



March 16, 2008

Selling Jesus

In the 80's and early 90's, religious groups were facing a crisis. Membership was at an all time low and congregations were being forced to close their doors. The year 2000 was approaching and there was concern about what to do. I remember at one point, I do not recall the year, churches began to hire marketing firms to help them bolster their image and attract more people. My personal opinion is that religion for many of these folks was more big business than soul saving, but there are probably also those who approached this with sincerity and misguided concern. Over the decade of the 90's the "megachurch" idea became a buzzword heard more and more. Smaller congregations in the denominational world were merging to combine resources. Advertising campaigns were launched that sought to draw followers in a number of ways. We are all aware of the traditional raffles, bingo nights and other things done to raise funds, but now there were stage productions, upscale meetings and other entertainment offers that were being produced to invite folks to enjoy, relax and "experience" Jesus. One aggressive ad campaign, designed and fueled by marketing firms, was that in order to appeal to the masses, religion had to change tactics, lighten up on doctrine and appeal to the spirit of a new millennium. Soon churches were getting larger and larger and offering a plethora of new things. Some churches were built with an attached club such as the YMCA and participation in the church meant big savings and opportunities to be fit and be saved at the same time. The programs worked and the result was a renewed interest in "religion". The old comparisons between churches was no longer so much "what does your church teach on this?", to "what does your church offer?". Simple youth programs were no longer good enough. There had to be more. Churches opened their doors and became support groups for a variety of self-help and self-interest groups, all with the shadow of religious teaching in the background. One could now associate themselves with a "laid back" church that offered everything from childcare to step aerobics and drivers

training for the young. Gospel groups that sang were supplanted by whole scale "gospel" music in a variety of flavors from pseudocountry to heavy metal. Some of which had been condemned by the same groups years earlier simply because of the nature of the music itself. Woodstock like gospel concerts are still growing in open air arenas and draw tremendous crowds of those who are born again and who still know how to rock and roll. All the while the simple message of the gospel was overshadowed by the sheer force of pageantry and power. The end result is that there are churches whose members can feel good at their services, leave and continue to live in a lost condition, never questioning the doctrines that they have been led to adopt. If you, or someone you know is looking for a "church", here is a way to tell the Lord's church from one that is not recognized by God. The Lord's church will spend it's time and effort on teaching the gospel from the Bible, not from the subjective testimonials of those who have been saved and are seeding their bank accounts with the gain this has brought them. The Lord's church will not offer discounts to the local Y nor teach you how to lower your cholesterol. Christians will teach you what you need to do to become a true obedient believer and what you need to do to remain faithful after conversion. The Lord's church will not assist you by placing air in your tires, or top off the fluids in your car. We will baptize you in water for the remission of sins upon your repentance and wish to obey and will probably help you dry off afterward then teach you what you need to do to be faithful. The Lord's church will not organize a lecture by a best selling author of how to find God's purpose for your life, but we will teach you what God's book has to say and then help you understand the purpose of the church as it seeks to fulfill it's mission to teach and save the lost.

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