"We will match your capacity to inflict suffering with our capacity to endure suffering. We will meet your physical force with soul force. We will not hate you, but we cannot in good conscience obey your unjust laws. Do to us what you will and we will still love you. Bomb our homes and threaten our children; send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our communities and drag us out on some wayside road, beating us and leaving us half-dead, and we will still love you. But we will soon wear you down by our capacity to suffer. And in winning our freedom we will so appeal to your heart and conscience that we will win you in the process."

- Martin Luther King, Jr.

Ministry: Toward a Balanced Life, Part 2: Holy and Whole

To minister effectively one must keep his or her cup "full and running over." No minister can be as holy as possible without being as whole as possible - socially, spiritually, sexually, physically, mentally, emotionally, and recreationally.

But how? What's a minister to do to stay well and balanced, given the never-ending tasks incumbent upon him or her?

There is no magical, mystical "Do this and Thou shalt thrive" formula. You'll need to design and implement your own unique game plan to improve your balance. To help you think about it, here are ten things, in no particular order, I have noticed about the most "whole" ministers I have known:

- They pay themselves first; financially, but more importantly with self-care, for instance by staying trim and fit.
- They maintain a certain distance from their ministry role(s).
- They have close non-church friends. (I know a highly effective "big steeple" pastor whose best friend is a Jewish lawyer in the same city.)
- They have passions they actively pursue outside of their ministry work.
- They maximize their income and live within their means.
They tend their primary relationship and make parenting a priority.

They take at least one "long" vacation (three weeks to a month) every year.

They practice clear communication in a timely fashion. For example, they do not avoid conflict; rather, they use crises as "dangerous opportunities."

They truly, deeply appreciate their staff, and show it.

They are not possessive of their "turf." For example, if preaching is a forte of theirs, they freely share the pulpit with staff members and guest speakers.

A few more hints to help you design your unique "balancing act."

Many ministers, especially males, tend to be circumstantial rather than purposeful about assertively seeking relationships they may be able to deepen into lifelong friendships. Ask yourself, "Are the 'friends' I have in my life the friends I want in my life?" If your answer is, "Not really," or "Not quite," consider firing some of your present friends, thereby creating a friendship vacuum. Then, make time to court a friend this year.

When it comes to a minister's support and accountability group, an ecumenical one, or at least an interdenominational one, is more trustable than a group of peers within one's own denomination, let alone within one's workplace.

Many ministers are able to negotiate sabbaticals. If you can, do it. A sabbatical can renew your strength like nothing else. In the spirit of #5 on the "Twenty Questions" checklist, one's annual educational adventure should last at least a week.

Women in ministry do better at this than men, but if I had $1,000 for each time I have heard a pastor's wife say something like "I feel he's more married to the church than he is to me," I'd be a rich man. Ask yourself, "Who, exactly, do I want to grow old with?" And if you have a wife (or husband) and aren't absolutely, positively certain it is she/he you want to grow old with, you have work to do.

Finally, I risk emulating a dominical axiom: "You have heard it said unto you, 'Never play till your work is done.' But I say unto you, 'Never work till your play is done.'" I think Jesus would like that idea.

Discuss this article on our Facebook page

John Landgraf was director of the Center for Ministry in Oakland, CA (1975-1987), president of Central Seminary in Kansas City, KS (1987-1992), and taught at Fuller Seminary in Northern California (1992-2008). He and his wife Laura conduct private couple retreats (www.landgrafretreats.com).

Resources

Do you know anyone married to a pastor?
Live Satellite Uplink for Ministerial Spouses

The NAD Ministerial department urges Best Practices readers to invite pastoral spouses to participate in a special TV program to be uplinked on the Hope Church Channel Tuesday, November 1, 2011 from 2-4 pm east coast time.

Donna Jackson, Associate Director of NAD Ministerial for spouses said: "I can't wait for November 1 when we will be able to connect, affirm, and empower all of the pastoral spouses in the NAD." Keeping it Real targets pastors and spouses but is especially focused on those who recently acquired that role. Pastoral spouses Joanne Cortes and Carin Villaiva will host the presentations.

The live show will feature:

- Daisy & Daniel Quinones--Finding Your Voice for God
- Rhonda Johnson & Debi Pedersen--Healthy Body & Soul
- Martin Weber--Keeping Your Kids Connected
- Christina & Bernie Anderson--Dealing with Pornography Addiction
- Cynthia Mercer--Increasing Spiritual & Emotional Intimacy
- Jose Hernandez--Embracing Your Identity and Role

Dave Gemmell says "Although studio space at the Hope Channel is limited there is room for
everyone to view the live show and participate via the Ministerial Spouses Association Facebook page. Or text your questions to 818-477-3844. Keeping it Real can be seen on the Hope Channel App, Online, and on Glory Star Satellite receiver channel 124. For more info contact Donna Jackson.

Reading for Pastors

Five cultural shifts that should affect the way we do church. Quote: “Churches aren't the most culturally savvy places. I know that some congregations are still fighting about whether they should be singing 'contemporary' songs, which were written in the 1980s.”

Poor Harold Camping: he just won't give up. This time, his date is October 21. (You’ll find some reflections on Harold's predictions from an Adventist perspective here.)

Alternative church styles:

- We've used to building big churches. But what about micro-churches? It's happening in Fort Worth.
- Professor at Dallas Theological Seminary says that the online church is theologically indefensible. Quote: “Simply put, virtual church is anti-church.” (This is a powerful article!)

Pastors, in case you need one more reason to behave yourself, please note that a Minnesota jury just gave a $1.4 million award to a parishioner who had a sexual relationship with her pastor at a time when she was emotionally vulnerable. The pastor has to pay about $250,000 of it personally. Is that how you want to spent your retirement savings?

You think your church has conflict? I'd be surprised if you could top this! Quote: “A group of religious castoffs has been attacking fellow Amish, cutting off their hair and beards in an apparent feud over spiritual differences.”

Religious issues with Mitt Romney as presidential candidate: Is Mormonism a cult? Who decides? And if it is, should we be calling it one?

- At least one prominent conservative pastor thinks so.
- But Richard Mouw, president of Fuller Theological Seminary, defends Mormons against the label.
- Christopher Hitchens insists that at the very least some of their beliefs are weird and sinister.
- Why the reluctance to speak out against religious bigotry? Quote: “The public would never for one minute accept this kind of anti-Mormon rhetoric if the target had been a Jew, a Catholic, a Baptist, a Lutheran or adherent of most any other major faith.”

New study highlights the decision-making flaw in powerful people: they don't listen well or take advice.

Resources

Prepare to be Disappointed: October 22 Celebration

“In the events leading up to and including October 22, 1844 our Adventist forefathers left us with an important heritage. Instead of a beginning of being 'right' about our religion, we began with utter failure and humiliation. Out of this failure and what was indeed a Great Disappointment - hope was born and a movement began.” - Rajeev Sigamoney

In 2010 many Adventist Churches began a tradition of reenacting the Great Disappointment Day, and learning from the journey of the Adventist Pioneers. Groups huddled around campfires and stayed up till midnight weaving their own experiences of anticipation, disappointment, and renewal with the experience of the pioneers.

These resources are now available on Pastor's DVD volume 19 to be used in planning a life changing experience at your church. Event planner helps include a video promotional piece, a video with discussion questions and a complete facilitators guide produced by the Hollywood Adventist Church. The file is found under Documents\GDD_MASTEER_PDF. The Pastor's DVD is distributed to all pastors in the NAD through local conference Ministerial departments. Others may purchase PDVD19 at AdventSource.

To the Point

A desk is a dangerous place from which to watch the world. - John Le Carre

Whenever we seek to avoid the responsibility for our own behavior, we do so by attempting to give that responsibility to some
other individual or organization or entity. But this means we then give away our power to that entity.

- M. Scott Peck

All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players: they have their exits and their entrances; and one man in his time plays many parts, his acts being seven ages.

- William Shakespeare

Power is of two kinds. One is obtained by the fear of punishment and the other by acts of love. Power based on love is a thousand times more effective and permanent then the one derived from fear of punishment.

- Mohandas Gandhi

The moral arc of the universe bends at the elbow of justice.

- Martin Luther King, Jr.

Let us touch the dying, the poor, the lonely and the unwanted according to the graces we have received and let us not be ashamed or slow to do the humble work.

- Mother Teresa

Holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else; you are the one who gets burned.

- Buddha

A banker is a fellow who lends you his umbrella when the sun is shining, but wants it back the minute it begins to rain.

- Mark Twain

Love is not blind - it sees more, not less. But because it sees more, it is willing to see less.

- Rabbi Julius Gordon

Read, every day, something no one else is reading. Think, every day, something no one else is thinking. Do, every day, something no one else would be silly enough to do. It is bad for the mind to be always part of unanimity.

- Christopher Morley

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**News, Ideas & Reminders**

- The Andrews Study Bible is now digital! New Logos Bible Software edition of the Andrews Study Bible.

- Annual council news is available on line, along with new ANN video news each Friday.

- Previous resource links:
  - Andrews Study Bible
  - The Hope of Survivors, ministry to victims of pastoral sexual abuse
  - iFollow website
  - NAD NewsPoints (formerly Friday Fax): by email, or on a web page.
  - Back issues of REACH North America News
  - Federal Regulation Forces Crib Replacements in Church Nurseries
  - Special creation-evolution edition of REACH North America News
  - Tony Morgan's free e-book on big churches getting bigger
  - Adventist Parenting e-newsletter
  - Exposing Harry Potter
  - The one Project
  - Facts with Hope, evidence-based health messages for bulletins
  - NAD Volunteer Screening Guidelines and Screening Form
  - Dr. Matthew Gamble at 2011 GODencounters
  - InMinistry fall classes in NAD

Got a tool, resource, site, article, idea or seminar that you like a lot? Share it with us at BestPractices@ameritech.net.

**Upcoming NAD Events**

Do you have an event you’d like to invite NAD pastors to? Send details to BestPractices@Ameritech.net.

**Youth Leadership Development (YLD).**
Oct 21, 2011 - Oct 23, 2011, Andrews University, Center for Youth Evangelism, 4145 E Campus Circle Drive, Berrien Springs, MI 49104. Annual gathering for youth leadership development, focused on bringing the finest experience into one
intense weekend of training, networking, and worship. YLD summit is the place to be. Over 50 hours of youth and young adult ministry seminars by specialist trainers. Phone: 800-968-8428. For more information, email: japhet@andrews.edu

Pathfinder Sabbath.
Oct 22, 2011, Division Wide. Special materials provided.

Native Heritage Month.
Nov 5, 2011 - Nov 26, 2011, Division Wide.

Stewardship Sabbath.
Nov 5, 2011, Division Wide. Check the NAD Stewardship site for information.

Week of Prayer.

G.L.U.E.
Nov 11, 2011 - Nov 13, 2011, Cohutta Springs Conference Center, 1175 Cohutta Springs Road, Crandall, GA 30711. The G.L.U.E. (Giving, Loving, Understanding, and Encouraging) conference will provide the steps, as well as the techniques churches can use to assist in discovering how people with disabilities can be included as partners in ministry. Phone: 301-680-6425. For more information, email: ChildrensMinistries@nad.adventist.org

Welcome Home Sabbath.
Nov 26, 2011, Division Wide. Let's get serious from the start. Programs don't win people back to church, people do! That's why a contact from someone in your local church is vital to getting inactive members engaged in church life again. Welcome Home is a user-friendly guide for personalizing invitations to Homecoming Sabbaths to reach and reconnect with former and missing church members. Phone: 800-328-0525. For more information, email: service@adventsource.org

Best Practices is a Vervent publication of NAD CHURCH RESOURCE CENTER. Editor: Loren Seibold, Ohio Conference. E-mail: Best Practices. You are free to republish pieces from Best Practices in your own newsletter or blog, with attribution to the Best Practices newsletter and the author of the piece.
Churches aren’t the most culturally savvy places. I know that some congregations are still fighting about whether they should be singing “contemporary” songs, which were written in the 1980s. Or they’re wrestling over the use of PowerPoint, which can be tiresome for people who have endured two decades of PP board meetings.

It’s probably good that most churches aren’t all wrapped up in the latest fads. We don’t have the cash to keep up with most of it, and if we do, we’re probably better off spending that money on feeding the homeless rather than making sure the youth room has the newest flat-screen TV.

But there are cultural shifts that congregations and church leaders need to track and respond to sensibly. Here are five of them.

1) **Finances.** Younger generations are not faring well in this economy. They didn’t do so well when the rest of the country was booming either. Why? Younger generations face high student loan debt, high housing costs and stagnant wages (if they’re even able to get a job). The shame they bear matches our debt load, and they feel like they need to get their life together before they go to church.

Are people ashamed of their monetary situation in our congregations? Is the first thing that comes out of our mouth at coffee hour, “So, where do you work?” Can we think of another question, like, “So, what keeps you busy these days?” Do we introduce new members by highlighting their shiny resume? Are we realistic in our giving expectations with young adults?

2) **Work hours.** People who go to mainline churches are wealthier. Or wealthier people go to mainline churches. It’s a chicken-and-egg thing. We don’t know what comes first. But young workers know one thing: many people in their 20s and 30s work retail or in the service industry. The blue laws faded long ago, and you don’t get Sunday mornings off unless you’re management.

Do we have opportunities to worship or engage in the community beyond Sunday morning? In the future, is Sunday morning going to be the best time to have worship services? Can we use new technologies to podcast our services so that people can stay connected when they can’t make it on Sunday?

3) **Families.** People marry and have children later in life. Some people say that adults in their 20s and 30s are just extending adolescence, having fun in their odyssey years, or they’re too commitment-phobic to settle down. Yet, we’re a society that expects financial stability before a couple gets married, and many younger adults can’t manage financial stability.

Does our church leadership operate with rush judgments that condemn the character of emerging generations? Do we expect “young families” to come to our church? Do we have space for single folks or people who don’t have families? Do we expect people to enter our doors two-by-two?

4) **The Internet.** Church leaders have a lot on their plate. Many don’t think they have any time for Facebook or Twitter. They may still be working with the misconception that the only things people are blogging about are what sort of breakfast they had on Tuesday (although if you’re reading this, you probably realize that blogs are good for
more than personal over-sharing). But there’s no way to ignore it any longer. Even if a church leader shies away from the web, people may be talking about you on Google Map reviews or Yelp.

Is your congregation keeping up with its online presence? Are you googling your church and finding out what people are saying? Are you using Facebook for pastoral care? Are you staying in contact with emerging adults who move away for education or jobs?

5) Politics. A new generation is exhausted from the culture wars. Many people growing up in the last few decades had a difficult time keeping “Christian” and “Republican” in two separate boxes. Emerging generations look at poverty, the environment and war as complex issues, and many younger evangelicals are less likely to vote on pro-life credentials alone. Many young Christians who grew up evangelical are trying out mainline congregations.

Is your church leery of evangelicals who grew up non-denominational or without any religious affiliation? Do we expect people to have the Lord’s Prayer and the Apostles’ Creed memorized before they attend worship? Do we make snide comments about people who “don’t even know what it means to be Methodist (or Presbyterian or Lutheran, etc.)”?

There are many shifts occurring in our current religious and cultural landscape. Have our churches thought about the larger changes in an emerging generation? We can become much more effective in reaching out to a new generation if we do.

Carol Howard Merritt is pastor of Western Presbyterian Church in Washington DC and author of “Tribal Church” (Alban). She blogs at tribalchurch.org.

Posted by Carol Howard Merritt at 9:35 am
In Millennials | Pastoral leadership | Trends
Permalink | Comments (7) | Post a comment

7 Comments

What generates commitment?
Posted by Ben McNutt at September 22, 2011 1:27 pm

Thanks for this, Carol. I’m always struck by the complaint that young people are commitment-phobic. I’ve often thought the question of why young folks lack commitment isn’t quite right. They commit to all sorts of things, just perhaps not what previous generations might have. I think the more significant question to ask is what generates commitment in the first place? What makes people want to commit to something?

Commitment...
Posted by Mark at September 25, 2011 10:13 am

It’s not just the 20- and 30-somethings who are shying away from church. Some of us 40- and 50-somethings (and older and younger) are losing or have lost interest. Why commit to an organization unwilling to commit to you, to listen to you, to understand you, to accept you for who you are instead of who they want you to be? It’s not just the socio-economic and generational prejudices, either. It’s also the doctrinaire attitude -- even among so-called liberals -- that leads some of us to say, "Why bother with the Church?" It’s a shame, really, that I grew up but the Church didn’t. I’d like the Church to make room for those of us whose spirituality, theology, and view of scripture matured beyond 5th grade Sunday School. If the Church won’t do that, I’m forced to look elsewhere for a faith community.

cross-cultural compatibility of comments
Posted by Wendy Kilworth-Mason at September 27, 2011 12:11 pm

Dear Carol
As a British Methodist Minister (currently contemplating a return to the 'mission field,' teaching in an African Theological College) I am struck anew by the cross-cultural compatibility of some of your comments.

We share your Sunday morning fixation, so fewer of our churches now offer Sunday evening worship than used to be the case. We are suspicious of mid-week services (though Anglicanism records that in its tradition these are the Acts of Worship that are experiencing a moderate increase in attendance, perhaps owing to the changed rhythms of life and employment).
Why do 'established' Church communities seem to value only those whose prosperity will make them worthy donors to the churches coffer? I'm sure that this is not their intention but it can be the effect of their questioning of the small number of strangers/newcomers who darken their doors.

Perhaps as church we could begin with some workshops on 'outreach' that teach conversational opening gambits that are more open!

Some of the most welcoming churches that I encounter in my current role are those whose numbers are such that any interest in participating is valued.

When 'respectable folk,' like us, no longer grace the church even the slovenly dressed worshipper is welcome and, besides, we might indeed be welcoming angels unawares!

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**Lord's Day**

*Posted by Joseph-guest at September 27, 2011 12:21 pm*

Hello,

I am a member (and D.V. a future minister) in a very conservative denomination. I found your article very interesting. My question is what would you say to Conservative Reformed Churches who still believe and practice the Lord's day, that is one day set apart for worship. And this being a theological conviction. I certainly agree with you on the other counts, to a large extent(- though I think the local church ought to help young adults (esp. men) learns the skills they need to grow up faster instead of indulging them- ), but on your second point I cannot help reflecting on the 4th commandment. Any thoughts? Thanks. JPG2

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"Lord's Day" and others

*Posted by Kristian at September 28, 2011 3:33 am*

In response to one comment, Paul did say (romans 14 throughout) that some consider one day more special than others, another considers all days equally (whether all days are special or no day is special, I think a Christian would opt for the former). Then he says "let each be convinced in their own minds" - and that those who judge one way should not denounce one who decides the other way for, "whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord" (romans 14:5,6)

"You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister[a]? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.(14:10)
"For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit"...(14:17)
We must also remember that "everything that does not come from faith is sin."(14:23)

Quoting from NIV throughout, except where I wrote from memory at the start.

So, if we condemn based on our date, or style of worship, we are hurting another's conscience by our conduct. On the one hand, if, by imposing a new way of worship, we cause another to stumble, that is taking away the option for one to regard one day as special to the Lord. On the other hand, if we say that one day a week is particularly special, an judgement of another, who considers all days equally to the Lord, in righteousness and thanksgiving, with joy, then are we not condemning another's servant - namely, a servant of Jesus, not of us? (14:4)

So, if one is theologically convinced regarding a particular day, is that same person, or group, also theologically convinced, along with Paul, that those in Christ who may have a different conviction regarding days and months are equally to stand before their master, and, by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, to stay standing?

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What a wonderful post. The

*Posted by Eleanor at September 29, 2011 2:29 pm*

What a wonderful post. The question about young families is especially poignant to me. I know many people young women in their mid-to-late 20s who feel pressure to marry, but the men that they're involved with feel pressure to have their financial houses in order before they marry. I have seen relationships where it puts a strain on the relationships to have these pressures battling it out - and when this pressure comes from the church, it certainly doesn't make it feel like a welcome home for these couples.

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Hi. I just want to comment

*Posted by Guest at October 12, 2011 2:35 pm*

Hi. I just want to comment on what you said about families. The fact is that the nuclear family is just not the norm
anymore. Churches need to make a focused effort to include and minister to never married adults, single parents, blended families and grandparents who are raising their grandkids. The churches I've been in haven't necessarily excluded these groups or made them feel un-welcome, but haven't made any effort to really include them either.
Harold Camping predicts Oct. 21 rapture — again

So, the rapture didn’t happen last time preacher Harold Camping said it would. When May 21 finally rolled around, there weren’t any trumpet sounds and Camping — along with millions of other Christians — didn’t rise up into the sky.

Maybe the end wasn’t nigh after all. But a whole lot of atheists in Seattle had a fun party and raised a few thousand dollars for a non-religious camp for kids.

Now, Camping is saying the real rapture happens later this month. May 21 was a deadline of sorts — an “invisible judgment day.” In other words, if you weren’t saved then, you’re going to be in a lot of trouble come Oct. 21.

So far, no Seattle-area “rapture day” parties are planned for that date. Earlier this year, a local atheist group planned a party to mark the end of Camping’s “countdown to backpedaling.”

Here’s the message Camping is putting out on the website for his Family Radio organization:

Thus we can be sure that the whole world, with the exception of those who are presently saved (the elect), are under the judgment of God, and will be annihilated together with the whole physical world on October 21, 2011, on the last day of the present five months period. On that day the true believers (the elect) will be raptured. We must remember that only God knows who His elect are that He saved prior to May 21.

More recently, he told followers in a recorded message:

I do believe that we’re getting very near the very end…. If [God] had not kept us from knowing everything that we didn’t know, we would not have been able to be used of Him to bring about the tremendous event that occurred on May 21 of this year, and which probably will be finished out on October 21, that’s coming very shortly. That looks like it will be at this point, it looks like it will be the final end of everything.

Camping suffered a stroke shortly after his rapture predictions in May fell flat. He recently returned home to his California home where he is “continuing his recuperation in the care of his dear wife,” according to Family Radio.

For more on what happened earlier this year see this story: “Harold Camping mum about judgment day, atheists aren’t.”

Camping explained how he miscalculated earlier this year. Watch the explanation, courtesy of the Associated Press.
How close can we come to knowing when Jesus will return?

When we were traveling in Spain recently, my wife called my attention to a billboard on the roadside near Seville that said “21 Mayo 2011” and “Radio Familia.” We had known about, and on rare occasions listened to, Harold Camping’s Family Radio for many years—he was on in the San Francisco area when we lived there—but were surprised to find that he now reaches around the world.

Harold calls himself “The Bible Answer Man” and often you’ll hear him live on air taking phoned-in questions—the more remarkable for his being 90 years old. But now he has a new cause: he’s set a definite date for the rapture. Jesus, says Harold, will take his people away on May 21, 2011. Harold has bent the resources of Family Radio to telling the world of this prediction, and has apparently convinced others to join him.
Harold reaches this conclusion by a tortured numerology. Here it is, from an article from SFGate (via Wikipedia) [4]:

1. According to Camping, the number five equals “atonement”, the number ten equals “completeness”, and the number seventeen equals “heaven”.

2. Christ is said to have hung on the cross on April 1, 33 AD. The time between April 1, 33 AD and April 1, 2011 is 1,978 years.

3. If 1,978 is multiplied by 365.2422 days (the number of days in a solar year, not to be confused with the lunar year), the result is 722,449.

4. The time between April 1 and May 21st is 51 days.

5. 51 added to 722,449 is 722,500.

6. \((5 \times 10 \times 17)^2\) or \((\text{atonement} \times \text{completeness} \times \text{heaven})^2\) also equals 722,500.

Thus, Camping concludes that \(5 \times 10 \times 17\) [squared] is telling us a “story from the time Christ made payment for our sins until we’re completely saved.”

Of the verse saying that “of that day and hour knoweth no man” (Matthew 24:36), Camping points out that the next verse compares our time to the days of Noah, and in fact Noah did know when the flood would begin (Genesis 7:4). As for Christ’s arrival as “a thief in the night,” (1 Thessalonians 5:2) Camping reads Paul to say that while some will be surprised, the faithful will have inside information—“But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief” (1 Thessalonians 5:4, emphasis supplied).

We Seventh-day Adventists have always had an uneasy relationship with the historical time line. Setting a date for Jesus to return was what initially got us into trouble in 1843 and 1844, though it was admitting that mistake and moving on with God’s guidance that launched our denomination and the marvelous worldwide ministry we have today. We’ve never again officially endorsed a date for Jesus to return, though sometimes we come about as close as we can, noting some current event or another that we speculate puts it within a decade or two.

Some independent Adventist ministries haven’t been as cautious. Lay eschatologist Larry Wilson [5] set dates of 1994, 1997, 1998 and others for the tribulation and other end time events. (To my knowledge, Larry doesn’t say exactly when Jesus will appear in the clouds, although a general time period between now and 2017 has been mentioned.) Camping himself had earlier promised Jesus’ return in the late 90’s.
(The amazing thing is that these folks seem not to automatically lose their followers after a failed prediction—an example of what social psychologist Leon Festinger called “disconfirmed expectancy [6]”, which came out of his studies of Chicago-based UFO cult in the mid-1950’s.)

I don’t find Camping’s interpretation of Matthew 24:36ff convincing: the intention of the passage is so clearly to say that we ought to live *always* ready. If even Jesus himself doesn’t know when he’ll be sent back for us, then the Advent is whenever God wants it to be, Noah’s knowledge of the earth’s first rainfall notwithstanding. For the same reason, I find no value in another theory I’ve also heard from date-setters, that Jesus only said you can’t know the day or hour, but he didn’t rule out our identifying the month or year.

Paul’s saying that the Advent shouldn’t be a surprise to the faithful opens another can of worms: we know from multiple New Testament passages that those dear believers clearly expected Jesus to return in their lifetimes. But if the Thessalonians did identify a precise time for Jesus’ return so as not to be surprised, then they were disappointed, because it didn’t happen.

While we haven’t set dates, the idea that something we can do—either become perfect people, which I’ve written about here [7], or spread the gospel to the world—will bring on the Second Advent, has a following. The latter idea generally draws on Matthew 24:14 which says that “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” However the causative interpretation isn’t inevitable: there is no necessity, either in Greek or English, that the second thing happen *because of* the first. If one says, “We will eat dinner, and then the football game will start,” that doesn’t necessarily mean that our finishing dinner signals kickoff.

So what can we safely say about the timing of Jesus’ return?

First, it’s going to happen, because we can trust God’s promises.

Second, we Seventh-day Adventists believe we have been given a “heads up” through prophecy that we are to remind the world about Jesus’ return, and help people be ready for it at all times.

Third, we have no idea when it will happen. Time on this earth doesn’t match God’s time. To one who lives eternally, whose day is as a thousand years, “soon” doesn’t necessarily mean what it means to us.
Fourth, the only safe counsel is to live as if each day were one's last on earth. For one of them will be.

Recommend this? [?]

You might like:

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La Sierra University Board of Trustees Removes Three Members
Justification By Faith
Remember the Adventist 'Sybil'?—Not So Factual
Inspired or Dictation Machine?

Source URL (retrieved on 10/21/2011 - 09:02): http://spectrummagazine.org/node/3110

Links:
Video: Acts 29 Network brings micro-churches to Fort Worth neighborhoods

Three different mini-churches meet in the Fort Worth area.

The Acts 29 Network is bringing micro-churches to Fort Worth neighborhoods, and pastors hope their congregation will make people like church more.

The Acts 29 movement is a network of churches across the world. The movement derives its name from the 28 chapters of the Acts of the Apostles in the Bible. The 28 chapters layout the model of the Christian church. The idea is that the (unwritten) 29th chapter of Acts is the continuation of the early church in modern times.

These church plants simulate the other 28 chapters as closely as possible by implementing early church roles and conduct at a micro level.

“It’s really a grass roots effort,” said the pastor of The Rooted, Nick Ostermann.

The City Church, The Rooted and The Paradox are all Acts 29 churches that meet and serve in Fort Worth neighborhoods. The Acts 29 movement started with Mars Hill Church in Seattle 10 years ago. The church has grown to over 400 “plants” as pastors plant new churches around America, and around the World.

The Rooted was the first Acts 29 church plant in the area, making its home in south central Fort Worth more than two years ago. However, the heart of their church may meet in the house next door to you.

“Acts 29 is not a denomination, but more of a theological network,” Ostermann said.

Many people have never heard of the small, bold church plants, however the Pastors express their united goals of serving the people in the community.

“There are big churches here, but for us in Fort Worth, we have smaller plants, it’s all about the city groups,” Ostermann said.

The City Groups or “Villages” are a defining mark of the Acts 29 church movement. Though each
church has a different title for the conglomeration of church members meeting at houses and serving the community, they remain similar in purpose. Micro management of the church is a unique intention of the Acts 29 movement.

“There is more responsibility to the church members, it's all about equipping the city groups for whatever God has placed on their hearts,” said Ostermann.

City groups range from students at TCU to families with children at Tanglewood and Paschal.

Members of The Rooted Church reach out to TCU students through Magnify

Ben Connelly, pastor and church planter of The City Church, says the way they focus on community outreach is different from many churches. Outreach is managed on a much more micro level. It’s the idea of making your neighbor dinner as opposed to donating food to a food pantry.

“The heart of our church are the members, it’s not ‘come and see’ on Sundays, but also sending people out to live on mission in the city,” Ostermann said.

A distinct trait of the Acts 29 movement in Fort Worth is that none of the churches have a building.

The Rooted meets in a Baptist church’s building each Sunday.

“We are church planting churches, so we all hold to the idea that the best way in our post Christian culture to see the gospel go forth is not to build big institutions but to have communities of gospel change people who are living as ministers of the gospel,” Ostermann said.
Jim Essian, pastor of The Paradox, says the church history in Fort Worth points to a revolution in the way its citizens see church. To him, it was only a matter of time before people started to see church differently.

“We’re minimizing the church; there are holes,” said the pastor of The Paradox, Jim Essian.

For Ben Connelly, planting The City Church in Fort Worth was a bit of a gamble. Connelly has been a professor at TCU for three years and led a former campus ministry.

“I felt I got really good at managing Christians, but really bad at making disciples,” Connelly said.

In January 2010, Connelly doubled his day job as TCU professor and new pastor of The City Church.

“The scariest thing running through my mind was, ‘in a Fort Worth culture, is anyone gonna be on board for this?’” Connelly said.

Connelly hopes that people will see the members of The City Church in action and see church in a new perspective.

“People may see us and might not hate church quite as much anymore,” He said.

Connelly grew up Methodist and bible church denomination and joined a Methodist congregation. Now, he feels The City Church pulls pieces of each church to make a compilation that he calls “the overlap.”

The Paradox church meets downtown at Van Cliburn Hall every Sunday morning at 10:30. The Rooted meets at College Avenue Baptist Church Sundays at 9 a.m., and The City Church meets at Fou Day Weekend Theater on Sundays at 5 p.m.
The trend toward online virtual church “campuses” must come to an end. If a church or ministry has started a virtual church campus as an alternative or supplement to an “in the flesh” gathering of a church community, it must desist. If an eager, entrepreneurial church planter is thinking about launching a virtual church, he needs to stop. If an impressionable saint has bought the idea that he or she can satisfy the mandate to assemble together (Heb 10:25) by logging into an online worship service, he or she needs to turn from that lie and embrace the truth.

Because, simply put, virtual church is anti-church.

Don’t misunderstand me. I’m not talking about authentic local churches that provide their messages online. I don’t even mean those that broadcast or stream their services live. I’m talking specifically about churches that “meet” exclusively online or those that have a component of their “membership” participating in the church exclusively online.

I know that for some reading this, it’s too late. They rushed in without thinking this thing through. They were so used to using the newest ever-changing technology to deliver the never-changing message that they simply took the next logical step. Or they got swept up in the “keeping up with the St. Jones’s” rat race and had to provide the same services
that competing churches were providing. Whatever the case may be, some have swallowed the virtual church model and see nothing wrong with it.

To a certain degree, those who have fallen into the pit of the virtual church are not entirely at fault. Before any evangelical could end up careening over the cliff into legitimizing an exclusively online church, his or her evangelical tradition had to have taken four wrong turns in its ecclesiology. Without these four turns—of which most modern evangelicals are at least partially guilty—no right-minded Christian would ever imagine granting validity to a “virtual church” ministry. These are the turns toward “sermo-centrism,” “anti-sacramentalism,” “fan-ification,” and “neo-docetism.”

To help think biblically, theologically, and historically about the disastrous rise of the online anti-church, we need to examine these four false turns more closely.

Sermo-centrism: Reducing Church to the Message

Sermo-centrism is an error of reducing the entire worship service to the sermon. That is, instead of placing the preached Word in its proper place as a vital element of a fuller worship experience, the sermon becomes the most important thing, toward which everything points, around which everything revolves, and before which everything bows. In fact, in a sermo-centric church service, everything else but the sermon is detachable, optional, and flexible.

However, a well-rounded biblical worship service could never be reduced to the sermon. In the apostolic church, worship always included confession of sins to one another, corporate prayers, singing of hymns to one another, the public reading of Scripture, a message of exhortation toward love and good works, an offering of food or money for the poor, and the observance of the Lord’s Supper as a rite of personal and corporate spiritual renewal. In fact, neither the New Testament nor the early church ever regarded the sermon as the center, climax, or purpose of the Sunday morning gathering of the church.

When the purposes of “gathering together” as a church are explicitly mentioned in the New Testament, they include the following: to exhibit unity of the community by properly observing the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:17–21, 33–34); to exercise spiritual gifts for the edification of the whole body (1 Cor 14:23–26); to pray for urgent matters (Acts 4:34); to report ministry endeavors (Acts 14:27); to discuss controversial doctrinal and practical matters (Acts 15:6); to read apostolic writings (Acts 15:30); to break bread and provide instruction in the faith (Acts 20:7); to exercise church discipline for the purification of the local congregation (1 Cor...
5:4); to encourage one another toward love and good works (Heb 10:25); to confess our sins to each other (Jas 5:16). With this brief sampling, we see that the purposes of the physically gathered community and its leaders went far beyond the Sunday morning worship hour, and even that time could not be characterized as centering on a sermon.

The turn toward sermo-centrism occurred sometime after the Protestant Reformation during the age of revivalism, between about 1700 and 1900. During this time itinerant preachers—often acquiring celebrity status—traveled from place to place, sometimes country to country, drawing crowds with dynamic evangelistic messages. They preached their fiery sermons from stages to filled fields or packed auditoriums. Everything centered on this proclamation. This revivalistic emphasis on the sermon soon made its way into our churches, which began to model their morning messages on the revivalist pattern—a lot of music to stir up the crowd followed by a long message designed to elicit responses of the hearers’ mind, heart, and will.

When many churches took the sermo-centric turn, however, all of the other vital biblical elements of the gathered church were first diminished, then neglected, and eventually ignored or rejected—corporate prayer, church discipline, corporate confession of sin and forgiveness, and especially the weekly observance of the Lord’s Supper. Today, the sermo-centric model of Sunday morning worship is virtually an unquestioned conviction of many evangelical churches. Our leaders and congregants simply lack the biblical and historical perspective to realize how far removed the sermo-centric model is from the worship experience established by the apostles and practiced by most Christians for centuries.

Yet by reducing the purpose of the gathered community to the delivery of the message, evangelicalism opened the door to delivering this core element of the church in ways that do not require the community to be physically gathered. Without the sermo-centric turn, the viability of online virtual church could not be entertained.

Anti-sacramentalism: Forsaking the Rites of Initiation and Renewal

When many evangelicals reduced the worship service to the sermon, they began to have trouble finding a proper place for the New Testament sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. As the church body was regarded more as an audience assembled to listen to a sermon, baptism began to lose its original meaning as the rite of solemn initiation into a covenanted community. If you review all the reasons for which the people of the church gathered in the New Testament, you’ll notice that they all emphasize a serious
degree of corporate accountability and interpersonal fellowship. In a stage/auditorium mentality where bigger crowds in tighter seating simply meant more ears to hear the motivational message, the concept of covenant church membership lost significance. As a result, today many traditions simply do not emphasize the necessary role of baptism in the life of the church. When it is practiced, it’s often sporadic, tacked on informally before or after a Sunday morning service, or relegated to a special “baptismal” service detached from the real purpose of church: to rev up the audience for its keynote address.

The Lord’s Supper has suffered even more. There’s no question at all that the apostles and the early church observed the Lord’s Supper (or “communion” or “eucharist”) every week as an essential part of their corporate worship experience. It was a holy time of offering oneself as well as the gathered body as living sacrifices to God in humble consecration (Rom 12). The one bread not only represented, but tangibly manifested, the unity of the one body gathered to partake together (1 Cor 10:17). Members of the church were not merely gathered to hear the Word read and preached. They were called upon to come forward, having confessed the wrongs toward one another and toward God, bearing an offering of love for others, and consecrating themselves to live a life of righteousness in response to the Word read and preached. So when evangelicals neglected the biblical emphasis on personal and corporate renewal through weekly observance of the Lord’s Supper, they lost a real, tangible, sanctifying experience of the faith designed to strengthen both individuals and the church.

Both of these biblical sacraments of the local church functioned not only as necessary means of covenant participation (baptism as initiation, communion as renewal) but also as means of exercising discipline and maintaining holiness in the community. At the time of their baptism, members of the church were both confessing their saving faith in the Triune God and pledging their covenant commitment to live the Christian life in the accountability of the church community. Having made this pledge, believers in good standing continued to renew their pledge of living a Spirit-led life of repentance from wickedness and growth in righteousness by participating in the Lord’s Supper. Those who strayed from the path of righteousness were physically excluded from sharing in this holy meal, of which Christ Himself was the divine Host through the power of the Holy Spirit.

By forsaking the physical corporate rites of covenant initiation (baptism) and covenant renewal (the Lord’s Supper), or by replacing these biblical ordinances with less formal and less physical processes for church membership and re-dedication,
evangelicalism opened the door a little farther for a virtual church model. Virtual churches cannot really baptize. They can’t really partake of the Lord’s Supper from one bread to represent the spiritual and physical unity of the one body. They can’t really exclude those under discipline from the Lord’s table or hold individual members of the body to their baptismal pledge of discipleship. So, without the anti-sacramental turn, the viability of online virtual church could not have been entertained.

Fan-ification: Converting the Congregation into an Audience

We have seen that the gathered church engaged in corporate prayer, confession of sins to one another, mutual edification through hymns, teaching, reading Scripture, providing for needs, exercising spiritual gifts, and partaking of the Lord’s Supper. If one were to express this kind of worship service in a diagram, it would take the form of a circle. As the members of the covenanted community focus together on the center of Jesus Christ’s person and work, they themselves manifested by their physical presence the gathered “body of Christ”—His physical corporate presence on earth.

However, especially in the twentieth century, the most influential, paradigm-setting, model churches could not be described as a circle, but as a pyramid. Atop this grand monument stands the celebrity preacher, the center and source of the entire operation. Oh, he points us to the Bible and to Jesus, but he does so in ways that necessarily keep our attention on the preacher himself. If he were to downplay his presence and shorten his message in order to re-instate the proper place of corporate prayer, observance of the sacraments, mutual encouragement and exhortation, reading of Scripture, and other less glamorous and less personality-driven activities of the church, the celebrity would necessarily lose his place in the limelight.

Let’s face it. The celebrity pastor has mostly displaced the altar of the Lord’s Supper, which once focused the congregation on the incarnation of God the Son, His atoning death, His resurrection, and His abiding presence in the gathered community. Then the semi-biblical motivational messages, cleverly conceived and professionally performed, have turned the pulpit itself into a stage. The “service” is now a “production.” This production has become a brand. The church itself then becomes a franchise that can be packaged and distributed—marketed even. Branch campuses with piped-in productions eventually give way to streaming delivery of fast food spirituality that tastes sweet in the mouth as it sours the soul.

In the extreme form of this fake Christianity, the congregation
is no longer defined as those covenanted members who gather frequently to commune with the Lord by communing with His corporate body on earth. Rather, the congregation has become a crowd of “fans” drawn to a brilliant preacher like dumb insects drawn to a shining light. And with the advent of life A/V feeds and online delivery methods, the growth of the fan base is limitless. With the fan-ification of the church, the congregation has become an audience focused on the latest evangelical luminary or tuning in to hear from their gifted guru.

By converting the congregation into an audience, evangelicalism opened the door even farther to legitimizing the online church. Virtual church members are pure audiences, as their “participation” through online media is only observation. Even if the online watcher is prompted to pray, to sing, to eat a cracker and drink some juice, or to shout “Amen,” he or she is doing nothing more than what we all did when we answered Mr. Rogers’ questions or responded to kids shows like Blues Clues or Dora the Explorer. The difference is, the grown Christian should know better. So, without the fan-ification of the congregation, the idea of online virtual church could never have gotten off the ground.

Neo-Docetism: Promoting a Non-Incarnational Church

Finally, evangelicalism has slipped deeper and deeper into ecclesiological docetism. Christological docetism was the early heresy that separated the real physical, bodily humanity of Christ from His real spiritual divinity, either rejecting or severely down-playing the physicality of Christ and exalting His status as a spiritual being. The result was that Jesus only “appeared” to be human and physically present.

When the church is understood biblically and theologically as the body of Christ, this language necessarily assumes an orthodox incarnational Christology—that Jesus is fully human, fully divine (not one or the other), embodied (not a ghost), physical (not a phantom), real (not apparent), among us (not remote). For the church to reflect this incarnational reality of Christ as a mysterious extension of His corporate body on earth, the church must be embodied, physical, real, locally gathered, in the flesh.

An authentic gathering of the body of Christ on earth must be able to describe its corporate life in incarnational terms like those of 1 John 1:1—“What we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands.” If I can merely hear and see the gathered body, but cannot touch and embrace its members, or feel, smell, and taste its sacraments, then it’s not an incarnational church but a docetic church. The word “docetism” means “appears to
be” or “seems to be.” In fact, it’s the functional equivalent of the modern term “virtual,” which means “simulated,” or “opposite of real or physical.” The docetic heresy taught that Jesus Christ was only a “virtual” human. His humanity wasn’t real, wasn’t physical. He was “simulated” humanity. In the same vein, a docetic body of Christ would be a “virtual” church. Its corporate gathering wouldn’t be real, wouldn’t be physical. It would be “simulated” church.

In short, the docetic church is no more an acceptable alternative to an incarnational church than a docetic Christ is an acceptable alternative to the incarnate Christ. Just as the docetic Christ is an anti-Christ, the virtual church is an anti-church.

Rise and Fall of the Anti-Church

“Can” does not imply “ought.” The ability to do something does not mean it should be done. After evangelicalism as a whole took four distinct bad turns in the last few centuries, a growing number of over-zealous individuals and churches have taken the wheel and have driven their ministries headlong over a cliff. This has resulted in the docetic belief that an online virtual church is a legitimate substitute for a real gathered congregation.

Evangelicals who are dedicated to biblical, theological, and historical renewal of the church must resist this madness. Let me suggest three ways we can do this.

First, stop promoting, supporting, and tolerating virtual churches and those who are propagating them. Those who believe virtual churches can pass as real churches have by this very belief demonstrated that they are unqualified to shepherd a true church of Christ. They simply do not have the biblical understanding, theological training, nor historical perspective needed to lead the church out of its current crisis. They can only lead it faster toward its disintegration. Resist the temptation to start a virtual church. And run (don’t walk) from those who start them.

Second, retrace your steps and work at reversing the four bad turns that led to virtual church being regarded as even a plausible ministry move. Reverse the promotion of the non-incarnational church (neo-docetism), the conversion of the congregation into an audience (fan-ification), forsaking the rites of covenant initiation and renewal (anti-sacramentalism), and reducing church to the message (sermo-centrism). Each of these alone and all of them together have led to a number of ministry models that are serving to weaken, not strengthen, the already declining evangelical tradition.
Third, promote a full-bodied church ministry, aligned with biblical priorities, informed by historical realities, and strengthened by theological convictions. Don't let pragmatism, peer-pressure, commercialism, popularity, numbers, and the bottom-line dictate your ministry models and methods. The modern technological gimmicks and games may appear to be bringing about success in your ministry, but this is only “virtual” success. In the end, anything short of an incarnational ecclesiology will lead your ministry to destruction.

POSTED BY MICHAEL J. SVIGEL AT 10:14 PM

5 COMMENTS:

Ron Goetz said...

Professor Svigel, your concern with "message" and "audience" is excellent, but unfortunately the conventional churches have already done the same thing, as you've pointed out.

"Reducing Church to the Message" is a perennial problem for Christendom, which problem is exacerbated by the priority pastoral education places on content, information, and doctrine.

This problem is virtually the same as "Converting the Congregation to an Audience." Unfortunately, the overwhelming number of church members are already mere audiences. This is that old "10% do the work" problem that all churches experience.

This audience mentality is ubiquitous in church life for many reasons, including the church's focus on teaching, and the fact that pastors have spent nearly twenty years of their lives in classrooms, where the predominant model is someone "talking at them, to an audience." It's really all they know.

"Forsaking the Rites of Initiation and Renewal" is problematical. Nowhere in scripture are baptism or the Lord's Supper the exclusive prerogative of ordained
clergy.

That un-Biblical clerical privilege is a hold-over from Roman Catholicism, which nurtured the policy to centralize control in the hands of the hierarchy. If only the priest could administer the sacraments, then the illiterate peasants had to go to the local parish church or spend thousands of years in purgatory.

You invoked that same "authority" reasoning when you wrote, "They can’t really exclude those under discipline from the Lord’s table or hold individual members of the body to their baptismal pledge of discipleship."

Baptism and the Lord's Supper have been transformed into a means of exclusion and discipline, not a means of grace, not a blessing.

Baptism and Communion = Means of Exclusion and Discipline.

BTW, every denomination, from Baptist to Methodist to Calvary Chapel, works hard to preserve its tradition, which is, as you know, "a marketable brand."
Successful seminaries cultivate "a marketable brand," which some of them sternly enforce.

Regarding the problem of "Promoting a Non-Incarnational Church," I will hazard a heartfelt generalization and say that the vast majority of church attenders stuck in message and audience mode, and the prospects of an incarnational church are lightyears away.

Professor Svigel, I wonder if you have set up a straw man here, but you may be able to enlighten me. I am not aware of any entity that is an exclusively online church. And I suspect that the number of people who rely exclusively on the internet for their spiritual koinonia and encouragement is miniscule. But you
may know of such people.

To characterize apparently non-existent exclusively online churches as "Anti-Church" reminds me of the old attacks on so-called "parachurch organizations," and the even older ecclesiastical attacks on Anabaptist house churches and Wesleyan class meetings. I believe many such debates are primarily territorial and financial.

When the traditional church organizations fail to nurture and equip believers to act on the burdens God has placed on theirs hearts, hopefully God's people will listen to the Spirit and not be intimidated by their critics.

From a certain point of view, it is a shame that so many believers--young, zealous, and committed--aren't lead by God to enter traditional ministry.

I think the wisdom of Gamaliel is good at this juncture. "If this plan or action is of men, it will be overthrown; but if these actions are of God, you will not be able to overthrow them."

2:46 AM

Michael J. Svigel said...

Thanks for your comments. Some good points. Most of the issues you mention regarding my ecclesiology and views of the sacraments I address in other essays on this site, so I won't deal with them here. My approach of reading the NT in its historical-theological context (in light of discernible apostolic practices in the first and second centuries) will undoubtedly lead us to some different emphases here, so it's probably not worth fussing over.

As far as whether this is a straw man, though, I wish this were the case. It's out there. Nothing like an
epidemic (and it probably never will be), but there's enough of a buzz that I'm getting a steady line of questions about it...

Thanks for reading and thinking about this. A little push-back is always helpful.

7:43 PM

SRQTom said...

Thanks for this post. I personally found it quite informative.

I've been involved in the "production" side of the service for a number of years now and I've been thinking to myself what would happen if we stopped doing all the producing of the service. Unfortunately I think we would lose probably 90% of our congregation.

It shouldn't be that way at all in my opinion.

8:36 AM

Michael J. Svigel said...

Tom, thanks for your comments. Yes, this is the "catch 22," isn't it? I'm in favor of doing things or not doing things in our worship with the goal of removing distractions from authentic worship. But I'm not in favor of doing things simply to attract attention, draw people in, etc. We can do a lot of things to draw a crowd, but then we need to keep doing these things to keep the crowd. It's like parenting--if you want to have to rock your baby to sleep every night with the lights out and a lullaby playing, then go for it. But realize that the moment you try to break that routine, you'll have a fit on your hands. Churches constituted around a big production kind of worship will expect this (and usually more). But I'm not sure it's worth it, frankly. I don't think it actually contributes to spiritual growth and the development of Christian virtues. In many ways, I think
the attraction itself becomes a distraction. Yet the attractional ministry model tends to be the unquestioned assumption in our market-driven church culture. I know a lot of people out there would fiercely disagree with me, but this is how I see it.

12:51 PM

Jared V. said...

This is definitely not a straw man and I appreciate the comments. Almost all of my friends who have moved from their home church and found it difficult to find a new church have happily relied on online sermons for their spiritual nourishment.

Interestingly, their all looking for community with substance. Evangelicals in general have adapted a cultural sense of community far from the prescriptions in the NT. We cannot do Christian life together because it is inconvenient - much like our approach to the Supper. We're much too focused on self.

Thanks for the entry and the comments.

2:00 PM
WINONA, Minn. (AP) — A jury has awarded $1.4 million to a Minnesota woman who accused her Methodist pastor of sexually abusing her.

The woman accused 67-year-old Donald Dean Budd of pursuing an inappropriate relationship at a time when she was emotionally vulnerable.

The Hennepin County jury concluded this week that Budd must pay $1 million in punitive damages. Of another $410,000 in compensatory damages, Budd must pay $246,000 and the rest is to be paid by the Minnesota Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.

A call to Budd's home Saturday rang unanswered, and a message left with his attorney wasn't immediately returned. The woman's attorney, Robert Hajek, said the jury's verdict was "very responsible and reasonable."

Budd was a pastor at McKinley United Methodist Church in Winona. Prior to that, he served in Methodist churches in Harmony, Minn., and Eau Claire, Wis. He is no longer a pastor.

The woman filed a civil lawsuit in 2009, alleging that she sought counseling from Budd while he was a pastor at McKinley between 2003 and 2005. A sexual relationship developed, leading to Budd's eventual conviction on a pair of felony sexual-abuse charges.

The woman said she reported the relationship to the conference in 2006. She accused officials of dropping the investigation and calling the woman uncooperative and not credible, court documents said.

Her civil lawsuit claimed that the conference should have done a better job of investigating Budd's sexual misconduct, according to a Winona Daily News report.

Victoria Rebeck, a spokeswoman for the conference, disputed the charge. She said the conference and its bishop acted immediately when notified about the allegations by placing Budd on restriction and removing his credentials.

"We take all allegations against pastors seriously," Rebeck said. "We are committed to doing everything we can to create a safe environment for our people."

The woman later turned to police, whose investigation led to criminal charges being filed against Budd in 2007. Budd admitted that he touched the woman inappropriately at her home and in the men's bathroom in McKinley's basement.

He pleaded guilty in 2009 to two counts of felony criminal sexual conduct. He was sentenced to 15 years of probation.

The woman first sought counseling in 2003 after her grandfather died, court documents say. She said the counseling sessions grew personal and she began to develop strong feelings for Budd.

However, instead of ending counseling and referring her to another therapist, Budd pursued an inappropriate relationship with her, according to the woman's lawsuit.

Hajek, the woman's attorney, said Budd and the conference offered last year to pay $30,000 to settle the case.

In 2009, the woman was awarded $10,000 in a separate civil suit against Budd that sought compensation for medical and counseling bills.


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Prominent Pastor Calls Romney’s Church a Cult

By RICHARD A. OPPEL Jr. and ERIK ECKHOLM

WASHINGTON — A Texas pastor introduced Rick Perry at a major conference of Christian conservatives here on Friday as “a genuine follower of Jesus Christ” and then walked outside and attacked Mitt Romney’s religion, calling the Mormon Church a cult and stating that Mr. Romney “is not a Christian.”

The comments by the pastor, Robert Jeffress of Dallas, injected a potentially explosive issue into the presidential campaign: the belief held by many evangelicals that Mormons are not Christians.

And it raised immediate suspicions that the attack might have been a way for surrogates or supporters of Mr. Perry, the Texas governor, who has stumbled in recent weeks, to gain ground by raising religious concerns about Mr. Romney. Mr. Jeffress similarly attacked Mr. Romney and his faith during the 2008 campaign.

The Perry campaign sought to put some distance between Mr. Perry and Mr. Jeffress, stating that the governor “does not believe Mormonism is a cult” and that Mr. Jeffress was chosen to speak by the organizers of the event, the Values Voter Summit, which was put on by the Family Research Council, the American Family Association and other evangelical Christian groups.

But in a statement, the Family Research Council president, Tony Perkins, said the Perry campaign had approved using Mr. Jeffress to introduce the governor. “Pastor Jeffress was suggested to us as a possible introductory speaker because he serves as pastor of one of the largest churches in Texas,” Mr. Perkins said. “We sent the request to the Perry campaign which then signed off on the request.”

Aides to Mr. Perry did not respond to a number of questions, including whether he was aware of Mr. Jeffress’s record of calling the Mormon Church a “cult” and denying Mr. Romney’s Christianity; whether he has ever talked with Mr. Jeffress about the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; and the nature of their relationship.

Mr. Perry did not bring up religion on Friday night as he addressed a Republican dinner in Iowa. Asked by a reporter whether he believed the Mormon faith was a cult, Mr. Perry said, “No.” Asked whether he repudiated the remarks of the pastor, he said, “I’ve already answered your question.”
A Romney spokesman declined to comment on Mr. Jeffress’s remarks.

The depth of the relationship between Mr. Perry and Mr. Jeffress, a Southern Baptist, was unclear, though the governor seemed to indicate some familiarity when he took the stage after being introduced. He called Mr. Jeffress “quite a leader” and noted that he had a church with 10,000 parishioners. He also praised Mr. Jeffress’s introduction, saying he “knocked it out of the park.”

Those comments by Mr. Perry were made before Mr. Jeffress attacked Mr. Romney’s religion. In his comments to reporters after his introduction, Mr. Jeffress said he had not discussed Mr. Romney’s religion with Mr. Perry and had no idea what he thinks.

Later, Mr. Jeffress said he had been in several meetings with Mr. Perry, including one in which the governor had candidly discussed his own faith. Mr. Jeffress called Mr. Perry an “acquaintance,” but said he had never discussed the Mormon Church with him or his aides. He said he was invited to speak at the conference by Mr. Perkins.

Mr. Jeffress, the pastor of the First Baptist Church in downtown Dallas, an influential congregation within the Southern Baptist Convention, also expressed surprise at the stir his comments created, saying that his view of the Mormon Church is widely held by evangelicals. “This isn’t news,” he said. “This idea that Mormonism is a theological cult is not news either. That has been the historical position of Christianity for a long time.”

While denying that his comments were coordinated with the Perry campaign, Mr. Jeffress said he emphatically believed that Mr. Romney's faith would spell trouble for him with many Republican voters and make it hard for him to win in Iowa, as well as South Carolina and other Bible Belt states.

“I think it is going to be a major factor among evangelical voters,” he said. “The thing is, they won’t be honest and tell you that it is going to be a major factor. Most people don’t want to admit — even evangelical Christians — that they have a problem with Mormonism. They think it is bigoted to say so. But what voters say to a pollster sometimes is different than what they do when they go into the privacy of a voting booth.”

He also said that he believed Mr. Romney is a “good, moral person,” and that he would endorse him over the president.

If it comes to that, he said, “I’m going to instruct, I’m going to advise people that it is much better to vote for a non-Christian who embraces biblical values than to vote for a professing Christian like Barack Obama who embraces un-biblical values.”

Now, all eyes turn to Mr. Romney, who is scheduled to speak Saturday at the conference, just before Bryan Fischer, director of issue analysis for government and public policy at the American
Family Association. Mr. Fischer is known for his strident remarks on homosexuality, gay rights, Muslims and Mormons.

*Jeff Zeleny contributed reporting from Des Moines.*
My Take: This evangelical says Mormonism isn’t a cult – CNN Belief Bl...

My Take: This evangelical says Mormonism isn’t a cult

Editor’s note: Richard J. Mouw is President of Fuller Theological Seminary, an evangelical school in Pasadena, California.

By Richard J. Mouw, Special to CNN

Some prominent evangelical pastors have been telling their constituents not to support Mitt Romney’s bid for the presidential nomination. Because Romney is Mormon, they say, to cast a vote for him is to promote the cause of a cult.

I beg to differ.

For the past dozen years, I’ve been co-chairing, with Professor Robert Millet of Brigham Young University – the respected Mormon school – a behind-closed-doors dialogue between about a dozen evangelicals and an equal number of our Mormon counterparts.

We have talked for many hours about key theological issues: the authority of the Bible, the person and work of Christ, the Trinity, “continuing revelations” and the career of Joseph Smith, the 19th-century founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church), better known as the Mormon Church.

We evangelicals and our Mormon counterparts disagree about some important theological questions. But we have also found that on some matters we are not as far apart as we thought we were.

I know cults. I have studied them and taught about them for a long time. It’s worth noting that people have wondered whether I belong to a cult, with a reporter once asking me: “Evangelicalism, is that like Scientology and Hare Krishna?”

Religious cults are very much us-versus-them. Their adherents are taught to think that they are the only ones who benefit from divine approval. They don’t like to engage in serious, respectful give-and-take dialogue with people with whom they disagree.

Nor do they promote the kind of scholarship that works alongside others in pursuing the truth. Jehovah’s Witnesses, for instance, haven’t established a university. They don’t sponsor a law school or offer graduate-level courses in world religions. The same goes for Christian Science. If you want to call those groups cults I will not argue with you.

But Brigham Young University is a world-class educational institution, with professors who’ve
earned doctorates from some of the best universities in the world. Several of the top leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have PhDs from Ivy League schools.

These folks talk admiringly of the evangelical Billy Graham and the Catholic Mother Teresa, and they enjoy reading the evangelical C.S. Lewis and Father Henri Nouwen, a Catholic. That is not the kind of thing you run into in anti-Christian cults.

So are Mormons Christians? For me, that’s a complicated question.

My Mormon friends and I disagree on enough subjects that I am not prepared to say that their theology falls within the scope of historic Christian teaching. But the important thing is that we continue to talk about these things, and with increasing candor and mutual openness to correction.

No one has shown any impulse to walk away from the table of dialogue. We do all of this with the blessing of many leaders from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, some of whom have become good friends.

While I am not prepared to reclassify Mormonism as possessing undeniably Christian theology, I do accept many of my Mormon friends as genuine followers of the Jesus whom I worship as the divine Savior.

I find Mormons to be more Christ-centered than they have been in the past. I recently showed a video to my evangelical Fuller Seminary students of Mormon Elder Jeffrey Holland, one of the Twelve Apostles who help lead the LDS church. The video captures Holland speaking to thousands of Mormons about Christ’s death on the cross.

Several of my students remarked that if they had not known that he was a Mormon leader they would have guessed that he was an evangelical preacher.

The current criticisms of Mitt Romney’s religious affiliation recall for many of us the challenges John Kennedy faced when he was campaigning for the presidency in 1960.

Some well-known Protestant preachers (including Norman Vincent Peale) warned against putting a Catholic in the White House. Kennedy’s famous speech to Houston pastors clarifying his religious beliefs as they related to his political leadership helped his cause quite a bit.

But the real changes in popular attitudes toward Catholicism happened more slowly, as Catholic Church leaders and scholars engaged in a new kind of dialogue with each other and representatives of other faith groups, most dramatically at the Second Vatican Council during the early years of the 1960s.

Cults do not engage in those kinds of self-examining conversations. If they do, they do not remain cults.

Those of us who have made the effort to engage Mormons in friendly and sustained give-and-take conversations have come to see them as good citizens whose life of faith often exhibits qualities that are worthy of the Christian label, even as we continue to engage in friendly arguments with them about crucial theological issues.

Mitt Romney deserves what every politician running for office deserves: a careful examination of his views on policy and his philosophy of government. But he does not deserve to be labeled a cultist.

The opinions expressed in this commentary are solely those of Richard J. Mouw.

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Next entry »Death toll rises in Egypt Christian clashes as tension continues
1. **Kat**

Cult:  
Noun:  
A system of religious veneration and devotion directed toward a particular figure or object.  
A relatively small group of people having religious beliefs or practices regarded by others as strange or sinister.

It's a silly argument.

October 18, 2011 at 8:03 pm | Report abuse | Reply

2. **Sara Richins**

I well written and courteous article. I would argue that the Mormon church is not "more Christ-centered than they have been in the past" because it has always been Christ-centered. A a people, however, we are being taught more and more how to better live the gospel of Jesus Christ and being urged to let our light shine before men. As such, many in the Christian community are reevaluating their ideas of the Church. Are we not Christians because we do not share the common Christian history? We believe many Protestant Reformers were inspired to do the things they did because they recognized the churches of their day were teaching false doctrines. The history of Protestant churches is that of seeking after truth, and this is a tenant of the LDS faith.

October 18, 2011 at 1:05 pm | Report abuse | Reply

3. **Keith**

OK, why are the simplest answers always discussed with complicated angles? YES the LDS church is Christian because they believe and worship Christ written about and worship in the New Testament of the Apostles. The LDS church has the old and new testaments as part of their teachings and beliefs, as all other Christian denominations. The theology of the writings of the BOM do not trump the theologues in the Bible, but that is not the issue at hand. Opinions of the companion writings and beliefs of the LDS Church may never be settled, but as one who believes Jesus was the Christ, was sacrificed and now lives again with the Father, it is MY opinion that we (those who believe on the name of CHRIST) are ALL on the same team against more evil opponents than each other. But for the record, the LDS church does uphold a belief that was handed down from GOD and upheld by our founding fathers...for everyone to have their own free will to worship however they please. The LDS church does not force members to exclude ppl who believe differently than themselves, or persecute any other religions because of theology as many other denominations do. For my soul and beliefs, the LDS church offers more answers and supports more Christ-like actions than many denominations who peddle fear and hate.

October 18, 2011 at 11:36 am | Report abuse | Reply

4. **Mark**

The LDS understanding of the nature of the relationship between God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son does not correspond with the understanding indicated in the New Testament. The background of the Divine Wisdom of God, first as a personification, and then, in Jesus Christ as a person, is much closer to the creedal understandings of the Trinity as three persons in one essence than it is to the Mormon conception of a social trinity involving three separate deities who closely cooperate. The Jewish background of the New Testament knows of no such concept except in the form of a heresy.

October 17, 2011 at 5:53 pm | Report abuse | Reply

5. **John**

Whether you believe the bible or not, it says right in there that you can't add or take away from it. Mormons add to it. If you look at this as if it were a game, they've broken the rules of the game. Or at least changed them, which means they've made a new game. It just ain't that complicated. It seems that they should just call this new game something other than Christian and the whole debate goes away.

October 16, 2011 at 10:23 pm | Report abuse | Reply

○ morpunkt

That's an old, worn-out retort to the Book of Mormon. But in actuality, you don't understand that that scripture was written, BEFORE the Bible was abridged. Therefore, everything added to that particular book of John the Revelator should be condemned. Like the entire rest of the Bible. (And by the way, Deuteronomy 4.2 basically says the same thing. So, using your logic, everything after Deuteronomy "breaks the rules". Sorry, weak argument.

October 16, 2011 at 11:43 pm | Report abuse | Reply

○ Steve

@morpunkt is right. Authors of the Bible did not complete their writings with the intention of creating the "Holy Bible". They simply wrote letters, journals and so forth. As time passed, these writings were compiled and organized into a collection which most Christian religions have canonized into their scriptures. The "Mormon" church
uses the King James Version of the Bible. I don't hear people arguing which of the
version of the Bible is the only true word of God. There are so many different versions
that use varying levels of scholarly interpretation that in many cases the translation into
modern English serves only to pervert the meaning of the doctrine taught. The Bible
also contains references to books which were not contained in any of the current
iterations of the Bible, so by @John's argument the Bible must be false because the
people compiling the writings omitted sacred text thus taking away from the book.
@John, your argument is a non-sequitur.
My Take: This evangelical says Mormonism isn’t a cult – CNN Belief Bl...

My Take: This evangelical says Mormonism isn’t a cult – CNN Belief Bl... http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2011/10/09/my-take-this-evangelical-says-...
Mitt Romney and the weird and sinister beliefs of Mormonism.

I have no clear idea whether Pastor Robert Jeffress is correct in referring to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, more colloquially known as the Mormons, as “a cult.” There do seem to be one or two points of similarity. The Mormons have a supreme leader, known as the prophet or the president, whose word is allegedly supreme. They can be ordered to turn upon and shun any members who show any signs of backsliding. They have distinctive little practices, such as the famous underwear, to mark them off from other mortals, and they are said to be highly disciplined and continent when it comes to sex, booze, nicotine, and coffee. Word is that the church can be harder to leave than it was to join. Hefty donations and tithes are apparently appreciated from the membership.

Whether this makes it a cult, or just another of the born-in-America Christian sects, I am not sure. In any case what interests me more is the weird and sinister belief system of the LDS, discussion of which it is currently hoping to inhibit by crying that criticism of Mormonism amounts to bigotry.

To give some examples. The founder of the church, one Joseph Smith, was a fraud and conjurer well known to the authorities of upstate New York. He claimed to have been shown some gold plates on which a new revelation was inscribed in no known language. He then qualified as the sole translator of this language. (The entire story is related in Fawn Brodie’s biography, No Man Knows My History.* It seems that we can add, to sausages and laws, churches as a phenomenon that is not pleasant to watch at the manufacturing stage. Edmund Wilson wrote that it was powerfully shocking to see Brodie as she exposed a religion that was a whole-cloth fabrication.) On his later forays into the chartless wilderness, there to play the role of Moses to his followers (who were permitted and even encouraged in plural marriage, so as to go forth and mass-produce little Mormons), Smith also announced that he wanted to be known as the Prophet Muhammad of North America, with the fearsome slogan: “Either al-Koran or the Sword.” He levied war against his fellow citizens, and against the federal government. One might have thought that this alone would raise some eyebrows down at the local Baptist Church. …

Saddling itself with some pro-slavery views at the time of the Civil War, and also with a “bible” of its own that referred to black people as a special but inferior creation, the Mormon Church did not admit black Americans to the priesthood until 1978, which is late enough—in point of the sincerity of the
“revelation” they had to undergo—to cast serious doubt on the sincerity of their change of heart.

More recently, and very weirdly, the Mormons have been caught amassing great archives of the dead and regularly “praying them in” as adherents of the LDS, so as to retrospectively “baptize” everybody as a convert. (Here the relevant book is Alex Shoumatoff’s The Mountain of Names.) In a hollowed-out mountain in the Mormons’ stronghold state of Utah is a colossal database assembled for this purpose. Now I have no objection if Mormons desire to put their own ancestors down for posthumous salvation. But they also got hold of a list of those put to death by the Nazis’ Final Solution and fairly recently began making these massacred Jews into honorary LDS members as well. Indeed, when the practice was discovered, the church at first resisted efforts to make them stop. Whether this was cultish or sectarian it was certainly extremely tactless: a crass attempt at mass identity theft from the deceased.

The first time I visited Salt Lake City, in 1970, the John Birch Society bookshop was almost a part of the Tabernacle. Ezra Taft Benson, later to be the president of the church, was a member of its board of 12 Apostles—and sought their approval—when he served in Eisenhower’s Cabinet for eight years. He was, if not a member of the Birch Society, a strong endorser. His pamphlet, “Civil Rights: Tool of Communist Deception” is well-remembered. This was the soil that nurtured Cleon Skousen and the other paranoid elements who in the end incubated Glenn Beck.* I merely make the point that the Mormon Church has a distinctly politicized record, and is in a weak position to complain when its leaders are asked political questions that arise directly from their membership.

So far, Mitt Romney, who praised Skousen as recently as 2007, has evaded most questions by acting as if he was being subjected to some kind of religious test for public office. He’s been supported in this by some soft-centered types who think that any dislike for any “faith group” is ipso facto proof of some sort of prejudice. Sorry, but this will not wash. I don’t think I would want to vote for a Scientologist or a Moonie for high office, or indeed any other kind, and I think attempts to silence criticism of such outfits are the real evidence of prejudice. The waters are muddied, of course by the fact that the first attack on Romney came from a man who is himself a clerical bigmouth, exploiting religion for political purposes and handing out Rick Perry endorsements. This is the sort of Southern Baptist who believes, in the words of the old ditty:

We are the pure and chosen few
And all the rest are damned
There’s room enough in hell for you
We don’t want heaven crammed.

As I pointed out a few weeks ago, Perry has not just accepted Jesus Christ as his personal savior, but has expressed the view that those who do not join him are headed for eternal damnation. He has sought to revise and extend his second set of remarks, but not by much. And he believes in miraculous births from virgins, talking snakes, walking cadavers, and other things that feel distinctly weird and cultish to me. The fact is that what we have here is a clash between two discrepant forms of Christianity, in which the good Pastor Jeffress holds no especially high ground and in which the Latter-day Saints, unless they lie, are among the fastest-growing churches in the United States.
The Mormons apparently believe that Jesus will return in Missouri rather than Armageddon: I wouldn’t care to bet on the likelihood of either. In the meanwhile, though, we are fully entitled to ask Mitt Romney about the forces that influenced his political formation and—since he comes from a dynasty of his church, and spent much of his boyhood and manhood first as a missionary and then as a senior lay official—it is safe to assume that the influence is not small. Unless he is to succeed in his dreary plan to borrow from the playbook of his pain-in-the-ass predecessor Michael Dukakis, and make this an election about "competence not ideology," he should be asked to defend and explain himself, and his voluntary membership in one of the most egregious groups operating on American soil.

Corrections, Oct. 17, 2011: This article originally misidentied Fawn Brodie’s biography of Joseph Smith as No Man Knows My Name. (Return to the corrected sentence.) This article also originally misidentified Cleon Skousen as Glenn Skousen. (Return to the corrected sentence.)
Mormonism isn’t a cult

Our view: Recent remark by minister gives Republican candidates an opportunity to condemn religious bigotry, but few are willing to do so

October 10, 2011

If your party nominated a generally well-qualified person for president who happened to be Mormon, would you vote for that person?

Earlier this year, Gallup pollsters asked that exact question, and 76 percent of those who responded said yes, they would. That may sound like the American people are ready for a president who is a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but maybe not.

Mitt Romney in 2012?

Would you support Mitt Romney for president? Vote in poll.

www.newsmax.com

In the same poll, the public was given other hypothetical candidates: Would you vote for a black, Catholic, Baptist, Jew or Hispanic? All scored better than Mormon. Only two categories fared worse — gay or lesbian (67 percent would support) and atheist (49 percent).

This public antipathy toward those of the Mormon faith is built on a lot of ignorance and misinformation. The recent comments by a Dallas evangelical minister and supporter of Texas Gov. Rick Perry for president who wrongly, but repeatedly, labeled Mormonism a cult at a conference in Washington, D.C. would seem to prove the point.

That not one but two Republican candidates — Mitt Romney and Jon Huntsman — are Mormon and the nation has not yet had a serious public conversation about their faith is absurd. Americans used to feel this same way about Catholicism, too, until John F. Kennedy was elected president.

Anti-Mormon concerns are not only fueled by Mr. Romney’s front-runner status but by the concerns of evangelical Perry supporters and other conservatives that the former Massachusetts governor does not share their values.

While the other candidates aren’t attacking the Mormon church, most aren’t offering much of a defense of their colleagues’ faith either.

Certainly, there are more pressing concerns to be discussed in the race — unemployment, the moribund economy, conflicts overseas — but when major candidates for president are regarded as unacceptable by one-quarter of the population for their religious beliefs, that’s a legitimate issue, too.

We at The Baltimore Sun believe Mormonism is not a cult. It is an important religious faith that should be treated with respect. We urge all candidates to stand up for its members and instruct their supporters that it’s a form of Christianity that is shared by 14 million people worldwide, including 6 million in the United

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Battling forces of church, state
Polygamy was denounced by the church more than a century ago, a point the church felt obligated to make once again in a recent advertising campaign. But the Mormons are up against a lot of popular culture, including the Tony-winning musical "Book of Mormon" on Broadway, which portrays Mormon missionaries as well meaning but deluded, and an HBO series, "Big Love," which tells the story of a polygamous family.

One can certainly empathize with Mr. Romney's political situation. Obviously, neither he nor Mr. Huntsman wishes to alienate voters by acting as missionaries for a religion that generates this much antipathy. But some people will continue to fear those things they do not know much about, and it therefore falls on the candidates to help educate the electorate. Mr. Romney attempted to do that in a speech in 2008, but the effort was obviously insufficient.

The issue is not confined to Republicans. The same Gallup poll revealed the groups that had the hardest time voting for a Mormon president — people who didn't attend college, who are under age 34, who live in the Midwest and who are registered as Democrats.

Perhaps the best response we've heard from the Republican field to the controversy stirred up Friday was from former House Speaker Newt Gingrich. During an appearance on "Face the Nation," he called the cult remark by Pastor Robert Jeffress "unwise and inappropriate." Mr. Gingrich was right but should have gone further.

The public would never for one minute accept this kind of anti-Mormon rhetoric if the target had been a Jew, a Catholic, a Baptist, a Lutheran or adherent of most any other major faith. The episode ought to be identified for what it is, religious bigotry, and roundly condemned.
The Decision-Making Flaw in Powerful People

Overflowing with confidence, many leaders turn away from good advice.

Title: The Detrimental Effects of Power on Confidence, Advice Taking, and Accuracy (Subscription or fee required.)

Authors: Kelly E. See (New York University), Elizabeth Wolfe Morrison (New York University), Naomi B. Rothman (Lehigh University), and Jack B. Soll (Duke University)

Publisher: Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, vol. 116, no. 2

Date Published: Forthcoming, November 2011

The decisions made by powerful people in business and other fields have far-reaching effects on their organizations and employees. But this paper finds a link between having a sense of power and having a propensity to give short shrift to a crucial part of the decision-making process: listening to advice. Power increases confidence, the paper’s authors say, which can lead to an excessive belief in one’s own judgment and ultimately to flawed decisions.

Previous research has shown that the quality of decision making declines when people hew too much to their own beliefs and discount too readily the advice of others; outside information helps “average out” the distortions that can result when people give a great deal of weight to their own opinions and first impressions. This paper is among the first to examine whether power — defined as an individual’s “capacity to influence others, stemming in part from his or her control over resources, rewards, or punishments” — reduces or increases a person’s willingness to heed advice.

Using four experiments, including one in a real-world business setting, the researchers employed a form of 360-degree assessment to explore the relationship between power and openness to others’ input. In all four studies, they found that powerful people were more likely than those with less power to disregard and mistrust outside perceptions and advice — and that men were more likely than women to disregard guidance from others. The researchers further discovered that confidence was perceived by many as an important attribute of leadership. They concluded therefore that many powerful people, over time, come to see taking advice as a sign of weakness, assuming that they should project total confidence in their views alone. This, argue the researchers, can be a dangerous assumption.

The first experiment, focusing on 208 professionals, explored the relationship between power and advice taking in real workplace settings. The participants were employed at midsized companies in a variety of fields — including accounting, engineering, sales, marketing, finance, and R&D — and had spent an average of almost four years at their organization.

The participants first rated themselves on how much power they had within their organization, considering such factors as the degree of discretion they had over allocating salaries or bonuses, whether they could hire or fire employees, the extent of influence they had in their own department and other parts of the company, and how much their decisions affected other employees. They also rated their level of confidence.

Meanwhile, their co-workers offered assessments of how willing the participants were to factor in the opinions of peers when making decisions and to reconsider decisions in light of outside input. The researchers controlled for participants’ gender, the amount of time they had worked with the colleagues who were assessing them, and whether their co-workers perceived them to be good leaders (to
account for any “positivity bias” in their working relationship).

The analysis showed that people who regarded themselves as having more power were viewed by their co-workers as being less receptive to advice. In addition, they showed elevated confidence in their own judgment. The results further showed that women reported lower levels of confidence in their judgment than men. In turn, co-workers reported that women were significantly more willing to incorporate others’ advice in their decisions.

In the second experiment, 63 students were asked to estimate the cost of tuition — as calculated by *U.S. News & World Report* — for each of seven public and private U.S. universities that appeared in random order on a computer screen. The participants answered questions about how confident they were in their responses and how powerful they felt in their relationships with others. The participants were then provided with another student’s estimates, which, unbeknownst to them, happened to be the correct numbers, and were given a chance to change their responses. Just as in the first study, women were significantly more receptive to outside input than men, and power correlated with confidence and an aversion to incorporating others’ views.

In the third experiment, more than 250 people ranging in age from 18 to 65 were asked to estimate the value of coins that filled three jars. The participants were then “primed” to be in either a high-power or a low-power group by being asked to recall and describe in detail a situation in which they held a great deal of influence or very little. A third (control) group was merely asked to describe all their meals for the past 72 hours.

After this “power manipulation,” the participants rated their level of confidence in their answers about the coins and were invited to change them; as in the second experiment, they were apprised of an estimate from a peer advisor that happened to be correct. Once again, participants in the higher-power group placed significantly less weight on others’ input. “Power elevates confidence in the accuracy of one’s judgment, which in turn reduces advice taking,” the authors write.

In the final experiment, the researchers examined whether the effects of power on advice taking reduced the accuracy of the participants’ ultimate judgment. In this study, which was similar to the second one, 126 undergraduate business students were asked to estimate the cost of tuition at each of seven American universities and were primed to be in a high-power, low-power, or control group. Again, they rated their confidence before being offered any advice. But this time, rather than providing generally accurate estimates, the peer advisors gave participants random answers that varied in accuracy. After submitting their final answers, the participants were asked to rate their confidence in their post-advice estimates.

In addition to confirming the previous experiments’ finding that more powerful people were less likely to take advice and were more likely to have high confidence in their answers, this final experiment showed that high-power participants were less accurate in their answers than low-power participants. By calculating the mean deviation between respondents’ initial estimates and the true answers, the researchers showed that low-power participants came significantly closer in their final estimates to the real tuition numbers because they “averaged” their initial guesses with the input from the advisors.

The researchers propose that their findings have troubling implications for organizations — and that power could negatively affect not just advice taking, but also an individual’s approach to seeking help or accepting performance feedback. But because power and confidence are so interrelated, there are ways to mitigate the problem. By “directly addressing the inflated confidence levels of powerful individuals,” the researchers write, “organizations may be able to help people with power take (and/or seek) advice when it is valuable to do so.”

For one thing, organizations could formally include advice gathering at the earliest stages of the decision-making process, before powerful individuals have a chance to form their own opinions. Encouraging leaders to refrain from commenting on decisions publicly could also keep them from feeling wedged to a particular point of view.

**Bottom Line:**
Powerful people are less likely to take advice from others, in large part because they have high confidence in their own judgment and don’t feel the need to incorporate outside views. By not factoring in others’ advice, however, people in power risk making flawed decisions.