

View

Has Church Become “Just Dessert”?

Listen to this, from an article in USA Today earlier this month:

Religion today in the USA is a salad bar where people heap on upbeat beliefs they like and often leave the veggies — like strict doctrines — behind.

There are so many ways of seeing God, public policy expert Barry Kosmin says, that “the highest authority is now the lowest common denominator.”

The story goes on to report that in latest data from the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life’s U.S. Religious Landscape Survey of 35,000 Americans, the study’s authors say there is a “stunning” lack of alignment between people’s beliefs or practices and their professed faiths.

Every now and then, we’ll get an advertisement for a church, often a new one, where you can “come as you are,” dress as casually as you like, enjoy a live band and thought-provoking dramas and explore personal and spiritual issues in a cafeteria-style setting (i.e., pick and choose your worship style). You can expect, they say, to hear Bible lessons presented with humor and insight and, perhaps, even discover some of the most significant relationships in life. In other words, the message is: “If you are bored with church, come here and have a good time.”

These kinds of advertisements don’t bother me all that much. If a church isn’t going to teach the truth then it might as well set things up for fun. After all, what could be worse than a church that doesn’t even teach the truth, but is still boring?

The sad thing is that advertisements like this will appeal to some people who may, at least deep down, really care about the truth. But the only experience they have is with boring mainline denominational churches where the truth is talked about but not taught. So they really have no idea where to look for the real thing. So they settle for “fun,” with a little truth thrown in for good measure. As far as they know, the only alternative to mainline denominations is one of these contemporary be-all-things-to-all-people groups.

It is apparent from reading the first few chapters of the book of Acts, which is the inspired history of churches, that people never went shopping for churches at all. The Bible tells us that those who believed and were baptized were, in fact, the church. Their lives were consumed with pursuing the things of the Lord, helping other brethren and learning more about the Christ who had died for them. Unlike many churches today, they didn’t go to one of two or three one-hour services that would “fit into their weekend.” Every

The church of Christ

Meeting at 900 E. Natoma
PO Box 492
Folsom, CA 95630

916/608-4866

Elders

Forrest Brown: 530/295-9230
Randy Clark: 916/939-5066
Rich Ladd: 916/774-9048
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Dennis Reagan: 916/797-5539

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Dane Scott: 916/631-7221
Russ Tarrant: 530/672-1748
Steve Thompson: 916/983-4170
Jeff Warshaw: 916/933-9399

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Services

Sunday Morning Assembly
9:30 AM

Sunday Evening: 5:00 PM
Wednesday Bible Study
7:30 PM

Classes for all ages.
Private classes arranged
at your convenience.

www.folsomchurch.com

Webmaster: Richard Harvey

day was devoted to the dissemination of the gospel story and the fellowship that came with commitment to Christ (Acts 2:41ff.).

Clearly, there were more important things on the minds of these early disciples than “fun.” Yet no one would accuse them of being depressed. Far from it! They were filled with joy because they had been forgiven of their sins. They were the happiest people on earth, not because they could wear sweats to church or drink their coffee while listening to Peter preach or because they had found a church that catered to their needs. They were full of joy because they had found the Christ and found others who love Christ to work and worship with. They were the church of the Messiah, the chosen people of God, a holy nation, a royal priesthood (see 1 Pet. 2:9). To a people who had been burdened by sin and were being dragged down by a perverse generation, there was nothing better than forgiveness.

In thanks for that forgiveness, they gladly accepted the discipline imposed upon those who make the audacious claim of being God’s children. They were willing to run that race, to deny

themselves and carry the cross (Mt. 16:24). And they suffered in the extreme for their faith.

Someone once observed that when churches emphasize marketing they begin to shape the message for the audience, instead of finding an audience to fit the message. I can tell you, without fear of contradiction, that the apostles never marketed the church—they appealed only the audience that was looking for truth.

I do my best to be gracious to individuals who may not yet understand what the church is supposed. But I’m much patient with leaders in churches today who are appealing to everything but the truth to get people in the house. They make a mockery of the faith of our spiritual ancestors and have prostituted themselves to a self-crazed culture that can’t get enough “fun” on Friday and Saturday nights so they demand entertainment on Sunday. All while salving their consciences in a show of service to Christ. How very sad that they have missed the real joy that comes through believing (Romans 15:19).

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God moves in a mysterious way,
 His wonders to perform;
 He plants his footsteps in the sea,
 And rides upon the storm.
 Deep in unfathomable mines
 Of never-failing skill,
 He treasures up his bright designs,
 And works his sov’ reign will.
 Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,
 The clouds ye so much dread
 Are big with mercy, and shall break
 In blessings on your head.
 Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
 But trust him for his grace;
 Behind a frowning providence
 He hides a smiling face.



Poem, “Light Shining Out of Darkness,” by William Cowper (pronounced “Cooper”), an English poet and hymnodist. One of the most popular poets of his time, Cowper changed the direction of 18th century nature poetry by writing of everyday life and scenes of the English countryside. He suffered from periods of severe depression, and although he found refuge in a fervent evangelical Christianity, the inspiration behind his much-loved hymns, he often experienced doubt and feared that he was doomed to eternal damnation. His religious sentiment and association with John Newton (who wrote the hymn “Amazing Grace”) led to much of the poetry for which he is best remembered



ARE YOU A LEADER?

ARE YOU LED?

Christians must be both leaders and led. In fact, a Christian must be led before he can be an effective leader.

Jesus Christ is our leader, the “Captain of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2). Our life’s goal is to emulate Him, to be “conformed to His image” (Romans 8:29). We lead, then, as we are led.

But the challenge is to be led by Christ, not by others. When we allow someone else to take the reins of our life and determine our direction, we are being led as the scribes and Pharisees — and both fell into the ditch, being the blind led by the blind (Matthew 15:4).

When you set out to lead, be sure you are led...by Christ and no other.

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The following is from the blog of Cathy Lynn Grossman, Religion Reporter for USA Today. Interesting take from a member of the mainstream media.

Oprah or Osteen or both?

Posted 6/25/2008

I’ve been thinking about the great line from Charles Schulz’s classic comic strip, Peanuts: “Happiness is a warm puppy.”

That may be the way people want their spirituality now, too: Whatever confirms or celebrates what they already like to believe, think and do, no matter what their church’s, synagogue’s or mosque’s official doctrines may be.

The Pew Forum’s U.S. Religious Landscape Survey find Americans stray far from the teachings of their professed faiths.

In reporting on the survey, one source, Michael Lindsay, saw Oprah’s influence, noting how she uses Christian lingo untethered to any dogma.

I also talked with Frank Page who just completed two years as head of the Southern Baptist Convention. He saw the path away from doctrine toward spiritual happy-talk led by Joel Osteen, the televangelist and author of *Your Best Life Now* and anyone like him who preaches on “how to have a good attitude and a good spirit but you never hear about sin or the saving grace of Christ.”

The interviews made me wonder:

Are people no longer willing to sit still — or kneel for — any preaching or teaching that challenges or discomforts them? Why?

“Are people no longer willing to sit still — or kneel for — any preaching or teaching that challenges or discomforts them?”

Is this really different than in the past — before Oprah and Osteen and their ilk? Or do

we only discuss this now because we have survey measurements we didn’t have 15 or 25 years ago?

And what’s so bad about a faith that just makes you spiritually happy? Would you join the Warm Puppy Congregation?