

Why “Christianity” Has *Failed* in America



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While America still boasts of being a “Christian nation,” in the area of *private* religious practice “Christianity” is in a state of serious decline. Today, church attendance is at an all-time low, and the number of Americans who profess to *being Christian* is rapidly dropping. Young people in particular are dropping out of church at an astounding rate, and significant numbers are abandoning Christianity altogether—calling it *irrelevant* to real life.

Perhaps more significant is the fact that *even among self-professed Christians*, morality is at an all-time low. As revealed by numerous surveys, it appears that there is little *in terms of lifestyle and conduct* to distinguish a “Christian” from a non-Christian.

What has happened to our churches? Why has Christianity been largely *ineffective* at stemming the tide of worldliness that plagues even churchgoers? Could it be that *Christianity itself* has unwittingly played a key role in the moral demise of its own followers?

Christianity in America—the Sad Statistics

Let’s look first at the decline of American Christianity in terms of *participation*—then we’ll look at it in terms of *practice*. In her book *Quitting Church*, Julia Duin documents today’s rapid decline in church attendance. Moreover, she argues that “something is not right with church life” today. She says that modern churchgoers are increasingly disappointed by what they consider to be a lack of genuine spirituality—that organized religion has become dysfunctional. She argues that today’s churches seem focused on *culture*—fads, image, creative marketing and packaging, membership drives—and that worship services often border on entertainment. Meanwhile, teachings are becoming liberalized and lack relevance to real life.¹ As we will see later, Christianity’s focus on culture—*on fitting in*—is exactly *why it has failed*.

Duin, who has spent much of her career researching Christianity in America, writes: “It’s no secret that the percentage of Americans in church on any given Sunday is dropping fast.” How fast? According to a survey sponsored by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, religious attendance in America *fell* from 41 percent in 1971 to 31 percent in 2002. That’s ten percentage points in 30 years. However, studies conducted in 2005 by sociologists suggest the average attendance is much lower, around 18 to 20 percent. Dave Olson, one of the researchers quoted by Duin, said in a report published in the April 2006 issue of *Christianity Today* that significantly *fewer* Americans are actually participating in traditional churchgoing practices.²

Yet 90 percent of Americans still claim to *believe* in God.

According to Duin, research suggests that, at current dropout rates, *only about four percent* of American teens will end up as Bible-believing adult churchgoers (compare this to 35 percent of baby boomers and 65 percent of their World War II-era grandparents).³ As a lead researcher for *Christianity Today*, Drew Dyck writes that the May 2009 Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life reports that “young Americans are dropping out of religion at an alarming rate of *five to six times* the historic rate.” Dyck also notes that, according to Rainer Research, approximately

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70 percent of America’s young people drop out of church between the ages of 18 and 22. Similarly, the Barna Group estimates that 80 percent of those reared in the church will be “disengaged” by the time they are 29.⁴

What’s behind all the empty pews? In a word—*irrelevancy*. Duin notes that for the estimated 78 million American Protestants who have become church *dropouts*, church has just become too boring. “Church has nothing to do with their actual lives. What’s preached and talked about is *irrelevant* to their daily existence in the twenty-first century.” She says there is a *disconnect* between what is coming from the pulpit and people’s real lives. Duin quotes Mike McManus, a syndicated Christian writer: “They’re not preaching on real issues—divorce, chastity, cohabitation—that people are facing. There’s an avoidance of the big issues people are facing.”⁵

Chuck Baldwin, an outspoken Christian minister and author, has long lamented Christianity’s failure to be *relevant* to modern life. Calling today’s mainstream church “the opiate of entertainment and feel-good-ism,” he writes that when it comes to influencing societal conditions, culture and the political philosophy of the nation, “America’s churches are the largest block of irrelevant, impotent and insignificant institutions in the entire country.”⁶

Baldwin charges today’s complacent ministry as the cause, calling them “hirelings in the pulpit [that] lust after ease and social acceptance”; he says they willfully and blindly “bask in their ignorance.” Quoting the 19th-century revivalist Charles Finney, Baldwin writes: “If there is a decay of conscience, the pulpit is responsible for it. If the public press lacks moral discernment, the pulpit is responsible for it. If the church is degenerate and worldly, the pulpit is responsible for it. If the world loses its interest in Christianity, the pulpit is responsible for it. If Satan rules in our halls of legislation, the pulpit is responsible for it. If our politics become so corrupt that the very foundations of our government are ready to fall away, the pulpit is responsible for it.”

According to Baldwin, most of what comes from today’s pulpits lacks relevance to real-life problems, challenges and experiences. Rather than being shepherds and watchmen, he says today’s pastors are more like *cheerleaders* and *CEOs*. “Our churches are not ‘the pillar and ground of the truth’ (I Timothy 3:15, *KJV*); they are centers of social interaction, recreation, and feel-good indoctrination. Preachers are not reprovers, rebukers, and exhorters (II Timothy 4:2); they are ear-ticklers, entertainers, and expositors of irrelevance.... The result: ineffective, impotent, weak, unprepared and sheepish Christians.”

The bottom line is that Christianity’s popular “feel-good Gospel” is just not *relevant* to the real problems and stresses people are facing. The widely-promoted bumper sticker “Honk If You Love Jesus!” pretty well sums it up. Unconsciously, those who remain a part of today’s organized Christianity end up just “playing church”—claiming to be Christian while living like a non-believer.

The “Christian” Lifestyle Gap

Recent research polls have brought to light some astounding facts concerning the conduct of Christians—particularly those ages 18 to 29, as this group has been intensely studied. Overall, there appears to be a gigantic *lifestyle gap* between what is believed or professed and what is actually practiced. As we will see, most Christians—especially in the young adult group—are *indistinguishable* from non-Christians in almost every area of life. In his book *Your Jesus Is Too Safe*, Jared Wilson notes that “in American culture, it has

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often become hard to distinguish between the body of Christ and the culture of society.” He says Christians often quote such passages as “Judge not lest you be judged,” or “Let him who is without sin cast the first stone” because we want to “*justify how we live* without the pesky burden of what Jesus requires of us.”⁷

In his compelling book *Revolution*, George Barna laments the considerable “disconnection between what research consistently shows about [the conduct of] churched Christians and what the Bible calls us to [actually] be.” If Christians are what they *claim* to be, adds Barna, “their lives should be noticeably and compellingly different from the norm.”⁸

According to Barna’s 2005 data, of the 77 million Americans who claimed to be churchgoing “born again” Christians, fully *half* of them admitted that they had *not* “experienced a genuine connection” with God over the past year. Moreover, *less than 10 percent* claimed to possess a “biblical worldview”—i.e., a core set of convictions and beliefs that they have *proven as absolute truth* (the other 90 percent claimed only a “patchwork” of theological views).⁹

Is it any wonder, then, that “worldliness” is as much a problem *inside* mainstream Christianity as it is outside? A good indication of the depth of the problem can be seen in how self-professed Christians approach *divorce*. The divorce rate for those who *profess* to be Christian and who *claim* to follow the teachings of the Bible is *exactly the same* (around 50 percent) as those who do not. Today, most divorces are unjustified—a matter of convenience. Marriage vows mean almost nothing. Are we really to believe that all of these “Christian” divorces are justified before God—when He says He *hates* divorce (Mal. 2:16)?

Then there’s the glaring problem of premarital sex and abortion among self-professed Christians. In his article “(Almost) Everyone’s Doing It,” Tyler Charles writes: “A surprising new study shows Christians are having premarital sex and abortions as much (or more) than non-Christians.” He notes that “a recent study reveals that 88 percent of unmarried [American] young adults (ages 18-29) are having sex.... [But] the number doesn’t drop much among Christians. Of those surveyed who self-identify as ‘evangelical,’ 80 percent say they have had sex”—yet 76 percent of the same group believe sex outside of marriage is wrong. The stats get worse: “Of those 80 percent of Christians in the 18-29 age range who have had sex before marriage, 64 percent have done so within the last year [2011] and 42 percent *are in a current sexual relationship*.” Only 20 percent say they have never had sex.¹⁰

Among non-evangelicals (such as Baptists, etc.), the statistics are worse still: 53 percent of Christians in the 18-29 age group say they are currently “in a sexual relationship,” with only 12 percent claiming to have never had sex (these last two figures for Christians are almost identical to the national averages for non-Christians).

So much for biblically mandated abstinence!

The same studies also looked at abortion. According to Charles, of the approximately one million abortions that take place in the United States each year, a shocking 65 percent are obtained by women who claim to be either Protestant or Catholic. The remaining 35 percent are obtained by non-Christians. That’s 650,000 abortions each year obtained by *Christians*. Yet 77 percent of evangelicals believe that abortion is morally wrong (compared to 56 percent of the general population).¹¹

For Christianity in America, these are damning statistics.

(In ancient Israel, God’s “chosen people” at times sacrificed babies and

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young children to false gods to appease them. It was pure *idolatry*. Today, “Christians” abort babies out of convenience—as if it was a form of birth control. But it’s the same approach—the spirit of *idolatry*. We worship the “god of sexual promiscuity”—and are willing to pay the horrendous price through abortion!)

Dyck labels the issue for what it is: *moral compromise*. He writes that many Christians experience an unbearable level of “conflict between belief and behavior. Tired of dealing with a guilty conscience and *unwilling to abandon their sinful lifestyles*, they drop their Christian commitment. They may cite intellectual skepticism or disappointments with the church, but these are smokescreens designed to hide the [real] reason. [In effect,] *they change their creed to match their deeds....*”¹²

This is reminiscent of what we see in the parable of the “sower.” In Matthew 13, Jesus says that some who joyfully begin their walk with God later find that they “have no root”—no real, lasting commitment (verses 20-21). Others start off strong only to allow the “cares of this world” to choke out their relationship with God (verse 22). Indeed, most young adults who abandon the faith do so in order to adopt a *lifestyle* that falls outside the bounds of Christian morality. Ultimately, they desire *worldliness* more than godliness.

David Kinnaman has researched this phenomenon for decades. In his book *unChristian*, he writes about the palpable “lifestyle gap” between what Christians profess to believe and how they actually live. Kinnaman argues that Christianity in America has a well-deserved *hypocritical* image. “Our lives don’t match our beliefs. In many ways, our lifestyles and perspectives are no different from those of anyone around us.”¹³

Kinnaman’s extensive research compared “born-again” Christians to non-Christians in over one hundred variables related to values and behavior. (Kinnaman focused on those who self-identified in surveys as being “born again” because—unlike those who self-identify as simply “Christian”—they claim to have a deeper commitment to Christ.) He writes: “In virtually every study we conducted, representing thousands of interviews [over a period of several years], born-again Christians fail to display much attitudinal or behavioral evidence of transformed lives.”

Not surprisingly, he found that the Christians were distinct in certain areas of *religious* behavior: they owned more Bibles, went to church, participated in church events, donating money to religious causes, etc. But that was where the distinction ended. “[When] it came to non-religious factors—the substance of peoples daily choices, actions and attitudes—there were few meaningful gaps between born-again Christians and [non-Christians]. Christians emerged as distinct in the areas people would expect—some religious activities and commitments—but not in other areas of life.”¹⁴

Kinnaman continues: Based on 2007 data, “we found that most of the lifestyle activities of born-again Christians were statistically equivalent to those of [non-Christians]. When asked to identify their activities over the last thirty days, born-again believers were just as likely to bet or gamble, to visit a pornographic Web site, to take something that did not belong to them, to consult a medium or psychic, to physically fight or abuse someone, to have consumed enough alcohol to be considered legally drunk, to have used an illegal, nonprescription drug, to have said something to someone that was not true....” In the area of inappropriate sexual behavior—including looking at online pornography, viewing sexually explicit magazines or movies, or having a sexual

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encounter outside of marriage—Kinnaman found that “30 percent of born-again Christians admitted to at least one of these activities in the past thirty days, compared to 35 percent of other [non-Christian] Americans. In statistical and practical terms, this means the two groups are essentially *no different* from each other.”¹⁵

Astonishing—*no difference*.

What happened to believers *not* being conformed to this world, but being *transformed* by a renewed mind (Rom. 12:2)? What about putting on the “new man” created in righteousness and holiness (Eph. 4:24)? What about developing the *mind* of Christ (Phil. 2:5), overcoming sin and the world’s influence (I John 2:13-14; Rev. 2:26; etc.)? How can there be *no difference* between Christians and non-Christians? Is Christianity nothing but a social club, where members are “Christians” in *name* only?

Even in ancient Israel, God put a *difference* between the holy and the unholy, the clean and the unclean (Lev. 10:10). Paraphrasing God’s words to Judah and Jerusalem—and to American “Christians” today: “Your pastors have misrepresented My teachings and have disregarded what was holy to Me. They have put *no difference* between what is holy and what is worldly, neither have they taught the *difference* between what is morally clean and what is morally unclean.... Indeed, I am profaned among those who call themselves Christians!” (Ezek. 22:26).

As Kevin Swanson writes in his recent book *Apostate*, Christianity’s “lifestyle gap” centers on the matter of *who will be God*. It is a battle over “whether man will be god or whether God will be God.” In taking of the forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam became the first *humanist*: he put human knowledge, human experience, and human will ahead of the authority of God. But either God will be God—in *His way, on His terms*—or man will be god. Swanson writes, “If God is the ultimate authority in man’s knowledge, ethics and reality, then *He* must be the central focus of life. *He* should permeate the thoughts, the motives, the academic teaching, the counseling, the family life, and the worship of the Christian.”¹⁶

There is simply no room for a “lifestyle gap” in real Christianity. As Swanson notes, “People always live out their fundamental beliefs. They may say they believe one thing while their lives reflect some other creed. In a world of a thousand hypocrisies and lies, there is only one way to determine the true creed of a man: *observe his life* and culture.”¹⁷

A Form of Religion

At the heart of the problem is that modern Christianity espouses the *name* of Christ but adheres to few of His *teachings*. A “Christianity”—really a “Churchanity”—has developed that unconsciously makes a *show* of religion with little to no substance. Evidence of this can be seen in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Immediately following the attacks, church attendance spiked; Americans everywhere were inspired and moved to seek God. But within a few months, attendance began returning to “normal” as people went back to life as usual. There was no grand revival of the Christian faith, no humbling of the nation before God, no introspective look into how we might have brought God’s judgment on ourselves—just a pretense of religion, enough to soothe our collective conscience.

This is reminiscent of the prophet Isaiah’s warning concerning those

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“who say to the seers [pastors], ‘See not,’ [don’t tell us about God’s coming judgment on our nation] and to the prophets [teachers], ‘*Do not prophesy to us right things* [such as the need to obey God’s commandments], speak to us *smooth things, prophesy illusions*’ ” (Isa. 30:10). Tell us things to make us *feel good* about ourselves; tell us what a great church we have; tell us God is pleased with us as Christians.

The church itself is to blame: “Churchanity’s” narrow-minded rush to increase membership rolls has led to the development of spiritually weak, ill-prepared followers. Instead of emphasizing personal transformation and practical faith according to Scripture, young people in particular have been sold a *feel-good religion*—one that fails miserably when stacked up against the pulls and temptations of society. As Dyck rightly notes, “the Christian life is hard to sustain in the face of so many temptations.” But the church itself has *failed* to equip believers to fight the good fight. “I realized that most [who leave the church] had been exposed to [only] a *superficial form of Christianity* that effectively inoculated them against authentic faith.”¹⁸

Kinnaman has come to a similar conclusion: “It is easy to embrace a *costless* form of Christianity in America today ... [with only] a *superficial* understanding of the gospel.... [But] in a *lightweight* [i.e., emotionally-based] exposure to Christianity, where a decision for Christ is portrayed as simple and costless, [the experience] will fail to produce lasting faith.”¹⁹

This particularly describes the experience of many young people. As Kinnaman notes, “Most teenagers in America enter adulthood considering themselves to be Christians and saying they have made a personal commitment to Christ. But within a decade, most of these young people will have left the church and will have placed [their] emotional connection to Christianity on the shelf. For most of them, their faith was *merely skin deep*.”²⁰

Today’s so-called Christianity is based largely on carefully selected New Testament passages (mostly from Paul’s writings) that are twisted to make them appear to teach a “soft Christianity”—a *costless* “faith” void of works and indifferent to clear biblical teachings on morality. Thus, “getting saved” is typically based on a fleeting emotional experience wherein the new “believer”—who is usually *too young* to fully understand what it means to “count the cost” (Luke 14:28)—is enamored with a popularized feel-good-about-yourself “Jesus.”

And when all you have is a “feel-good” religion, morality is the first thing out the window.

In fact, for the past few decades popular Christianity has been spawning a new generation of *plastic* Christians—those whose belief in Jesus amounts to nothing more than a “get-out-of-hell-free card.” As David Kupelian notes in his groundbreaking book *The Marketing of Evil*, “Christianity has been *dumbed down* into a bumper-sticker religion.... This *dumbed-down* version of Christianity doesn’t require honest introspection or courage or self-denial or patience. The only ingredient it needs is a guilty person who’s sick of feeling guilty, wants relief, wants to feel better about himself, and desires an ‘insurance policy’ to keep him out of hell. But even the most insincere person wants to feel better about himself, wants relief from guilt, and fears death.... [Thus,] the trivialization of Christianity into a mantra of belief—but separated from works, from obedience to God’s laws, and even more fundamentally, separated from basic honesty, integrity, love of truth, and *true repentance*—has ushered in a generation of shallow, ineffectual and invisible Christians.”²¹ Moreover, as

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Swanson brings out, Protestantism has “reduced God’s law to a nebulous definition of love”—so that “God’s will [can] be interpreted in a thousand ways by a thousand different people.”²²

The inevitable result is a *counterfeit* “religious experience”—leading to what Duin calls a “costless Christianity that’s easily maintained.”²³ It’s easily maintained because it’s devoid of *works* or real *obedience* to God’s Word. Jesus corrected the religious hobbyists of His day for this very same approach: “*Hypocrites! Isaiah has prophesied well concerning you, saying, ‘This people draw near to Me [God] with their mouths, and with their lips they honor Me’*”—they say all the right things, call Jesus “Lord, Lord,” sing praises to God every Sunday morning—“*but their hearts are far away from Me. [Thus,] they worship Me in vain, teaching for doctrine the commandments of men’*” (Matt. 15:7-9). Jesus applied Isaiah’s prophecy to the scribes and Pharisees of His day, but the passage is just as applicable to today’s “Christianity.”

Likewise, the prophet Jeremiah wrote: “An astounding and horrible thing has happened in the land. The prophets [pastors] prophesy [teach] *falsely* ... and *My people love to have it so...*” (Jer. 5:30-31). They love to hear “soft doctrine”—“smooth things”—but nothing that will prick their consciences.

Ezekiel also wrote of such “churchgoers”: “[The] children of your people are ... speaking to one another, each man to his brother, saying, ‘I pray you, come and hear what is the word [preached] which comes forth from the LORD.’ And they come to you [pastors] as the people [have traditionally] come, and they *sit before you as My people* [on Sunday mornings], and they *hear* your words. But they *will not do them.*”

Why? “For with their mouth they show much love”—again, they say all the right things, they sound like Christians—“but their *heart* goes after their covetousness” (Ezek. 33:30-31). They still *covet this world and its culture*—while fooling themselves into thinking they are somehow real “Christians”! Indeed, today’s churchgoers love to talk about Jesus as their *Lord*. But not every person who does so will enter the Kingdom of God—only the ones who *do the will of the Father* (Matt. 7:21; Luke 6:46).

As a whole, modern “Christianity” has *failed* to meet the spiritual needs of its members. Rather than being a sanctuary for the spiritual growth and development of its followers, “Churchanity” seems narrowly fixated on image, public relations and membership drives. Unwittingly, its leaders have created a “Christianity” that emphasizes *form* over *substance*. Meanwhile, as corruption, politics and negligence plague churches, congregations are slowly but steadily consumed by *worldliness*. Having lost touch with the real-life issues churchgoers are facing, pastors and church leaders seem oblivious to the reality that so-called “Christians” today are *no different* than unbelievers.

Christianity—Seduced by Worldliness

What has happened to Christianity? How has worldliness made such inroads into the church? A key reason, according to Kupelian, is that when the church should have been at the forefront in the nation’s “culture wars,” it too was seduced by *worldliness*. Kupelian quotes Francis Schaeffer—widely regarded as one of the most influential evangelical thinkers of modern times—who takes the unpopular position that mainstream Christianity has drawn back and failed to engage in a meaningful way in the ongoing battle for American culture. Schaeffer writes: “Most of the evangelical world has not been active in

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the battle, or even been able to see that we are in a battle.” In describing the “failure of the evangelical world to stand for [the] truth,” he says the church has “*accommodated*” the world—*tried to fit in*. Schaeffer adds that it has been “the weakness and accommodation of the evangelical group on the issues of the day that has been largely responsible for the loss of the Christian ethos” over the past few decades. Such accommodation, he writes, is nothing less than “*worldliness*”—and has led to the further breakdown of America’s moral base.²⁴

Kupelian suggests that such “accommodation” by church leaders was ostensibly an attempt to gain new converts, the idea being that you have to go where the unconverted are, act like them, look like them—all in hopes of winning their trust. But this approach is completely contrary to biblical instruction. He gives the following example: “[Youth] pastors at some point started to dispense with their formal attire and instead appeared before teenagers without coat and tie, so as not to appear a stuffed shirt. That’s a reasonable accommodation. But what happens when the youth leader’s strategy of going tieless turns into his dressing like a rap singer, talking jive, and wearing earrings? That’s what’s happening in Christian pop culture today.”²⁵

An extreme example of “accommodation” can be seen in the recent development of “churches” that offer enticements such as free *beer* or *cigars*—to be enjoyed *during services*, of course. This is nothing but an effort to attract non-Christians by *appealing to their lusts*. Scott Brown of the Center for Family Integrated Churches agrees: “[This is] relating with people by becoming *like* people.” He says, “When people come into the church, they should see a completely new kingdom, a completely new community. They should see how *different* God is than they are....”²⁶

Eric Ludy, president of Ellerslie Mission Society, likewise expressed his concerns about the church seeking to attract the world by appearing *cool*. He says, “The problem is, *Jesus wasn’t cool*. Whether we want to acknowledge it or not, Jesus didn’t do it the world’s way. He came in and [typically] offended the world.... We actually want to indict Jesus and say, ‘You know what? If You had known as much as we know, You would have done it differently.’ We want to appeal to the world’s sensibilities and somehow draw them to the Gospel. Jesus didn’t do any of that.” Ludy says that giving people the undiluted *truth* is the only way to bring relevance to Christianity. “The key is, we lift up the Gospel. We give the straight and narrow path. We give it undiluted—and people will start respecting us because we are not giving them something that will [merely] tantalize the flesh. We are giving them something that will bring life to their spirit.”²⁷

Whereas Kupelian and others use the notion of “accommodation” to explain where Christianity’s has gone awry, Swanson uses the idea of *synthesis*—the attempt to *mix* biblical ideals with worldly philosophies (also called *syncretism*). He argues that in the “war of ideas”—an ongoing cultural crisis that covers every aspect of life, including music and entertainment, education, politics, economics, etc.—Christians must be extremely careful not to *synthesize* their beliefs with the humanistic ideas of the world. Swanson writes that “when Christianity abandons the centrality of God”—by trying to *accommodate* or *synthesize* with the non-Christian world—“it loses [the] critical, distinctive element of the *Christian worldview*.”²⁸ The result is an irrelevant and powerless church.

Indeed, no other worldview will do. “For thousands of years, it was pastors and fathers in villages and homes who shaped the culture.” But today,

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“the media [has] replaced the church and the family as the dominant means by which society transfers information, inculcates worldviews, and forms [its] culture.”²⁹ Ideally, with a thoroughly biblical worldview, the church will lead or create culture. But if it fails to do so, the church will be *absorbed by popular culture*—to the extent that it practically ceases to exist.

This is exactly where Christianity in America (and Great Britain, for that matter) finds itself today: rather than leading or setting culture, the church now simply *reflects* culture. Like the culture that now dominates it, the church is rapidly being infested with paganism, polytheism, relativism and even nihilism. As Swanson says, “The synthesized church [now] finds itself under the unhappy curse of being both compromised and irrelevant.”³⁰

To put this another way, the church has followed the dubious path of “contextualization.” Thus, today the Gospel is preached in the “context” of popular culture. The original framework in which Jesus and the apostles preached the Gospel has become passé; what matters now is how the Gospel conveniently *fits* into modern society. Whether its music, entertainment, dress, language, morals or even attitudes, *contextualism* allows the church to *borrow* (synthesize) from the world whatever it needs in order to be comfortable, to appear effective, and to be *appealing*. Swanson writes: “If culture is the *living out* of a worldview, then Christians will live as Christians only if they are well acquainted with their own [biblical] worldview.... As long as the church tries to *contextualize* [popular] culture ... it will be powerless to impact that culture.”³¹

But whatever the motive—fear of rejection, doubtfulness, need for acceptance and approval—wanting to fit in and be like the world is just the *opposite* of what Jesus instructed His followers. Notice: “I have given them Your words, and the world has hated them because *they are not of the world*, just as I am not of the world” (John 17:14; also verse 16). The world will despise you if you practice true Christianity because you will be so *completely different* in every aspect of your life—because you will refuse to “fit in” and participate in today’s popular culture. James adds: “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their afflictions, and to *keep oneself unspotted from the world*” (James 1:27).

Why has Christianity been so *easily seduced* by those who market popular culture? Kupelian argues that it is because “a hidden, selfish part of [churchgoers] *wanted* to embrace” the falsehoods of popular culture.³² Indeed, *we want to fit in, to be of this world*. It is just as God said through Jeremiah—“My people *love to have it so*” (Jer. 5:31). It is just as Ezekiel said—“their *heart goes after their covetousness*” (Ezek. 33:31).

“Accommodation” has truly been modern Christianity’s “Achilles heel.” This is *why* Christianity in America has utterly failed: there is no *heart* in the people or their pastors to truly seek and obey God *on His terms!* It is much easier to simply fit in—to *accommodate* the non-Christian world. But as long as “Christians” are immersed in popular culture—or in any culture based on a non-biblical worldview—their thinking and way of living will never conform to the Word of God.

Indeed, Paul’s admonishment in Romans 12:2 has never been more appropriate—“Do not be conformed to this world!”

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NOTES

1. Julia Duin, *Quitting Church*, p. 18
2. Duin, pp. 11-12
3. Duin, p. 37
4. Drew Dyck, “The ‘Leavers’: Young Doubters Exit the Church”;
www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/november/27.40.html?start=1
5. Duin, pp. 20, 32
6. Chuck Baldwin, “Ear Tickling, Entertainment, and Irrelevant Exposition”;
www.NewsWithViews.com; www.chuckbaldwinlive.com
7. Jared Wilson, *Your Jesus Is Too Safe*, pp. 6, 14
8. George Barna, *Revolution*, p. 31
9. Barna, pp. 32-33
10. Tyler Charles, “(Almost) Everyone’s Doing It,” *Relevant*, Sept. 2011
11. Charles, “(Almost) Everyone’s Doing It”
12. Dyck, “The ‘Leavers’: Young Doubters Exit the Church”
13. David Kinnaman, *unChristian*, p. 46
14. Kinnaman, pp. 46-47
15. Kinnaman, p. 47
16. Kevin Swanson, *Apostate: The Men Who Destroyed the Christian West*, pp. 25, 31-32
17. Swanson, p. 13
18. Dyck, “The ‘Leavers’: Young Doubters Exit the Church”
19. Kinnaman, pp. 75-76
20. Kinnaman, p. 74
21. David Kupelian, *The Marketing of Evil*, pp. 235, 239
22. Swanson, p. 29
23. Duin, p. 116
24. Kupelian, p. 226, quoting *The Great Evangelical Disaster* by Francis Schaeffer
25. Kupelian, p. 228
26. Heather Clark, “Bibles and Booze: Congregations Across America Attempting to Attract New Members with Beer”;
www.christiannews.net/2013/11/03/bibles-and-booze-congregations-across-america-attempting-to-attract-new-members-with-beer/
27. Clark, “Bibles and Booze”
28. Swanson, pp. 10, 15
29. Swanson, p. 271
30. Swanson, p. 33
31. Swanson, p. 283
32. Kupelian, p. 240

Appendix

**Has Christianity’s Decline
Spawned “Atheist Churches”?**

With the fall of communism, *coerced* atheism has fallen rapidly. But *voluntary* atheism and other forms of voluntary non-belief are clearly on the rise—particularly in America and the UK. According to Gallup, more than 9 in 10 Americans still answer “yes” when asked the basic question, “Do you believe in God?”—a statistic virtually unchanged from the 1940s. But when asked about the *absolute certainty* of their belief, the number drops to the 70-80 percent range. A 2008 Gallup poll showed that about 6 percent of the U.S. population believes definitively that no God exists (39 percent for the UK, where humanist organizations have flourished for decades).¹

The question is, has the decline of Christianity contributed to a rise in atheism? It appears so. According to a 2008 ARIS study, Christianity in America (and the UK) is not threatened by other religions, but by a growing *denial* of religion in general.² This would suggest that atheism’s growth is to some degree based on the ongoing decline of Christianity. As demonstrated by this booklet, there is a growing perception that Christianity has lost its effectiveness; increasingly, Christians are becoming nonreligious—and at least some are “converting” to atheism. However, research indicates that most atheists are *not* “converts” from any religion; rather, they have always rejected religion in general because of its insistence on a Supreme Being.

Interestingly, a number of studies reveal that many atheists deny the existence of God while actually indulging in some kind of formal religious practice—usually Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, or a related philosophical worldview. Many do so as a way of *connecting* with their culture—all the while being atheist.³ This suggests that there is an *intrinsic need* in humans to connect with “something spiritual.” Such an “inherent longing” may explain the recent growth of “atheist churches” in the UK and America. The following reports shed light on this bizarre movement wherein adherents are obviously intent on satisfying a vague but discernable spiritual need.

After all, even atheists are human.

1. www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_atheism
2. www.americanreligionsurvey-aris.org/reports/ARIS_Report_2008.pdf
3. www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_atheism

**Atheist “Mega-Churches” Take Root
Across U.S., World**

LOS ANGELES (AP)—It looked like a typical Sunday morning at any mega-church. Several hundred people, including families with small children, packed in for more than an hour of rousing music, an inspirational sermon, a reading and some quiet reflection. The only thing missing was God.

Nearly three dozen gatherings dubbed “atheist mega-churches” by supporters and detractors have sprung up around the U.S. and Australia—with more to come—after finding success in Great Britain earlier this year. The

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movement, fueled by social media and spearheaded by two prominent British comedians, is no joke.

On Sunday, the inaugural Sunday Assembly in Los Angeles attracted several hundred people bound by their belief in non-belief. Similar gatherings in San Diego, Nashville, New York and other U.S. cities have drawn hundreds of atheists seeking the camaraderie of a congregation without religion or ritual.

The founders, British duo Sanderson Jones and Pippa Evans, are currently on a tongue-in-cheek “40 Dates, 40 Nights” tour around the U.S. and Australia to drum up donations and help launch new Sunday Assemblies. They hope to raise more than \$800,000 that will help atheists launch their pop-up congregations around the world. So far, they have raised about \$50,000.

They don’t bash believers but want to find a new way to meet likeminded people, engage in the community, and make their presence more visible in a landscape dominated by faith.

Jones got the first inkling for the idea while leaving a Christmas carol concert six years ago. “There was so much about it that I loved, but it’s a shame because, at the heart of it, it’s something I don’t believe in,” Jones said. “If you think about church, there’s very little that’s bad. It’s singing awesome songs, hearing interesting talks, thinking about improving yourself and helping other people—and doing that in a community with wonderful relationships. What part of that is not to like?”

The movement dovetails with new studies that show an increasing number of Americans are drifting from any religious affiliation.

The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life released a study last year that found 20 percent of Americans say they have no religious affiliation, an increase from 15 percent in the last five years. Pew researchers stressed, however, that the category also encompassed majorities of people who said they believed in God but had no ties with organized religion and people who consider themselves “spiritual” but not “religious.”

Sunday Assembly—whose motto is Live Better, Help Often, Wonder More—taps into that universe of people who left their faith but now miss the community church provided, said Phil Zuckerman, a professor of secular studies at Pitzer College in Claremont.

It also plays into a feeling among some atheists that they should make themselves more visible. For example, last December an atheist in Santa Monica created an uproar—and triggered a lawsuit—when he set up a godless display amid Christian nativity scenes that were part of a beloved, decades-old tradition.

“In the U.S., there’s a little bit of a feeling that if you’re not religious, you’re not patriotic. I think a lot of secular people say, ‘Hey, wait a minute. We are charitable, we are good people, we’re good parents and we are just as good citizens as you and we’re going to start a church to prove it,’ ” said Zuckerman. “It’s still a minority, but there’s enough of them now.”

That impulse, however, has raised the ire of those who have spent years pushing back against the idea that atheism itself is a religion. “The idea that you’re building an entire organization based on what you don’t believe, to me, sounds like an offense against sensibility,” said Michael Luciano, a self-described atheist who was raised Roman Catholic but left when he became disillusioned. “There’s something not okay with appropriating all of this religious language, imagery and ritual for atheism,” said Luciano, who blogged about the movement at the site www.policymic.com.

That sentiment didn’t seem to detract from the excitement Sunday at the inaugural meeting in Los Angeles.

Hundreds of atheists and atheist-curious packed into a Hollywood auditorium for a boisterous service filled with live music, moments of reflection,

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an “inspirational talk” about forgotten—but important—inventors and scientists, and some stand-up comedy.

During the service, attendees stomped their feet, clapped their hands, and cheered as Jones and Evans led the group through rousing renditions of “Lean on Me,” “Here Comes the Sun” and other hits that took the place of gospel songs. Congregants dissolved into laughter at a get-to-know-you game that involved clapping and slapping the hands of the person next to them and applauded as members of the audience spoke about community service projects they had started in Los Angeles.

At the end, volunteers passed cardboard boxes for donations as attendees mingled over coffee and pastries and children played on the floor.

For atheist Elijah Senn, the morning was perfect. “I think the image that we have put forward in a lot of ways has been a scary, mean, we-want-to-tear-down-the-walls, we-want-to-do-destructive-things kind of image is what a lot of people have of us,” he said. “I’m really excited to be able to come together and show that it’s not about destruction. It’s about making things and making things better.”

Source: http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/U/US_ATHEIST_MEGACHURCH?SITE=AP&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT&CTIME=2013-11-10-17-03-15
Sunday Assembly: www.SundayAssembly.com

Godless Divided Over Sunday Assembly: Atheist “Mega-Church” too Churchlike for Some Nonbelievers

A growing godless congregation has some atheists in a state of disbelief.

The Sunday Assembly, which recently embarked on a 40-day tour around the U.S., Canada and Australia, is being branded an “atheist mega-church” by the media. The founders, two comedians named Sanderson Jones and Pippa Evans, say they just want to celebrate life and help people live better without all that God stuff, but many atheists say the whole effort defies the very definition of atheism, which is not a belief system but the absence of a belief.

The assembly held events this week in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Vancouver and elsewhere—where willful atheists turned out to sing songs and exchange messages of positivity. The events evoke the experience of a traditional church, according to one account from the Associated Press, but they’re not centered around a deity. According to the Sunday Assembly Web site, the assembly is a “place of love that is open and accepting,” but its aim is to celebrate the “only life we know we have.”

“We are born from nothing and go to nothing. Let’s enjoy it together,” the founders write.

The assemblies are free to attend and volunteer-run, and the founders say they don’t accept sponsorships or promote outside businesses. They will, however, take your money—a notion that mimics the underpinnings of churchlike greed a little too closely in the minds of some atheists.

Go to the Sunday Assembly Web site and what’s the first thing you notice? “DONATE.” Like any good church, getting money is their goal.

So how much does it cost to run an atheist mega-church? The founders are seeking to raise £500,000 (\$804,100) on Indiegogo, and they’re off to a strong start. The campaign has raised £29,556 with a full 31 days left to go. Many of the commenters on the campaign thanked the assembly for creating something they’ve been searching for. “Been waiting for this type of thing for a long time,” one commenter wrote. “Can’t wait to get involved!”

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There is an element of satire and performance art to the whole thing—as evidenced by this video featuring Evans dousing Jones in a giant glass of red wine—and given that the duo are both comedians, it should come as no surprise that already-skeptical atheists are questioning Jones and Evans’ motives. But the founders swear they are serious about the assembly’s core concept. They say that, despite the media’s characterization of “atheist mega-churches,” they are celebrating life, not atheism. On Twitter this week, Jones spent time defending his organization against detractors.

The assembly’s Australian tour begins Sunday in Perth and continues through Nov. 24.

Source: www.ibtimes.com/godless-divided-over-sunday-assembly-atheist-mega-church-too-churchlike-some-nonbelievers-1472750

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