul Washer's analysis or indictment of contemporary western church culture, and agree with his recommendations, I fear he will never be taken as anything more than an annoyance, a gadfly (things I am familiar with), even a heretic... *until the church recognizes that the real problem is lack of divine power and returns to seeking God in prayer*. Paul Washer omits this critical necessity, and that may be the primary difference between

his assessment and my own.

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1. www.heartcrymissionary.com/
 2. www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=1211101534390
 3. www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=102308839520
 4. <http://www.answersingenesis.org/Home/Area/wwtl/chapter7.asp> - Ken Ham makes the case that, on Pentecost, Peter preached a sermon to Jews, who had enough Bible literacy to understand our need for a Saviour because of the Fall in Genesis, and saw thousands come to repentance. In contrast, Paul delivered a message starting with first principles (who and what God is, the Creator) to the Athenian Greeks, who lacked this basic understanding, and saw only a few converts. Our public culture in the West today is far more similar to the "Greek" case, but churches insist on applying methods and preaching sermons for "Jews"; this is one reason why our evangelism efforts are not fruitful.
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December 27 2010: A C. S. Lewis Christmas Miracle

I started my Christmas holiday on Thursday, December 16, the same day my eldest daughter returned from Flagstaff for her holiday. The next day, we went to see *Voyage of the Dawn Treader* as a family.

What can I say? It's good! Not quite as faithful to the book as the first film, and not as strong a gospel allegory, but much better on both counts than *Prince Caspian*. But I see this as sort of a Christmas miracle. Our western culture is throwing off its Christian heritage at an increasing rate, biblical and cultural literacy is decaying in both the secular and the religious spheres, and yet Fox and Walden Media and Douglas Gresham can provide this film, with the statement by Aslan:



I am. But there I have another name. You must learn to know me by that name.

Unmistakeably Christian. A testimony for the world.

Or maybe not. In our amazing capacity to twist the truth, we can have Liam Neeson, the voice of Aslan, saying

Aslan symbolises a Christ-like figure but he also symbolises for me Mohammed, Buddha and all the great spiritual leaders and prophets over the centuries. That's who Aslan stands for as well as a mentor figure for kids - that's what he means for me.

Of course, Neeson is a "Hollywood Catholic", so one might expect a politically-correct, pluralistic, post-modern statement from someone

who is pop-culture deep and theologically shallow. And no surprise that the [source article](#) [1] puts more post-modern spin, insisting that Neeson is within his rights of interpreting what Lewis means *for him*. In post-modern theory, our interpretation of a work is more correct *for us* than the original intent of the author, which results in any work being able to mean anything to anyone. That's kind of a "miracle" all its own, of the wrong sort, and all too common to be truly miraculous.

(The article goes on to describe the "vilification" by the "Third Reich of the Christian community" of Neeson's remark. If the [official story](#) [2] by *Christianity Today* is what the writer is talking about, it appears that any sort of disagreement is "vilification" by "Third Reich" types. But that's 1984-style strategic redefinition for you.)

Anyways, I thought that *Dawn Treader* shines like a light in a post-modern world that desperately wants to pretend that the Jesus Christ that Aslan unmistakably represents is just a figure of "good" which, of course, all religions promote. Maybe that's why it hasn't done as well as it might. On the other hand, the [current \\$63 million](#) [3] ranks well with the other films released at this season, and if it misses its estimate, it may indicate something more about the economy than how well a follow-on film would do. I am hoping/praying that Walden Media and (preferably) 20th Century Fox will see fit to produce the next Narnia film. Maybe *The Silver Chair*, which should be much more economical for props and special effects than *Dawn Treader* was.

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1. www.cinemablend.com/new/Liam-Neeson-Enrages-Christians-By-Comparing-Aslan-To-Buddha-22063.html
2. www.christiantoday.com/article/liam.neeson.says.narnias.aslan.could.be.muhammed/27215.htm
3. boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=narnia3.htm

December 12 2010: They're Not Coming Back

I recently ran across an article in the November 2010 issue of [Christianity Today](#) [1] titled *The Leavers: Young Doubters Exit the Church*, by Drew Dyck. Yet another study in the topic of young people (in this case, 20-30 year olds) who leave the church and often the faith. The chorus of warning voices is rising and coming from all

directions; I would hope that churches would start taking the problem seriously and quit thinking that just doing the traditional church thing is going to make a difference.

Another web post occurs in this context, one from [another church culture pundit](#) [2] with a solid reputation. Just a few weeks ago.



The most important point of the article to me was whether the young people are going to come back. The article cites a few other "experts" who shrug the problem off with "we've seen this before; they'll be back when they marry and start having children." This is a point that the [unChristian](#) [3] book by David Kinnaman makes. However, Mr. Dyck observes that, while earlier exoduses were followed by returns, in this case, there is no historical precedent. There are four aspects of the current situation that argue against a return.

- The rate of departers is far greater than past episodes.
- Before, a "hiatus" of a few years before responsibility and maturity set in could be expected; now, the "prolonged adolescence" phenomenon changes this scheme.
- By all accounts, marriage is falling into disrepute; therefore, young people are less likely to experience the settling and commitment aspects of the marital state.
- Previously, the overall background culture was still largely "Judeo-Christian". This is increasingly no longer the case.

Then the article turns to the reasons why the young people are leaving. In some degree, moral compromise or intellectual problems are involved, but to a very great measure, the survey reports, "most leavers had been exposed to a superficial form of Christianity that effectively inoculated them against authentic faith." When young people (as early as middle school, per the [Already Gone phenomenon](#) [4]) don't get the authentic Christianity and the Truth that encompasses all of human experience (to counter the "truth" they are taught in government-run public schools), they are not equipped to deal with doubts, and have nowhere to turn. When they do ask questions, they experience negative reactions or unhelpful "help" from other Christians.

The article ends with some reflections of what might help with this

unprecedented problem. "Only with prayer and thoughtful engagement will at least some of the current exodus be stemmed." (Oh, look: "Prayer". "Intentional Programming". Where have I seen *that* before?) There is no substitute for "serious programs of discipleship and catechism."

After reading this article, I return to my core concerns:

First, if we can't passively wait on cultural forces like marriage or a Judeo-Christian consensus to return them to the pews, then the church must actively do something. We've already tried to think up solutions by ourselves; the "seeker-sensitive" movement and youth-oriented move to casual dress and contemporary music was the leading edge of the church's reaction to a perceived problem. *It isn't working*. We must universally, as the Western Christian church, return to seeking God in **PRAYER** for direction.

Second, *maybe it is decreed that they won't come back*. In II Thessalonians, Paul says the final chapter of world history will be preceded by a Great Apostasy, a "falling away". Perhaps this is what we are seeing. If this is true, then God is behind it, and nothing we do will solve the problem. How can we tell? The same way: **PRAYER**.

And whether they return or not, we are still obligated and privileged to live out a Christian Worldview in the face of increasing persecution and tribulation. Maybe a return to *this* aspect of the early church will have an effect on the new pagans.

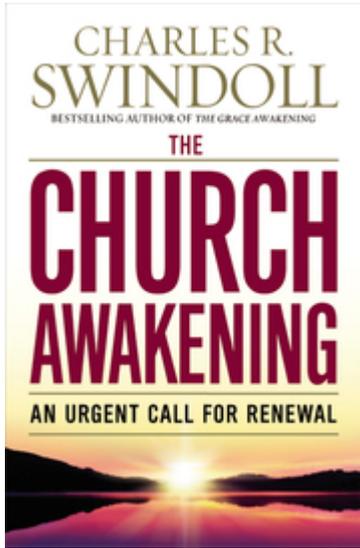
(Not that I'm too anxious for the prospect... to be honest...)

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1. www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/november/27.40.html
2. townhall.com/columnists/JaniceShawCrouse/2010/12/04/the_tribe_of_young_unbelievers_increases
3. www.barna.org/store?page=shop.product_details&flypage=flypage.tpl&product_id=1&category_id=1
4. www.answersingenesis.org/get-answers/features/already-gone



December 10 2010: The Church Awakening



The books, magazine articles, and web posts that I read and comment upon all have far more public visibility than my little blog here. Some of the authors are actually quite famous in evangelical circles. So it is with Ken Ham of *Already Gone*. And so it is with Charles Swindoll. A lady whom we meet with in a three-way "smallgroup" is a fan of Charles Swindoll and regularly listens to his [Insight for Living \[1\]](#) radio program. She recently got his book, [The Church Awakening \[2\]](#), and as she read it, she realized it aligned with what I had been mentioning (complaining about) in our "smallgroup". So she loaned it to me, and I read

it.

Charles Swindoll is as engaging and entertaining as a writer as he is as a speaker. No difficulty understanding why he is famous, or why his church, Stonebriar Community Church, is so large. In fact, I discovered that Stonebriar is in Frisco, Texas, in the Dallas area, and not far from McKinney, where I occasionally go on business. I'll have to see if I can visit sometime. If Swindoll has a shortcoming, it would be that he is so comfortable speaking and writing that he seems to have trouble being concise - his detailing of the aspects of the evangelical problem, and his recommendations for what we should do, are scattered all through his book, somewhat disguised by the context, and it is often difficult to recognize them.

It is gratifying to me that a *pastor* (rather than a church-growth expert or parachurch ministry head or evangelical pundit) recognizes from his own church that there is a problem, and to some extent, his assessment of the problem aligns with my own. He states that the problem is that "erosion" has led us away from what the church, as described in Acts 2:42, should be:

- The Apostles' Teaching
- Fellowship - more than eating potluck meals together
- "Breaking of Bread" (which Swindoll interprets as "Communion", so he reads this as Celebrating the Ordinances, and adds in "Baptism")
- Prayer

He returns to this theme on occasion. Now, it seems that Stonebriar had some sort of problem about ten years ago that required an intentional and painful restructuring. It isn't clear to me that this restructuring was to address the general, church culture-wide problems that I and many other evangelicals and emergers are concerned about, or a particular problem with Stonebriar's rapid growth and the accumulation of deacons and elders, some of which had to be removed, and who may have been the "wolves among the sheep" that some of the later chapters are concerned with. He isn't clear. And when he describes what a "contagious church" would look like (chapter 3), he only indirectly references *some* of the four "early church" characteristics:

- **Grace** - "Simply share what Christ has done for you... how contagious!". Well, yes, and this goes along with an earlier statement -

"And it's more than a curiosity at the number of people. It's their passion. It's their Spirit-driven enthusiasm. It's the obvious work of God engaging the lives of believers in a meaningful connection, a genuine compassion, and an almost electric excitement about reaching out into the community and investing themselves wholeheartedly into places of ministry."

Is that a description of Stonebriar today? Is this a result of some activity following their restructuring, or is it (as it says) a sovereign work of God - in which case there's not much point in presenting this as something the church "needs to do" to be contagious.

- **Mentoring** - A different take on discipleship. Swindoll denounces the pattern of sit / take notes / walk out / repeat each week for Sunday morning sermon-hearers. Discipleship is "passing the baton, not just dispensing information". He advocates one-on-one personal life involvement, and rejects age-targeted ministries that separate young adults from other age groups. Sounds great... is this what Stonebriar does? They don't do traditional Sunday School?
- **Fellowship** - The hard work of sacrificing your own time and interests and exposing yourself to hurt by sharing with others in their hardships. In this case, Swindoll does refer to a Stonebriar

ministry, "SoulCare", that does something like that. No clue as to how "core" or "essential" this ministry is, or if it was planned intentionally by the church leadership, rather than a "bolt-on" ministry that some laymen decided to do and the church permitted.

The second half of the book is a mishmash of themes that is hard to extract any clarity from. He decries the "worship wars" (hymns vs. praise-band songs). He states,

"Stop and think. *That* is what we want to cultivate in our churches. Not a group of selfish people who come together to be entertained, but a body of selfless believers who are learning how to worship God as a lifestyle."

He notes the increase of Biblical illiteracy in our culture, even among church people, and the trend of "insulating ourselves in a Christian hothouse" with lingo, friends, books, activities, music, stores - things that lead us to take Christ for granted. And after an extended discourse of how we need Biblically-faithful, *expositional* preaching, he ends the book with three changes that need to occur:

1. The people of God must return to a hunger and thirst for righteousness (not be satisfied with entertainment and shallowness)
2. The ministers of God must repent of their failure to fulfill their calling (a plea for *expositional* preaching) quit being phonies, and not neglect their wives and families
3. The house of God needs to represent its Biblical Purpose for existence (prayer, not business; worship, not entertainment; Jesus is our savior, not our brand in the market)

But again, not much for how Swindoll leads the people to "hunger and thirst for righteousness" or the church to "represent its Biblical Purpose for existence". The statements are a bit vague and abstract; *this engineer* would appreciate a bit more concrete, "This is how we do this" or "What we need to do is", which (frankly) is more characteristic of Ham's *Already Gone* or Warren's *Purpose-Driven Church*. But most disturbing to me is the apparent failure of taking his own advice - that we as the church need to return to Teaching, Fellowship, "Breaking of Bread" (even interpreted as the Ordinances), and Prayer. Perhaps his expositional preaching would be Teaching (I would disagree that preaching adequately fulfills the mandate). Maybe we had some clue at one point what Stonebriar means and does about Fellowship. He didn't

say anything about how frequently to observe Communion. And he didn't say anything about *PRAYER*.

So it was a good book, an engaging book, and a gratifying one from the perspective of someone who recognizes that something is deeply wrong with the contemporary Western church. However, I thought it was too loosely organized and full of disconnected ideas and entertaining clutter to make a clear statement of what Charles Swindoll thinks ought to be done, and how his church is doing it.

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1. www.oneplace.com/ministries/insight-for-living/
2. www.christianbook.com/church-awakening-urgent-call-for-renewal/charles-swindoll/9780446556538/pd/556538

December 5 2010: Traditional to a Fault

Another series of articles from *Answers in Genesis*. I knew a big part of their ministry was doing presentations in churches at the Sunday Morning service. I knew a big part of their ministry is selling resources. I've always been in churches where it was common for some outfit to make a presentation and sell resources; these churches (for all their other shortcomings in the "Discipleship" Purpose) have understood that getting these kind of resources into the hands of their members is as important as having them sit and listen to a speech. Apparently, not all churches are like that! *Answers in Genesis* has been turned away from churches because they try to sell resources in the building, which equates in the minds of many to "money changers in the Temple". So they posted three analysis articles on their website examining the problem.

1. What is the context of the teaching regarding money changers in the Temple? (Not money-changing, which would be buying access to God, when really, access to God has been bought by Christ and is free to all). [Part 1 \[1\]](#).
2. Are church buildings the same as the Temple of the old covenant? (The Temple was a shadow of things to come; now, the Church is the people, the body of Christ, and the building merely a place to meet). [Part 2 \[2\]](#).
3. What is the correlation between worship in the Temple and the

church gathering? (God is seeking those who worship in spirit/truth, does not specify a day or place like in the OT, no need of an "altar"). [Part 3 \[3\]](#).

So the root problem is church people getting hung up on wrong traditional ideas.

To me, this is just more of the same. I'm amazed, but not surprised, that "church people" can have wrong ideas about the church building (being the Temple) or selling stuff in church is evil (well, actually, I *have* encountered that before, in regard to youth fundraiser bake sales for camp or church rummages sales). After all, this is the same mindset that cannot conceive of any alternative to traditionally-styled "worship" services or Sunday School, and is ultimately behind the "Worship Wars" of traditional hymns versus praise band songs.

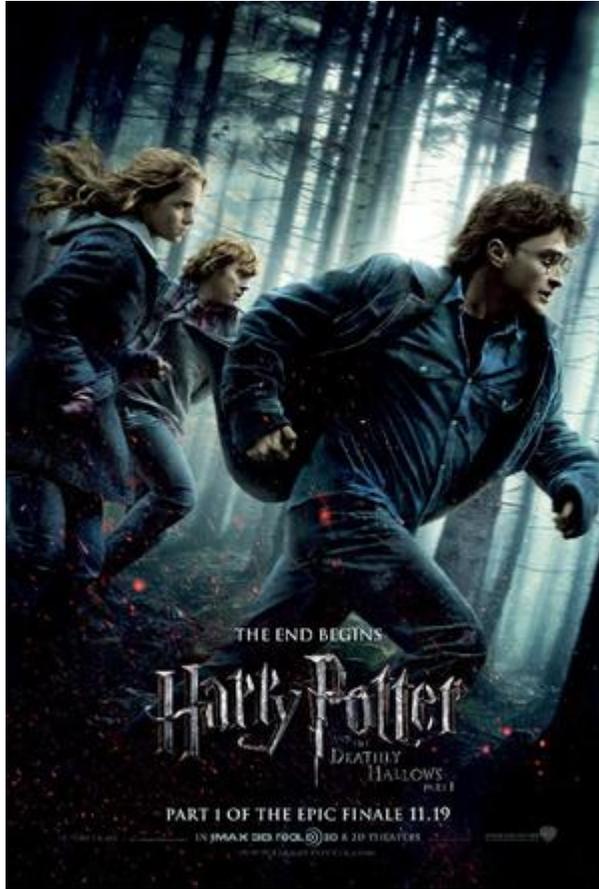
Tradition can be a good thing. It seems to me, though, that it is almost *always* a bad thing in a church context. Maybe that's why Jesus spent so many words countering the religious traditional notions of His day.

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1. www.answersingenesis.org/articles/2010/11/22/money-changers
 2. www.answersingenesis.org/articles/2010/11/23/church-buildings
 3. www.answersingenesis.org/articles/2010/11/24/true-worship
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December 4 2010: Positive or Negative Influences

On Black Friday (the day after Thanksgiving), when my older daughter was home from university for the holiday, we went to see *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, Part 1*. We had already read the book together, so we knew how the story went, and that there was way too much critical content to fit in one movie. I'm thinking when the conclusion, Part 2, comes out in June, the theatres would do well to put Part 1 up again.



Now, I am aware that many of my fellow believers, particularly pastors and "church-people" traditionalists, are opposed to *Harry Potter* and loudly advocate that Christians should not see the movies, and that Christian parents should not permit their children to see them or read the books. Because of the magic, you see. So I was not surprised to find an article in [The Christian Post \[1\]](#). In this case, the argument is made that *Harry Potter* is dangerous for young people, after noting that the appearance of *Harry Potter* was followed by a significant increase in teen involvement in Wicca.

All right. Let's lay aside the question of causality, if we are justified in stating a causal link between the two events, that they are not merely coincident or even themselves both effects from other, common causes. Who are these teens that are turning to Wicca after being exposed to the magic of *Harry Potter*? Are they unsaved teens? Then who should be surprised? We live in a pluralistic culture where there is no standard of truth is generally promoted (or rather, in fact, the standard of *secularism*, even *atheism*, is generally promoted in schools and popular media); why should these young people without a better influence not be curious or excited about something so cool and fun as magic, and look for what truth models in society offer something like it?

But what if these young people are church kids or Christians? What should we think if they turn away from Christianity and church culture to embrace Wicca? Is it really, honestly the influence of *Harry Potter*? Or is it rather the *Already Gone* phenomenon that has been observed by many and carefully researched and documented by Ken Ham and Britt Beemer? I'm thinking it is much more likely the latter. If it is, the evangelical leaders who are denouncing *Harry Potter* are

- Aware of the problem with their young people
- Speculating on what external influences might be responsible
- Either ignorant or in denial of internal influences that are much more likely to be responsible
- Advocating removing an influence ("don't see, don't read"), rather than fixing the lack of a positive influence

In some cases, ignorance is a reasonable explanation - many pastors, some I've known, evangelical leaders from what I read of their philosophy, are so inwardly focused (e.g., *The Bible Is All You Need*) and generally unaware of what other Christian scholars are writing that the *unChristian* and *Already Gone* studies have escaped their attention. In other cases, it is clear that denial is in play.

I was looking around for a better summary of *Already Gone*. There is surprisingly little mention on the Net; here is the official [Answers in Genesis site](#) [2]. But I also found an critique by [Dr. R. L. Hymers, Jr.](#) [3]. Here is a summary of Hymers' sermon:

1. He acknowledges the terrific rate of losing young people and the failure to convert new ones.
2. He applauds Ken Ham's emphasis on reading Genesis 1-11 literally.
3. He states that Ham is making the same error that church leaders from about 100 years ago made, of thinking that more apologetics teaching would reverse the decline of the church. According to Hymers, Ham is failing to learn from history.
4. He misunderstands what Ken Ham and Britt Beemer are saying in *Already Gone*. This quote is typical, and pretty much summarizes the entire sermon:

Young people have been taught the Bible in Sunday School and church since they were born. Ken Ham says that hasn't worked because we need more answers to evolution and

deeper Bible study in Genesis. Well, Dr. Harry Rimmer gave all that back in the 1930s and it didn't seem to stop the churches from losing people. If it didn't work then with Dr. Rimmer, why should we think it will work now with Ken Ham? Don't get me wrong. What Dr. Rimmer said was good and helpful, *to those who were already converted!* By the way, Dr. Henry M. Morris also did a marvelous job teaching apologetics and Genesis, beginning back in the early 1960s. But Dr. Morris' wonderful efforts did not stop the churches from losing people. If it didn't work with Dr. Rimmer in the 1930s or Dr. Henry M. Morris in the 1960s, why should we think it will work now with Ken Ham? "*Study history! Study history! Study history!*" History shows that Ken Ham is wrong! *We have had these tools for 75 years and they have not kept young people from leaving the churches! The answer lies in an entirely different place - in **real** conversions.*

Yes, Ham says we need to study Genesis as literally true, and yes, Ken Ham's ministry is primarily to provide answers for Christians why they don't have to be intimidated by the vigorous evolutionism in our culture. But Ham's primary point in the book is, we are losing young people from our churches because in our churches, *we teach only the Bible*, and the Bible only as *religious stories and doctrines*. Noah's Ark, David and Goliath, Jonah and the Whale. Life Application. Theology Lite. Then they go to school (six hours a day, five days a week) and are taught "real" truth. They don't get reinforcement at home. Youth ministries are mainly about fun & games. The system is rigged against the church making a permanent influence.

To emphasize how he thinks anti-evolution apologetics are ineffective, he makes another statement:

But I talk to young people year in and year out. What's more, I *listen* to them. I was called into the ministry 51 years ago. I have been listening to young people for over half a century. I have never found *one* who left the church because he believed in evolution! *Not one!* That is not to say that there may not be one, but I have never met one - out of the many hundreds I have listened to in counselling sessions. *Not one!* The universal reason young people leave their church is that they were never converted. That is the Biblical reason!

I have not been in the game for 51 years, but I have certainly come

across young people (mostly by their testimony on websites) that "lost their faith" when confronted with evolutionism. I have "met" others who came to Christ when presented with a solid creationist message. I don't know where Hymers has been listening to young people and he never met any like this - unless he approaches the problem with a presupposition. Which brings us to...

5. People who fall away from the faith or church attendance were never actually converted, and therefore the real solution to the problem is "real conversion".

Now, he started his sermon by noting that we are not successfully converting lost young people. So if what we need is conversion, but we aren't doing it... where does that leave us? I note that Dr. Hymers does not make an exception for his own church, so presumably he notes that his church is not successful at producing "real" conversions among young people. What is his solution? I think the end of his sermon indicates his solution:

Come into the local church. Come to Jesus Christ. Be washed clean from your sin by the Blood He shed to redeem you on the Cross. "Ye Must Be Born Again." And that is the way to become a real Christian.

I take this is, just work harder at more of the same.

And this is the problem with the contemporary evangelical church and the leaders who denounce *Harry Potter*. The *Already Gone* phenomenon is a **discipleship** problem. Any low resistance to *Harry Potter* magic (or *Star Wars* "The Force") or Wicca or "Therapeutic Moralistic Deism" is a **discipleship** problem. Getting parents to engage with their children and model true Christian character and demonstrate that Christianity is more than just attending a weekly event to sing emotional songs and listen to a sermon or sit in a Sunday School "class" and regurgitate what everyone already knows about the book of Ruth (like we did last Sunday) is a **discipleship** problem. But our churches don't understand discipleship; we're hung up on evangelism - that's the only problem we recognize, and we only have one approach.

So finally, the only reaction these "one-tool" church leaders ever seem to have to troubling external influences is to denounce them ("Don't see *Harry Potter*! Don't read Ken Ham's book!), because they cannot conceive of any shortcoming in their own, "Bible-based" approach.

Removing negative external influences without replacing them with adequate positive internal influences (and I'm *not* talking about more "True Love Waits" or volleyball games or Gross-out Nights) just creates a vacuum in young souls, that no amount of gospel messages or altar calls is going to fill.

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So Dr. Hymers doesn't know any young people who gave up on Christianity because of evolutionism? How about church pastors? From (ironically) [Answers in Genesis \[4\]](#), this article about pastors who turned atheist because they don't believe the Bible anymore. Kind of like the Already Gone effect! But I suppose Hyers et al. (and perhaps generally Calvinists, also) would just write this phenomenon off as indicating not "real" conversion. Seminary trained, God-called surrendered to the ministry men of God. Awful convenient...

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1. www.christianpost.com/article/20101119/some-christians-still-denounce-harry-potter-as-dangerous
2. www.answersingenesis.org/get-answers/features/already-gone
3. www.rlhymersjr.com/Online_Sermons/2009/091309PM_HamsMisguidedBook_p2.html
4. www.answersingenesis.org/articles/2010/11/13/news-to-note-11132010#five

November 21 2010: A Godly Spectacle?

We recently went to Las Vegas as a family (see our family page, dlormand.us/family) to celebrate our daughter's birthday by going to the *Phantom of the Opera* musical show at the Venetian. Of course, that isn't all we did! We visited many of the resort hotels and their attractions - the Eiffel Tower at the Paris hotel, the lion habitat at MGM Grand Hotel, the shops at Luxor and Mandalay Bay and Aria and Caesar's Palace, the fascinating musical fountain at the Bellagio, the dolphins and lions and tigers at The Mirage, and the Strato-Tower at the Stratosphere. We experienced the famous Las Vegas buffets at Harrah's and the Golden Nugget. And we saw the dancing neon lights of the Strip at night.



(Photo from the Las Vegas News Bureau. We didn't quite get in the air!)

But in the shadow of all this opulence and grandeur, we also saw the marks of sin and decay. Our hotel was a few blocks north of the original Downtown area (now the Fremont Street Experience). Homeless men wandered on the curbs and vacant lots outside the steel fence around the hotel, and clustered thickly around the Social Services center just a few blocks further north on Main Street. Worse is the pornography. There are "gentlemen's clubs" all over the area, even prominently in the downtown "Glitter Gulch" area on Fremont Street. Suggestive video loops run continuously, including high above the Strip at Planet Hollywood. Billboard vans advertising "Hot Girls Want to Meet You!" prowl up and down Las Vegas Boulevard. Half-naked girls are dancing on elevated platforms amidst the card tables in some casinos. But the worst is the "card-slappers"; men (and women), clearly hispanic immigrants, wearing their advertisements on their shirts and trying to hand out small cards with pornographic pictures to passers-by. By midnight, the ground is covered with discarded pornography.

But of course, at the root of all this glamour, and the very source for its funding is *gambling*. The extensive casino is the heart of every single

one of the huge resort hotels. Now, right off, I'm not going to put on my 19th Century Church People hat, beat my Temperance Union drum, and loudly proclaim "Gambling is Of the Devil!" Just like our Baptist nonsense about "alcohol is evil", it doesn't work to twist scripture to support our church-culture notion that gambling is sin. *It isn't in there!* I shared my Vegas story with a friend, who told me he has a friend who comes to Las Vegas to gamble, and sets a limit for himself, and views it entirely as entertainment, on the same level as spending a like amount for a fine dinner or a few amusement-park style rides. It's hard to argue with that perspective, and to not appreciate his self-discipline about the matter... except that *self-discipline is precisely the problem!* People don't put themselves into poverty by spending all their income on fancy restaurants or thrill rides, but it is a recognized social cost that districts where gambling is allowed (like Nevada or Atlantic City or the river shores in Mississippi) have to deal with - gambling addicts, who take the food from the mouths of their children and put it on the croups table.

But boil it down - what does pornography and gambling (and liquor, and drugs, and prostitution, and any other problem in especial large supply in Las Vegas) have in common? In fact, what do these "evils" have in common with the shows and the attractions and the spectacles of the grand resorts? How about... seeking one's own pleasure?

Hedonism.

So I'd put it that the engine that drives the glory of Las Vegas, the economic reason that powers the neon, is selfish indulgence.

But it would be easy at this point (and many church-people do this) to dismiss Las Vegas as purely and irredeemably sinful, and to be boycotted (and many do). But it remains - Las Vegas (looking past the pornography and the casinos) is beautiful and spectacular.

Find the good and praise it.

And consider... how might there be a *Christian* Las Vegas? How could a spectacular and a neon-trimmed attraction be established centered on God?

In the U. S., some have tried. Branson and Pigeon Forge try to be wholesome, but I wouldn't say they were "spectacular" on a par with Las Vegas. Jim Bakker tried to create "Heritage USA" as a Christian theme park, but it never came to anything. I suppose some

megachurch buildings are spectacular, like the Crystal Cathedral, but they aren't general public attractions.

In Europe there are the great cathedrals and basilicas, but correspond to American megachurch buildings; they aren't general public attractions. Closer would be the pilgrim churches, including the Holy Nativity and the Holy Sepulchre in the region of Israel; those towns have definitely prospered economically from the crowds of the faithful, and they are impressive in their way (so I understand) - but not quite on the level as Las Vegas.

Perhaps in a sinful world, we can't get there. Probably the New Jerusalem will be the eternal God-centered spectacular attraction for the entire world. Until then, Las Vegas is the best example of what it might be, if you can look past the ugliness. Which, I would state, is *good practice* for Worldview Christians, who should avoid slipping into a knee-jerk church-culture rejection of Las Vegas for the gambling and pornography and hedonism. We shouldn't throw the baby out with the bathwater!

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I also noticed something else about the Strip and the Downtown area. Coming into Las Vegas, we saw large church buildings on prominent hills from the highway. Threading through some neighborhoods on side streets east of the Boulevard, we saw smaller churches. So there is definitely a Christian presence in Las Vegas. Entirely reasonable; America is still majority evangelical protestant Christian, so it will be represented everywhere, including "Sin City". *And yet*, there was *no* Christian presence on the Strip or the Fremont environs. The closest it got was church-shaped wedding "chapels" for those famous fast & easy Las Vegas marriages. I might have expected a booth set up on the sidewalk, or a storefront (like the Coca Cola store or the M&M store) or a spot in one of the many malls as an outreach to the large tourist class. Even some broadside hawkers standing next to the card-slappers. (Unless they would get ignored the same way and for the same reasons... except that, for the ground to get so littered with porno cards, *someone* was taking them - so maybe *someone* would take evangelistic broadsides - and that would be reason enough!)

I noticed this, because the Strip has kind of a "state fair" feel to it, with all the people milling about eating and drinking stuff and popping in and out of buildings, and I am quite used to Christian groups making their presence known at the Pima County or Arizona State fairs. I can't

believe this opportunity hasn't occurred to Las Vegas churches. Unless (I hope not, but would not be surprised) Las Vegas churches are generally satisfied with their church culture and don't want to "blacken their names" by countering the major economic activity of their community (kind of like the Ephesian silversmiths being threatened by Paul and his new disciples).

(Which didn't stop them. And it shouldn't stop Las Vegas disciples.)

October 28 2010: Worldly Ways



I recently came across an interview with former Apple CEO John Sculley on [Cult of Mac \[1\]](#). He had a good deal of interesting things to say about Apple, how it was always more of a design company than a computer company, and how Steve Jobs is a perfectionist. In fact, Mr. Sculley was very humble and self-effacing, admitting to his mistakes and acknowledging that he didn't really understand then how to run a design company.

But at one point he said something that made me stop and take notice:

I remember one of the things we talked about, Steve used to ask me: "How did Pepsi get such great advertising?" He asked if it was the agencies that you picked? And I said what it really is. First of all you have to have an exciting product and you have to be able to present it as an opportunity to do bold advertising.

But great advertising comes from great clients. The best creative people want to work for the best clients. If you are a client who doesn't appreciate great work, or a client who won't take risks and try new stuff, or a client who can't get excited about the creative, then you're the wrong kind of client.

So. If you want to get people to pay attention when you are presenting something you want them to get - *advertising* - in the mind of an experienced business professional with broad experience in the market, you need two things:

- The thing being advertised must be exciting to the advertiser

- The advertiser must be bold, creative, and a risk-taker

This has obvious implications for Christians. We have a "product" - a love relationship with the almighty, all-powerful living God. Although more frequently, the "product" is membership in a church. We want people to get these things - to enter into a relationship with God, and to join our church. Sometimes these advertising campaigns are overt: Billboards with messages from "God". A five-minute radio spot with some music and a snip from a sermon. Flyers and business cards to stick in people's front doors or under their windshield wipers inviting them to a church service or a religious event. Getting the church website up the search list and increase the rate of "hits". But we also have the nominal principle that all of us Christians are advertisers, that it is the job of each and every one of us to present an advertising campaign to "the market".

So let's look at the situation through the perspective of former Apple CEO John Sculley:

First, is our "product" really exciting?

A friendship with the Creator ought to be exciting! Anyone who knows a new believer who came out of a background of dire lostness and darkness into the light of truth and joy knows how excited and "on fire" a new believer like this can be! It seems, though, that people with this kind of experience are in the minority, and most of us are *not* excited about our "product". In fact, even those new believers loose their ardor over time; like my old pastor would say, they "get saved and then get over it". Why might this be?

Most of us came to Christ as children and "grew up" with Jesus, so our relationship with God is familiar and comfortable, not exciting and new. Perhaps this is like children with great loving parents, maybe even wealthy ones. If you grow up this way, you take it for granted because you've never known anything else. Even if you were aware of how your friends' parents weren't so great, it would generate pity for their circumstances or gratitude for your own, but not *excitement*. I've been through too many "witnessing" clinics where you were supposed to write out your "testimony" in preparation for presenting it to others, but try as you might, your "testimony" was dull and uninteresting; no great addictions overcome or sins forgiven or narrow brushes with disaster.

But I also think (at least, in my own case) that part of our lack of

excitement with God, and the reason why "on fire" new believers cool off, is being embedded in a church culture that is not exciting. Even though our pastors urge us to "advertise" the church (by inviting friends and neighbors to services), we don't think it's really exciting enough to draw their interest. The best we can seem to do (and we do it a lot in our contemporary evangelical church culture) is to dress up our "worship" service with energetic music and casual dress and edgy messages. Often we will put together programs for children and youth and "mothers' day out" to attract attenders.

This is most of my problem. I don't see that the churches I've been in are worth inviting anybody. I'm hesitant to say anything about God to my associates because the next best step would be to invite them to a boring, counter-productive evangelical-culture church. It's not the music - hymns or rock songs, if my fellow believers aren't on fire for God, the music is just part of a wierd alien culture to prospective seekers I might bring in. It's not the sermon - theology and Bible exposition and even object studies and jokes are not really interesting to someone who's not already "in the club".

This is a prime reason I'm looking for my "ideal church"; if a group of believers are keen enough on connecting with God that they will seek Him in prayer and equip themselves to engage their world with a powerful Christian Worldview, then I think God would show up in power and answered prayer and Spirit-filled lives. *That* would be a church I would be excited about enough to invite my friends!

Second, are our "advertisers" really bold, creative, risk-takers?

The first observation here is that, just as in a major corporation, all the employees and contractors are *not* advertisers. A company hires a PR service or has an in-house marketing or advertising division. The ones who are talented in advertising (as opposed to, say, software development or electronics design) end up in that division or service. The best PR companies are the ones where the most talented, creative, and assertive PR people end up. So it is with the church. To paraphrase I Corinthians 12, "Not everyone is an advertising consultant." So the best thing we could do is drop the misinterpretation that everyone has an obligation to be an advertising consultant, and identify the ones who are gifted in that area.

Do we have people like that? Certainly we have Billy Graham and Luis Palau, advertising very effectively for the "relationship with God" product. We have our missionaries and church planters. There are

certainly people in many churches who are "soul-winners" (although I notice that it is these who most often insist that everyone should be a "soul-winner"). How about advertisers for worthwhile churches? Note first that a successful advertiser for an exciting church "product" will be drawing lots of people into that church - and it will become... a megachurch. Where do we see examples of megachurches with advertising style leaders?

How about Saddleback Church, and Rick Warren?

And this is where we run into an interesting phenomenon. Maybe at some point, there were people who critiqued Charles Finney and Billy Sunday and Billy Graham and now maybe Luis Palau for their tactics. Maybe for their beliefs (apparently there are grounds for critiquing Finney). However, if they weren't effective at advertising for Christ's Kingdom, *we wouldn't even know their names!* Apparently, success breeds criticism. So it is no surprise that some (like [this person](#) [2]) (and [another one](#) [3]) would criticize, even demonize Rick Warren for being a disciple of business growth guru Peter Drucker. The claim is that we should be doing things "God's Way", not applying the teachings of godless secular business strategists and philosophers, and anyone who follows "the ways of the world" is something less than Christian and his work should be rejected.



Disclaimer: I am a fan of *Purpose-Driven*, in the essentials. I'm not a Rick Warren fanboy, and I don't agree with everything he does, says, or writes in his books (of which I only have two). So the horse I have in this race isn't Rick Warren, but the method he *draws from scripture* and embodies in principles from secular business management (and engineering discipline) that I find *reasonable* and *practical*. So allow me to suggest that we not apply an emotion-driven, scripture proof-texting approach to this critique, but rather a [Christian Worldview](#).

1. All truth is God's truth. Paul used Roman roads, Phoenician ships, and the Greek language to spread the Gospel. He didn't just stick with Hebrew or Jewish facilities; the "pure", Godly, "Biblical", traditional

methods. It was **TRUE** that Roman roads were the best, and went everywhere, that Phoenician shipping was well-developed and widespread, and that Greek was the most generally used language. If something is *true*, it has the stamp of God on it, even if it is mixed with error (which we can discern and reject). Paul even quoted Greek poets or playwrights once or twice - *in scripture!* Paul says explicitly (and in context), "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (I Cor. 9:22). Some of the teachings of Confucius, Mohammed, even Joseph Smith are *true*. If humans are created in the image of God, we should expect some glimmer of truth to shine on them. Even humans like Peter Drucker.

2. The Bible is necessary but not sufficient. Scripture (The Great Commission) says that we (the Church) should make disciples of all nations, but scripture doesn't lay out an approved set of methods for doing this. Except for maybe "preaching", which comes up in frequent contexts. We can't claim that the examples of Peter (on Pentecost) or Paul (on his missionary journeys, particularly in Athens) is "God's way" to win the lost, because Acts is *history*, not *doctrine*; their world (The Ancient World) is not ours, and their gifts (The Apostles) are not ours. It doesn't appear that "The Regulative Principle of Scripture" ("don't do it if it isn't commanded") is a very good guideline for evangelism in the 21st Century.

Which is the time when advertising is strongly part of Western culture. Nope, it isn't Biblical, but like the man said, "if it didn't work, nobody would do it." So we need to acknowledge it, and encourage our best people to use their gifts and the best of the *truth* of the world we live in. And be **INTENTIONAL** about building the best church "product"!

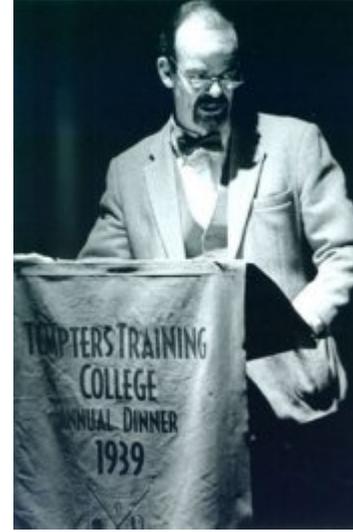
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1. www.cultofmac.com/john-sculley-on-steve-jobs-the-full-interview-transcript/63295
2. www.letusreason.org/Popteac24.htm
3. www.jesusdrivenlife.org/wolves.htm



October 23 2010: Two Dramas

A few weeks ago (October has been a very busy month for us), we went to see a play put on by [Waypoint Theatre](#) [1], Tucson's Christian theatre company. The play was [Screwtape Letters](#) [2], adapted for the stage from C. S. Lewis' book (picture from Top Cat Theatre Company, another Christian theatre company based in Portsmouth, England). Anyone who had read the book would recognize the flow and the essential elements in the play. It had its funny moments, it had its sad moments, but throughout it was thoughtful and conveyed a *message*: The powers of evil, operating in the background obscured by human disbelief, are thwarted by the power of heaven which they cannot detect or understand. The acting was excellent and the production quality was quite good - Waypoint is a good example of Christian Worldview in action - believers doing what they are gifted to do and enjoy doing, serving God *outside* the walls of the church building.



After that, just last weekend, we went back to Flagstaff for "NAU Parents' Weekend". I've got to hand it to NAU, they are more serious about undergraduate education and recognizing that students are members of families than any other continuing education establishment I know, even more than community colleges (like our own excellent

Pima Community College) and particularly than my alma mater, University of Arizona. Anyways, our daughter is studying theatre arts, so she was aware of the fall production of the drama department: [25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee](#) [3]. So we went to see it.

Putnam County Spelling Bee is a "musical", but the "musical" part is entirely incidental and does not really contribute to the overall production. It relies on gimmicks: some of the spelling bee contestants are drawn "cold" from the audience, and Jesus appears briefly during a scene, complete with a puff of smoke and a lit-up pulsating

catholic-style "sacred heart". In the second half there's a sustained phallic joke involving a Boy Scout. One of the spellers is dressed in outlandish self-made clothes and correctly spells his words while in a trance. It wasn't exactly a "comedy", but it was clearly intended to *entertain* (in a 21st century secular-cultural sort of way) rather than *communicate*. To be sure, there were a few serious themes: one speller struggles with having two homosexual "fathers" and no mother; another (an Asian parochial school student - to whom Jesus appears) deals with expectations upon her to excel at everything; another has a mother who left her to go to India and a father who is disconnected from her. But (except perhaps for the Asian student) there was no resolution to the problems, no exploration of the human condition, no central, unifying conflict - no *message*.

This is not to say that secular plays put on by the NAU drama department are never going to be serious - I'm sure anything they ever do by George Bernard Shaw or Anton Chekhov or Arthur Miller will be competently performed. It is also not to say that Christian artists living out a thoroughgoing Worldview will always only be serious - Waypoint Theatre has a light-hearted Christmas dinner theatre production coming up in just a few months. But the contrast between *Putnam County Spelling Bee* and *Screwtape Letters* points out two things:

First, Drama is a form of communication. *Screwtape Letters* communicates, *Putnam County Spelling Bee* does not. Serious drama should leave the audience better than it was, people should internalize the message to at least some degree. Comedy has no lasting effect after the laughter dies out. Think "beef stew" versus "cotton candy". A Christian thespian intent on living out a consistent Worldview should not forget this - there is a place for levity, but God is keen on *communicating* - and we are made in His image.

Second, There is a difference between "quality" and "value". *Putnam County Spelling Bee* was a quality production of little value beyond getting some laughs (at least by some, who weren't squirming a bit in their seats at the sexual innuendo and the apparent blasphemy). *Screwtape Letters* had both - maybe just a bit less quality than the NAU drama production, since they had a teeny stage with no real wings to speak of and no machinery. Of course, quality is a necessity; lack of quality will make a production worthless no matter how much value it purports to offer. The Christian dramatist (and theatre-goer, for that matter) needs to be able to distinguish between "good" (from an acting skill or production quality perspective) and *good* (for the truth and utility of the message it attempts to communicate).

Ultimately, with drama as well as music or writing or embedded systems design or anything else we might do, the question boils down to *purpose*. Is our drama just an exercise in technique (i. e., for a grade or instruction in dramatic theory)? Is it just to get a few guffaws from a paying audience? Or is it to get a point across in a way that mere spoken or written words cannot achieve? A Christian Worldview and the *purpose* of a meaningful life has some answers to this question.

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1. waypoint-theatre.org
2. www.topcattheatre.com
3. azdailysun.com/entertainment/arts-and-theatre/article_2efd6e36-0979-5ae8-bc5b-66df3a9676e7.html

October 2 2010: Ignorant Christians

Atheists and Agnostics, Mormons and Jews Score Best on Religious Knowledge Survey

Average # of questions answered correctly out of 32

Total	16.0
Atheist/Agnostic	20.9
Jewish	20.5
Mormon	20.3
White evangelical Protestant	17.6
White Catholic	16.0
White mainline Protestant	15.8
Nothing in particular	15.2
Black Protestant	13.4
Hispanic Catholic	11.6

PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S FORUM ON RELIGION & PUBLIC LIFE May 19-June 6, 2010

From this article in [Answers in Genesis](#) [1], I was put on the track of a news factoid that I had been hearing about recently but hadn't nailed down yet: In the [Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life Survey](#) [2] conducted recently, "American Christians" got right answers on only a surprisingly small percentage (circa 50 percent) of questions about basic Bible doctrine and church history and comparative religions. Two conclusions follow:

First, we need to teach better. The obvious is, church members that sit under a pastor's teaching (or preaching) and/or a Sunday

School class ought to know more than they do about what they believe, and why they should believe it. As stated before, I have grown up under Southern Baptist teaching, and found it a chaotic jumble of Bible stories and life-application directives. And just *Bible Study* at

that. The Bible Study needs to be **STUDY** - structured, of increasing depth, and *intentional*. And there needs to be more than just Bible Study; there needs to be theology and church history and apologetics and what other religions teach; subjects *not* directly in Scripture.

The fact that "Christians" know so little (less, in fact, than atheists and Jews and Mormons) about their own beliefs is yet another indication that something is wrong with the way we "do church". In fact, I might suggest that the Catholic score on this survey, less even than Protestants, points to *what* we are doing wrong. In times past, the Catholic church "catechized" their young people; I don't know if they still do that now (or how prevalent or consistent it is if they do), but the impression *this* Protestant has is, if you attend Mass (where there's no real teaching, even in a "sermon") and go to Confession, you're doing all right. Similar to Protestants "doing all right" if they just attend Sunday Morning "worship" services.

Second, we need to measure. This isn't so obvious. The Pew study is an indication that something is wrong with Christian education - but it took an independent secular (not even para-church, like the Barna Group) organization to discover it. If churches have a mandate to "disciple" (which, of course, the vast majority of even Evangelical churches don't take seriously), then they *must* determine if their discipleship efforts, even in something so objective as education, is being effective. Schools do it, and parents expect it from schools; *why not the church?*

Just last week, at the Sunday Morning "worship" service and again at the Wednesday Night youth ministry service (both similar in having sing-along music and a message from the pastor), the pastor(s) knew that there were people in the audience, almost entirely regularly-attending "members", who were not being discipled and many who were not even believers. I was thinking even then, "how do you know? Have you surveyed them? Do you know who is and who isn't? Shouldn't you as the *pastor* know more than vague generalities?" This just underscores the necessity of gathering more objective data of our performance as a church than just the subjective "feelings" or anecdotal reports of the staff.

In fact, one could contemplate having "tests" in Sunday School. Shucks, even *standardized tests* (what's good for the State of Arizona ought to be good for the Kingdom of God - let's have a Christian "AIMS" test!). But if the pastor regards his sermons as the primary teaching tool of the church... how does he "test" for comprehension or

lifestyle impact? Answer: he can't. Another problem with making the "worship" service and the preacher's sermon the central focus of the life of the church - you can't really tell how well or how poorly the church is doing until the young people are "Already Gone" and the church has a reputation for irrelevance, because you *cannot* (or *will not*) measure it.

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1. www.answersingenesis.org/articles/2010/10/02/news-to-note-10022010#two

2. www.pewforum.org/Other-Beliefs-and-Practices/U-S-Religious-Knowledge-Survey.aspx