

Maybe Christianity in America is Dying Because it's Boring Everyone to Death

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By Matt Walsh

I recently attended a service that might help solve the riddle of the fantastic decline of American Christianity. It was a different church from the one I normally go to. Let me set the scene, perhaps it will sound familiar.

I walked in and immediately realized that I'd inadvertently stumbled upon a totally relaxed, convenient, comfortable brand of church. The first hint was the choir members dressed in shorts and flip flops. Sweet, bro. So chill. There were a bunch of acoustic guitars and drums and tambourines and a keyboard. Before the service/concert began, some guy came out to rev up the crowd. Opening acts aren't usually a part of the liturgical experience, but this is 2015 and we're, like, so not into solemn silence and prayer anymore. There must always be noise. Always noise. Sounds. Lights. Never silence, not even for a moment.

Finally, church started. The choir, or jam band for Jesus, or whatever it was, played a song that sounded like a cross between a 90's Disney soundtrack and an easy listening favorite you might hear if you skimmed through your aunt's second generation iPod. It wasn't really contemporary, or good, or relevant, but at least it wasn't traditional. Because YUCK! Tradition is old!

The singer was relatively talented, but he carried on like an American Idol contestant. I got the impression that he was fishing for applause, not worshipping the Lord of the Universe. His style and demeanor said "talent show" but the music said "wine and cheese festival" or maybe "my dentist's waiting room." It definitely didn't say "truth," or "heaven," or "the Great King sitting upon his throne amidst throngs of mighty angels."

The pastor began with another round of jokes. They weren't very funny but they succeeded in being unserious, which I guess is close enough. The sermon was jam packed with youth slang and pop culture. He mentioned a couple of TV shows and Netflix. He made sports metaphors. He didn't do anything with the references, he just hung them out there like we were supposed to be impressed that he knows about these things. I think he even said something about Angry Birds. Dated, sure, but it did the job of letting us know that the guy speaking also used a smart phone at some point in the last five years. OMG! He totally gets us!

The word "Gospel" made maybe one appearance in his message. The words "truth," "sacred," "reverence," "sin," "hell," "virtue," "obedience," and "duty" were conspicuously absent, just as they're absent from most sermons delivered in most churches, everywhere in the country. Of course he did throw in a friendly helping of "friend" and "helping." And "tolerance." Obviously tolerance. It's important to only preach the sort of principles we can practice from our couches, you know. Also left out of his spiel: any semblance of an insight, a challenge, a truth, a call to action, or a point.

About halfway in, I turned around to get a look at my fellow congregants. Do you know what I witnessed? Hundreds of captivated churchgoers. Just kidding. Actually, a lot of empty seats. A disinterested yawn echoed through the hall. I could see the guy next to me fighting to keep his eyes open. I understood where he was coming from. Maybe this was the plan: stop people from leaving by putting them to sleep. Effective, yes, but to what end?

Effective at making this whole thing seem rote and shallow, that's for sure. I guess it's supposed to entertain us, but our faith isn't suppose to be merely entertaining. It's so much more than that. When you reduce it to mere distraction and spectacle, it loses its substance, and without its substance it is, among other things, boring. I wonder what a secular person might think if he was looking to give Christianity a try and that was the first service he ever attended? Yeah, he wouldn't leave offended (or impacted, or moved, or energized), but would he even be awake?

Would he have a deeper understanding of the faith, or would he be scratching his head, wondering what all the

Jesus fuss is about? If he went in prepared to encounter something deep, holy, and challenging, would he walk out feeling like that goal was accomplished? Unlikely.

And this is the problem with Christianity in this country. Not just inside our church buildings, but everywhere. It often has no edge, no depth. No sense of its own ancient and epic history. There is no sacredness to it. No pain. No beauty. No reverence. Or I should say Christianity has all of those things, fundamentally and totally, but many modern Christians in every denomination have spent many years trying to blunt them or bury them under a thousand layers of icing and whipped cream and apathy.

I think this might shed some light on the latest study trumpeting how the Christian ranks have shrunk by another eight percentage points in just the last seven years. Now, about 70 percent of Americans identify as Christians. Still a majority, but the smallest majority we've ever had. As atheism and agnosticism surge in popularity, Christianity hemorrhages and fades. Some have tried to argue that the situation isn't really as bad as all that, but I disagree. I think it's worse.

After all...

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