

# WHY CHRISTIANITY IS FAILING IN AMERICA?

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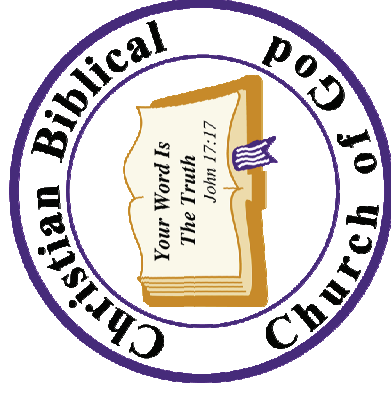
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## Why is “Christianity” Failing in America?

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

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

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

### Christianity in America—the Sad Statistics

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

## Why is “Christianity” Failing in America?

Duin, who has spent much of her career researching Christianity in America, writes: “It’s no secret that the percentage of Americans in church on any given Sunday is dropping fast.” How fast?

Research conducted by the Barna Group over the past few decades reveals key insight into the so-called *unchurched*—those Americans who do not regularly attend church services. According to a 2014 Barna report, in the early 1990s about two out of 10 adults were *churchless*. In the early 2000s, it was three in 10. Today, the *unchurched* make up nearly *half* of the adult population. Including children, that number comes to *156 million*.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, there is little *real* growth among churches: “The raw number of unchurched people in the United States is staggering. Most of what gets counted as ‘church growth’ is actually transfer growth, rather than conversion growth—that is, people transferring their allegiance from one church to another, not transitioning from non-Christian to Christ-follower.”

Looking closer at the data on the *unchurched*, Barna notes that some 65 percent qualify as moderately to highly *post-Christian*. (This analysis is based on detailed surveys dealing with beliefs and behavior.) Being post-Christian means they are *moving away* from the Christian religion entirely. Barna concludes: “In other words, in spite of ‘Christian’ self descriptions, *more than one third* of America’s adults are essentially *secular* in belief and practice. If nothing else, this helps explain why America has experienced a surge in unchurched people.” Also, 20 percent of the unchurched qualify as *skeptics*—a category that includes atheists and agnostics.

The decline in Christianity is most notable among the nation’s young adults. In fact, according to Barna’s research, the younger the generation, the more *post-Christian* it is. This becomes apparent when looking across the following four demographic groups:

Group	Born	Post-Christian
Elders	1945 or earlier	28 percent
Boomers	1946-1964	35 percent
Busters	1965-1983	40 percent
Millennials	1984-2002	48 percent

26. Kinnaman, p. 74
27. David Kupelian, *The Marketing of Evil*, pp. 235, 239
28. Swanson, p. 29
29. Duin, p. 116
30. Kupelian, p. 226, quoting *The Great Evangelical Disaster* by Francis Schaeffer
31. Kupelian, p. 228
32. Heather Clark, “Bibles and Booze: Congregations Across America Attempting to Attract New Members with Beer”; [www.christiannews.net/2013/11/03/bibles-and-booze-congregations-across-america-attempting-to-attract-new-members-with-beer/](http://www.christiannews.net/2013/11/03/bibles-and-booze-congregations-across-america-attempting-to-attract-new-members-with-beer/)
33. Clark, “Bibles and Booze”
34. Swanson, pp. 10, 15
35. Swanson, p. 271
36. Swanson, p. 33
37. Swanson, p. 283
38. Kupelian, p. 240

## APPENDIX NOTES:

1. [www.mrcvtv.org/blog/blessed-be-aho-and-amen-wiccan-priestess-delivers-prayer-iowa-house](http://www.mrcvtv.org/blog/blessed-be-aho-and-amen-wiccan-priestess-delivers-prayer-iowa-house)
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8. Snyder, Michael. “New Trend: ‘Radically Inclusive’ Churches That Embrace All Religions And All Lifestyles” [www.endoftheamericandream.com/archives/new-trend-radically-inclusive-churches-that-embrace-all-religions-and-all-lifestyles](http://www.endoftheamericandream.com/archives/new-trend-radically-inclusive-churches-that-embrace-all-religions-and-all-lifestyles)
9. Snyder
10. [www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics\\_of\\_atheism](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_atheism)
11. 2014 statistics. See [www.barna.org/churchless](http://www.barna.org/churchless) and [www.barna.org/barna-update/culture/713-2015-state-of-atheism-in-america](http://www.barna.org/barna-update/culture/713-2015-state-of-atheism-in-america)
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18. Arizona State University *Templeton Research Lectures* “Facing the Challenges of Transhumanism”; [www.transhumanism.asu.edu](http://www.transhumanism.asu.edu)
19. [www.universalmortalism.org/beliefs.html](http://www.universalmortalism.org/beliefs.html)

secularists, and humanists, their *creator-less approach* prohibits them from answering the one question that preoccupies man, *What is the purpose of human life?*

\* \* \*

Ultimately, we must all ask, “To what degree has the *failure* of modern Christianity led to the development and growth of aberrant religious ideas?” At the very least, a robust *biblical* Christianity is a strong deterrent to God-less belief systems. But when Christianity ceases to have sufficient relevance in a nation’s culture—and it has in America—the result is akin to opening up a religious Pandora’s Box.

## NOTES:

1. Julia Duin, *Quitting Church*, p. 18
2. [www.barna.org/churchless](http://www.barna.org/churchless)
3. [www.barna.org/barna-update/faith-spirituality/701-year-in-review-barna-s-top-10-findings-from-2014](http://www.barna.org/barna-update/faith-spirituality/701-year-in-review-barna-s-top-10-findings-from-2014)
4. [www.barna.org/churchless](http://www.barna.org/churchless)
5. Drew Dyck, “The ‘Leavers’: Young Doubters Exit the Church”; [www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/november/27-40.html?start=1](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/november/27-40.html?start=1)
6. [www.barna.org/barna-update/millennials/147-most-twenty-somethings-put-christianity-on-the-shelf-following-spiritually-active-teen-years](http://www.barna.org/barna-update/millennials/147-most-twenty-somethings-put-christianity-on-the-shelf-following-spiritually-active-teen-years)
7. Duin, p. 37
8. [www.barna.org/barna-update/millennials/94-a-new-generation-expresses-its-skepticism-and-frustration-with-christianity](http://www.barna.org/barna-update/millennials/94-a-new-generation-expresses-its-skepticism-and-frustration-with-christianity)
9. Duin, pp. 20, 32
10. Chuck Baldwin, “Ear Tickling, Entertainment, and Irrelevant Exposition”; [www.NewsWithViews.com](http://www.NewsWithViews.com); [www.chuckbaldwinlive.com](http://www.chuckbaldwinlive.com)
11. [www.onenewsnow.com/church/2014/08/01/barna-many-pastors-wary-of-raising-controversy](http://www.onenewsnow.com/church/2014/08/01/barna-many-pastors-wary-of-raising-controversy)
12. Baldwin, “Pastors Deliberately Keeping Flock In The Dark”; [www.newswithviews.com/baldwin/baldwin817.htm](http://www.newswithviews.com/baldwin/baldwin817.htm)
13. Jared Wilson, *Your Jesus Is Too Safe*, pp. 6, 14
14. George Barna, *Revolution*, p. 31
15. Barna, pp. 32-33
16. Tyler Charles, “(Almost) Everyone’s Doing It,” *Relevant*, Sept. 2011
17. Charles, “(Almost) Everyone’s Doing It”
18. Dyck, “The ‘Leavers’: Young Doubters Exit the Church”
19. David Kinnaman, *unChristian*, p. 46
20. Kinnaman, pp. 46-47
21. Kinnaman, p. 47
22. Kevin Swanson, *Apostate: The Men Who Destroyed the Christian West*, pp. 25, 31-32
23. Swanson, p. 13
24. Dyck, “The ‘Leavers’: Young Doubters Exit the Church”
25. Kinnaman, pp. 75-76

Clearly, Christianity—as it is taught and practiced today—is rapidly declining. But why? It all has to do with American culture.

Indeed, in spite of America’s “Christian” self description, there is a growing sense among churchgoers that our nation’s culture is changing so fast that young people in particular are uncertain as to how to express their faith. As Barna notes, “Not too many years ago, church attendance and basic Bible literacy were the cultural norm. Being a Christian didn’t feel like swimming against the cultural current. But *now?*”

It appears, however, that the root of the problem is not Christianity itself; it is how the “Christian religion” is packaged, presented and practiced in today’s mainstream church. When the *churchless* were asked about their personal beliefs, two thirds claimed to be “spiritual.” More than *half* said their *faith* was “very important” to their life. Moreover, while not actually claiming to be Christian, almost 70 percent of them had a *favorable view* of Christianity.

So *why* are they churchless? Nearly *half* of them said they *see no value* in personally attending church.<sup>4</sup> Clearly, the research points to *the church itself* as the problem!

### Are Mainstream Churches Becoming Irrelevant?

As a lead researcher for *Christianity Today*, Drew Dyck writes that the 2009 Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life reports that “young Americans are dropping out of religion at an alarming rate of *five to six times* the historic rate.” Dyck also notes that, according to Rainer Research, approximately 70 percent of America’s young people drop out of church between the ages of 18 and 22.<sup>5</sup> A more recent study by Barna shows that 60 percent of today’s young adults in their 20s—who *had regularly attended church* during their teen years—are now “spiritually disengaged” (i.e., not actively attending church, not reading the Bible, and not praying).<sup>6</sup>

According to Duin, research suggests that, at current dropout rates, only about *four percent* of American teens will end up as Bible-believing *adult* churchgoers (compare this to 35 percent of baby boomers and 65 percent of their World War II-era grandparents).<sup>7</sup>

Again, all of this suggests that *something vital is missing* from the average person’s church experience—especially if they are young. Indeed, according to Barna, fully *half* of all young churchgoers say they perceive Christianity to be judgmental, hypocritical, and too political. A third of them say it is old-fashioned and out of touch with reality.<sup>8</sup>

What’s behind all the empty pews? In a word—*irrelevance*. Duin notes that for the millions of American Protestants who have become church *dropouts*, church has just become too boring. “Church has nothing to do with their actual lives. What’s preached and talked about is *irrelevant* to their daily existence in the twenty-first century.” She says there is a *disconnect* between what is coming from the pulpit and people’s real lives. Duin quotes Mike McManus, a syndicated Christian writer: “They’re not preaching on real issues—divorce, chastity, cohabitation—that people are facing. There’s an avoidance of the big issues people are facing.”<sup>9</sup>

Chuck Baldwin, an outspoken Christian minister and author, has long lamented Christianity’s failure to be *relevant* to modern life. Calling today’s mainstream church “the opiate of entertainment and feel-good-ism,” he writes that when it comes to influencing societal conditions, culture and the political philosophy of the nation, “America’s churches are the largest block of irrelevant, impotent and insignificant institutions in the entire country.”<sup>10</sup>

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

According to Baldwin, most of what comes from today’s pulpits lacks relevance to real-life problems, challenges and

guide our positions. We are an ever evolving organization, shaped by new ideas and discoveries. Ultimate truth is a moving target, and we hope to come closer to it with each passing day.”

*Transhumanism* (sometimes called *post-humanism*) is a futuristic idea revolving around human enhancement. “Basically, it’s a sort of re-genesis, [the] altering [of] human bodies—genetically, mechanically, or both—to make them better than they’ve been for thousands of years, affording them Superman-style abilities in both brains and brawn. Futurists describe it as being ‘post-human,’ the next step in what they believe to be the evolutionary process.”<sup>17</sup>

This perspective is well explained in Arizona State University’s *Templeton Research Lectures*: “Humanity stands now on the precipice of a new phase in human evolution, referred to as ‘post-humanism’ or ‘transhumanism.’ ... In the trans-human phase, *humans will become their own makers*, transforming their environment and themselves. Proponents of transhumanism believe that advances in robotics, nanotechnology, artificial intelligence, and genomics will liberate humanity from pain and suffering. Presumably, in the trans-human age humanity will conquer the problems of aging, disease, poverty, and hunger, finally actualizing happiness in this life.”<sup>18</sup>

The movement’s Statement of Beliefs goes on to describe some of the philosophical ideals behind transhumanism: “We embrace the ideals of Humanism... We are our own saviors. We cannot rely on supernatural or external forces to guide us on our journey.... By coming together as one, in an informed and rational manner, we can arrive at the solutions to the problems that face us.... Reason, rational thought, and the scientific method are our tools in reaching our goals. We reject divine inspiration and other metaphysical approaches to arriving at truth. Instead, we rely on reason, rational thought, and the scientific method as our tools to guide us along our path.... With time on our side there should be no limit to what we can achieve. Our physical form will continue to evolve, through our own efforts, to keep pace with our ever-growing soul.” (Transhumanists define the *soul* as a composite of one’s thoughts, memories, and emotions.)<sup>19</sup>

A bleak religion, indeed. Proponents of transhumanism have no clue as to the true purpose of life. Like all atheists,

or a related philosophical worldview. Many do so as a way of *connecting* with their culture—all while being atheist.<sup>13</sup>

This suggests that there is an *intrinsic need* in humans to connect with “something spiritual.” Such an “inherent longing” may explain the recent growth of “atheist churches” in the UK and America.

This bizarre movement—wherein adherents are obviously intent on satisfying a vague but discernable spiritual need—is typified by the recent introduction of “Sunday Assembly” meetings held in several major cities in America, Canada, Britain, and Australia. The gatherings, about three dozen in all, have drawn hundreds of atheists seeking the fellowship of a “church” without religion or ritual. The inaugural Sunday Assembly in Los Angeles, for example, attracted several hundred people bound by their atheistic belief in *non-belief*. As one observer put it, the meeting included an hour of rousing music (renditions of “Lean on Me,” “Here Comes the Sun,” and other hits took the place of gospel songs), an inspirational sermon, a reading, and some quiet reflection. “The only thing missing was God.”<sup>14</sup>

According to organizers—who say they “just want to celebrate life and help people live better without all that God stuff”—Sunday Assembly taps into that universe of people who *left their faith* but now miss the sense of community church once provided. The meetings evoke the experience of a traditional church without being centered around a deity.<sup>15</sup>

### Transhumanism as Religion

A variant among secular groups is the emerging *Transhumanist Church*. Tripper McCarthy, president of the movement, writes in the introduction to the group’s Statement of Beliefs: “We are a religious organization that brings together the ideas of Humanism, Transhumanism, Cryonics, and Universal Immortalism into one all-encompassing belief structure. We are a small movement, in the infancy of our development, but feel that there is a need for our message.”<sup>16</sup>

McCarthy stresses that transhumanism should be rightly placed in a “religious context.” He cautions, however, that this position “does not mean that we must resort to metaphysical or supernatural foundations for our faith. Reason and rationality

experiences. Rather than being shepherds and watchmen, he says today’s pastors are more like *cheerleaders* and *CEOs*. “Our churches are not ‘the pillar and ground of the truth’ (1 Timothy 3:15, *KJV*); they are centers of social interaction, recreation, and feel-good indoctrination. Preachers are not reprovers, rebukers, and exhorters (II Timothy 4:2); they are ear-tickers, entertainers, and expositors of irrelevance.... The result: ineffective, impotent, weak, unprepared, and sheepish Christians.”

This dereliction of duty extends as well into the area of addressing political and social issues from the pulpit. In researching conservative pastors, the Barna Group found a serious disparity: 90 percent of pastors agree that the Bible speaks about all of today’s key political issues; but only 10 percent of them are willing to address these issues to their congregations. The Barna report noted that when it comes to the separation of church and state, it’s the *churches* that have “separated themselves from the activities of the state.”<sup>11</sup>

Barna’s inquiry into the matter shows that the average pastor views church success primarily in terms of “attendance, giving [money], number of programs, number of staff, and square footage [of facilities].” The report concludes: “Now all of those things are good measures [of success], except for one tiny fact: Jesus didn’t die for any of them.” Ultimately, most pastors will not get involved in politics because political issues can be controversial. And “controversy keeps people from being in the seats, controversy keeps people from giving money, [and] from attending programs.”

Baldwin adds: “The mega-church phenomenon of the last several decades transformed how pastors think and behave. Pastors read the ‘successful church’ books and publications; they attend the ‘successful church’ conferences; they watch the ‘successful church’ videos, etc. They then try to mimic the tactics and strategies they have been taught. And if there is one constant theme, ... it is pastors must avoid controversy like the plague.”<sup>12</sup>

One cannot help but ask, “Are pastors more concerned about being ‘successful’ than they are about being truthful?”

The bottom line is that Christianity’s popular “feel-good Gospel” is just not *relevant* to the real-world problems and stresses people are facing. The widely-promoted bumper sticker “Honk If You Love Jesus!” pretty well sums it up.

Unconsciously, those who remain a part of today’s organized Christianity end up just “playing church”—claiming to be Christian while living like a non-believer.

### The “Christian” Lifestyle Gap

Recent research polls have brought to light some astounding facts concerning the conduct of Christians—particularly those ages 18 to 29, as this group has been intensely studied. Overall, there appears to be a gigantic *lifestyle gap* between what is believed or professed and what is actually practiced. As we will see, most Christians—especially in the young adult group—are *indistinguishable* from non-Christians in almost every area of life. In his book *Your Jesus Is Too Safe*, Jared Wilson notes that “in American culture, it has often become hard to distinguish between the body of Christ and the culture of society.” He says Christians often quote such passages as “Judge not lest you be judged,” or “Let him who is without sin cast the first stone” because we want to “*justify how we live* without the pesky burden of what Jesus requires of us.”<sup>13</sup>

In his compelling book *Revolution*, George Barna laments the considerable “disconnection between what research consistently shows about [the conduct of] churching Christians and what the Bible calls us to [actually] be.” If Christians are what they *claim* to be, adds Barna, “their lives should be noticeably and compellingly different from the norm.”<sup>14</sup>

According to Barna’s 2005 data, of the 77 million Americans who claimed to be churchgoing “born again” Christians, fully *half* of them admitted that they had *not* “experienced a genuine connection” with God over the past year. Moreover, *less than 10 percent* claimed to possess a “biblical worldview”—i.e., a core set of convictions and beliefs that they have *proven as absolute truth* (the other 90 percent claimed only a “patchwork” of theological views).<sup>15</sup>

Is it any wonder, then, that “worldliness” is as much a problem *inside* mainstream Christianity as it is outside? A good indication of the depth of the problem can be seen in how self-professed Christians approach *divorce*. The divorce rate for those who *profess* to be Christian and who *claim* to follow the teachings of the Bible is *exactly the same* (around 50 percent) as

And what agreement is there between a temple of God and idols?” (II Cor. 6:14-16).

For Christianity to be genuine, it must be true to Christ, true to the faith of the early church. It cannot be repackaged with elements of other religions and still represent the Bible.

### Recent Growth of Secular Atheism

Today, an alarming number of Christians are becoming nonreligious, turning to secular ideologies. With the fall of communism, *coerced* atheism has fallen rapidly. But *voluntary* atheism and other forms of voluntary non-belief are clearly on the rise—particularly in America and the UK. According to Gallup, more than 9 in 10 Americans still answer “yes” when asked the basic question, “Do you believe in God?”—a statistic virtually unchanged from the 1940s. But when asked about the *absolute certainty* of their belief, the number drops to the 70-80 percent range. A 2008 Gallup poll showed that about 6 percent of the U.S. population believes definitively that *no* God exists (39 percent for the UK, where humanist organizations have flourished for decades).<sup>10</sup> Another way to view this is to consider that almost *half* of the adult population of America—some 114 million—is now *unchurched*, meaning they have not attended a Christian church service in the past 6 months. Of this number, *one quarter* are identified as *skeptics*, meaning they are either atheist or agnostic.<sup>11</sup>

The question is, has the decline of Christianity contributed to a rise in atheism? It appears so. According to a 2008 ARIS study, Christianity in America (and the UK) is not greatly threatened by other religions, but by a growing *denial* of religion in general.<sup>12</sup> This would suggest that atheism’s growth is to some degree based on the ongoing decline of Christianity. As demonstrated in this booklet, there is a growing perception that Christianity has lost its effectiveness; increasingly, former Christians are becoming nonreligious—and at least some are “converting” to atheism. However, research indicates that most atheists are *not* “converts” from any religion; rather, they have always rejected religion in general because of its insistence on a Supreme Being.

Interestingly, a number of studies reveal that many atheists deny the existence of God while actually indulging in some kind of formal religious practice—usually Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism,



Snyder writes: “A stained glass window looming over the pulpit captures the spirit of the church. It’s a design that contains a Christian cross, ringed by symbols from Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism. In the middle is a dove, which symbolizes the spirit of peace that binds them all together.”

Other “Christian” churches are being more “inclusive” by embracing alternative lifestyles. For example, San Francisco’s City Church—one of the largest evangelical churches in the area—has ended its policy of banning gay members who are unwilling or unable to take a vow of celibacy. Fred Harrell, senior pastor, explains: “Our pastoral practice of demanding life-long *celibacy*—by which we meant that for the rest of your life you would not engage your [gay] sexual orientation in any way—was causing obvious harm and has not led to human flourishing.” So, now you can be a Christian *and* a practicing homosexual.

But, as Snyder asks, if these churches don’t really stand for anything at all, what is their purpose? And what does the popularity of such churches say about the state of Christianity in America?

In today’s culture, it has become trendy to “choose your own path” while being extra careful to not “offend” someone else’s sensibilities. And today’s so-called Christianity has certainly followed suit. But if Christians can just believe whatever they want, what is it that actually makes a person a Christian?

One “Christian” seeking a more tolerant path said, “After years of spiritual reflection and inquiry, I am at a place where I don’t want to feel guilty, hypocritical, judgmental, closed-minded, or arrogant.”<sup>9</sup> Countless pastors today accommodate this desire among their congregants. They never talk about *sin* because they want people to *feel good* about themselves; they never preach on anything controversial because they dare not interrupt the flow of donations.

So they preach “smooth things” (Isa. 30:10) and remind us of how wonderful we are and tell us how much God loves us. And they promote syncretism—cloaked as tolerance. But as the apostle Paul wrote, a Christian cannot be *unequally yoked* with anything that is contrary to the faith once delivered: “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and lawlessness have in common? And what fellowship does light have with darkness? And what union does Christ have with Belial? Or what part does a believer have with an unbeliever?”

those who do not. Today, most divorces are unjustified—a matter of convenience. Marriage vows mean almost nothing. Are we really to believe that all of these “Christian” divorces are justified before God—when He says He *hates* divorce (Mal. 2:16)?

Then there’s the glaring problem of premarital sex and abortion among self-professed Christians. In his article “(Almost) Everyone’s Doing It,” Tyler Charles writes: “A surprising new study shows Christians are having premarital sex and abortions as much (or more) than non-Christians.” He notes that “a recent study reveals that 88 percent of unmarried [American] young adults (ages 18-29) are having sex... [But] the number doesn’t drop much among Christians. Of those surveyed who self-identify as ‘evangelical,’ 80 percent say they have had sex”—yet 76 percent of the same group believe sex outside of marriage is wrong. The stats get worse: “Of those 80 percent of Christians in the 18-29 age range who have had sex before marriage, 64 percent have done so within the last year [2011] and 42 percent are in a *current sexual relationship*.” Only 20 percent say they have never had sex.<sup>16</sup>

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

So much for biblically mandated abstinence!

The same studies also looked at abortion. According to Charles, of the approximately one million abortions that take place in the United States each year, a shocking 65 percent are obtained by women who claim to be either Protestant or Catholic. The remaining 35 percent are obtained by non-Christians. That’s 650,000 abortions each year obtained by *Christians*. Yet 77 percent of evangelicals believe that abortion is *morally wrong* (compared to 56 percent of the general population).<sup>17</sup>

For Christianity in America, these are damning statistics. (In ancient Israel, God’s “chosen people” at times sacrificed babies and young children to false gods to appease them. It was pure *idolatry*. Today, “Christians” abort babies out of convenience—as if it was a form of birth control. But it’s the same approach—the spirit of *idolatry*. We worship the “god of

sexual promiscuity”—and are willing to pay the horrendous price through abortion!)

Dyck labels the issue for what it is: *moral compromise*. He writes that many Christians experience an unbearable level of “conflict between belief and behavior. Tired of dealing with a guilty conscience and *unwilling to abandon their sinful lifestyles*, they drop their Christian commitment. They may cite intellectual skepticism or disappointments with the church, but these are smokescreens designed to hide the [real] reason. [In effect,] *they change their creed to match their deeds...*”<sup>18</sup>

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

David Kinnaman has researched this phenomenon for decades. In his book *unChristian*, he writes about the palpable “lifestyle gap” between what Christians profess to believe and how they actually live. Kinnaman argues that Christianity in America has a well-deserved *hypocritical* image. “Our lives don’t match our beliefs. In many ways, our lifestyles and perspectives are no different from those of anyone around us.”<sup>19</sup>

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

Not surprisingly, he found that the Christians were distinct in certain areas of *religious* behavior: they owned more Bibles, went to church, participated in church events, donating money to religious causes, etc. But that was where the distinction ended. “[When] it came to non-religious factors—the substance of

According to Vicari, today’s younger evangelicals fear being dubbed “intolerant or uncompassionate.” Desperate for acceptance but unable to navigate today’s “spiritual haze,” such Christians are highly susceptible to what she calls “feel-good” doctrines that focus on *how we make others feel*.

Of course, loving others and not wanting to offend—it all sounds quite biblical. But in terms of on-the-street application, it means primarily one thing—*tolerance*. It means we are to nonjudgmentally accept others regardless of their faith, beliefs, or lifestyles. In particular, we are to coexist when it comes to *religion*. The popular “Coexist” logo—with its seven religious icons—says it all:

C	Islam	(crescent moon with star)
O	Peace	(universal peace symbol)
E	Male/Female	(male and female symbols conjoined)
X	Judaism	(star of David)
I	Wicca/Paganism	(the I is dotted with an occult pentagram)
S	Eastern religion	(yin-yang symbol)
T	Christianity	(cross)



Researcher Michael Snyder writes that so-called “Christian” services that “incorporate elements of Hinduism, Islam, Native American religions, and even Wicca are becoming increasingly common. And even if you don’t believe anything at all, that’s okay with these churches, too.”<sup>8</sup>

For example, Snyder references *The Spirit and Truth Sanctuary*, founded in 2012 by D. E. Paulk. The church welcomes everyone from Wiccans to atheists and Hindus to Muslims—and recognizes all gods and prophets, including Mohammed. Paulk established his church based on one principle: “Christ cannot be, and will not be, restricted to Christianity.”

differences are quite insurmountable. A Christian simply cannot fuse his or her faith with that of Islam and remain a biblical Christian—one who *wholly* follows Christ. We are reminded of this principle in Deuteronomy 12:30, that we are not to attempt to *blend* pagan worship practices with the worship of the true God. The apostle Peter warned of just such heretical ideas finding their way into the church: “But there were also false prophets among the people, as indeed there will be false teachers among you, who will **stealthily introduce destructive heresies, personally denying *the* Lord who bought them**, and bringing swift destruction upon themselves” (II Peter 2:1).

While no one seriously believes the Christam movement will make significant inroads into traditional Christianity, it is symptomatic of the sad state of religion in America. Are Christians so desperate for acceptance—so desperate to appease the world—that they are willing to allow their faith to be fused with a divergent religion?

### The New Syncretism

The key premise of this book is that “Christianity” in America is failing because it has forsaken its foundation of *separateness* from the world (John 15:19). Today’s churchgoer wants to fit in. But they fail to appreciate (or conveniently ignore) the risk involved in attempting to follow Jesus while participating in popular culture. The unfortunate result is *worldliness* masquerading as Christianity.

Not surprisingly, this willingness to embrace the world has led to a new *syncretism*. Indeed, all over America, “*radically inclusive*” churches are now beginning to pop up. These churches, while “Christian” in appearance, welcome all religions and all lifestyles. Their pastors and leaders focus on being *inclusive*—a virtual open-door policy to any teaching or standard of conduct.

The buzzword for this movement is *tolerance*—that we are all to *coexist* regardless of differences. In her book *Distortion*, Chelsen Vicari warns that there is a new “Christian Left”—a “liberal movement cloaked in Christianity.” Embraced by evangelical churches as *hip* and *progressive*, this growing movement emphasizes that *tolerance* is “more marketable” to the rising generation of young churchgoers.<sup>7</sup>

peoples daily choices, actions and attitudes—there were few meaningful gaps between born-again Christians and [non-Christians]. Christians emerged as distinct in the areas people would expect—some religious activities and commitments—but not in other areas of life.”<sup>20</sup>

Kinnaman continues: Based on 2007 data, “we found that most of the lifestyle activities of born-again Christians were statistically equivalent to those of [non-Christians]. When asked to identify their activities over the last thirty days, born-again believers were just as likely to bet or gamble, to visit a pornographic Web site, to take something that did not belong to them, to consult a medium or psychic, to physically fight or abuse someone, to have consumed enough alcohol to be considered legally drunk, to have used an illegal, nonprescription drug, to have said something to someone that was not true....” In the area of inappropriate sexual behavior—including looking at online pornography, viewing sexually explicit magazines or movies, or having a sexual encounter outside of marriage—Kinnaman found that “30 percent of born-again Christians admitted to at least one of these activities in the past thirty days, compared to 35 percent of other [non-Christian] Americans. In statistical and practical terms, this means the two groups are essentially *no different* from each other.”<sup>21</sup>

Astonishing—*no difference*.

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

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

As Kevin Swanson writes in his recent book *Apostate*, Christianity’s “lifestyle gap” centers on the matter of *who will be God*. It is a battle over “whether man will be god or whether God will be God.” In taking of the forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam became the first *humanist*: he put human knowledge, human experience, and human will ahead of the authority of God. But either God will be God—in *His way*, on *His terms*—or man will be god. Swanson writes, “If God is the ultimate authority in man’s knowledge, ethics and reality, then *He* must be the central focus of life. *He* should permeate the thoughts, the motives, the academic teaching, the counseling, the family life, and the worship of the Christian.”<sup>22</sup>

There is simply no room for a “lifestyle gap” in real Christianity. As Swanson notes, “People always live out their fundamental beliefs. They may say they believe one thing while their lives reflect some other creed. In a world of a thousand hypocrisies and lies, there is only one way to determine the true creed of a man: *observe his life and culture*.”<sup>23</sup>

### A Form of Religion

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

This is reminiscent of the prophet Isaiah’s warning concerning those “who say to the seers [pastors], ‘See not,’ [don’t tell us about God’s coming judgment on our nation] and to the prophets [teachers], ‘Do not prophesy to us *right things* [such as the need to obey God’s commandments], speak to us *smooth things, prophesy illusions*’ ” (Isa. 30:10). Tell us things to make

In 2009, the Islamic Society of North America, which champions terrorist organizations and disseminates extremist literature, organized a national convention in Washington, DC. Some 8,000 Muslims attended. A key speaker was Rick Warren, the highly influential evangelical author and pastor of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California. Subsequently, Warren has been involved in an ongoing bridge-building initiative called *The King’s Way*, a partnership with a number of West Coast mosques that seeks to discover and promote the so-called “shared principles” of Islam and Christianity. A key argument includes the *false* declaration that both faiths worship the same God.<sup>4</sup> Warren and his efforts have been repudiated by numerous other evangelical pastors.

The central truth of Christianity is that there exists a single path to eternal salvation—Jesus Christ. But while Muslims may look up to Jesus as a prophet, they regard it as blasphemous to view him as God’s son and the savior of the world. Islam holds the firm view that eternal damnation awaits those who do not *earn* salvation by submitting to the requirements of the Koran. Thus, Chrislam requires the rejection of biblical truth and the denial of Jesus as the Messiah. Ultimately, the result of attempting to merge Christianity with Islam is that the Christian faith gets *watered down* while Islam continues to thrive.

Some, however, see a clearly sinister motive behind Chrislam—at least from the Muslim perspective. Christian author Bill Muehlenberg warns that Muslims are all too happy to use such religious syncretism to gain entry into Christian circles—for the purpose of ultimately *debasing Christians*. He says, “Islam always wins in such attempts, while Christianity always loses. The truth is, the two religions are fully incompatible.”<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, according to author Richard Mather, Chrislam is an anti-Semitic ploy designed to unite Muslims and Christians against Israel.<sup>6</sup> He writes that Chrislam is an attempt “to neutralize Jewish identity and history.” Mather contends that Chrislam is dependent on the removal of the Bible from its Judaic context. By stripping the Bible of its Jewishness, Chrislam seeks to neutralize the prophetic significance of the Jewish people and the land of Israel.

Indeed, Christianity and Islam may *seem* to be similar—both have Abrahamic origins, both are monotheistic, etc.—but the

personal, supernatural being. Jesus may have been historical, but most of the stories about Him in the Bible and elsewhere are legends.” Shuck insists that “belief-less Christianity is thriving.” He adds, “Many liberal or progressive Christians have already let go of or de-emphasized belief in heaven, that the Bible is literally true, that Jesus is supernatural, and that Christianity is the only way [to salvation]. Yet they still practice what they call Christianity.” Astonishing.

In many places in America, “Christianity” is no longer Christian. Indeed, the growing trend in *religious fusion* has rendered many churches unrecognizable. Front and center of this movement is the inclusion of *Islamic* elements in Christian worship. Across the pond, the Church of England—which already performs special services for parishioners in “civil partnerships” and same-sex marriages—has broken the ice by holding a prayer service for Muslims. Giles Goddard, a Church of England vicar at central London’s St John’s Church, arranged the Islamic service based on the following line of reasoning: “We are offering a place for people to pray, so it made absolutely perfect sense,” he claimed. “It is the same God, we share a tradition.” The service included a traditional Islamic call to prayer that involved dozens of Muslims. Goddard participated as well, giving thanks to “the God that we love, Allah.”<sup>3</sup>

### American *Christlam*

In America, this trend—aptly called *Christlam*—is quietly gaining acceptance among “Christian” churches. As the name suggests, *Christlam* is a hybrid of Christianity and Islam.

With its roots in the 1970s, *Christlam* recognizes both the Bible and the Koran as holy texts. For decades the movement grew slowly and boasted of few followers. But in recent years, the idea of merging Christianity with Islam has grown considerably in the West, particularly in the United States where numerous bridge-building programs have been implemented to bring the two religions together.

Notable *Christlam* organizations include Christians and Muslims for Peace (CAMP), which is devoted to discovering common ground between the two religions, and Bridges of Faith, an evangelical Christian-Muslim dialogue group.

us *feel good* about ourselves; tell us what a great church we have; tell us God is pleased with us as Christians.

The church itself is to blame: “Churchanity’s” narrow-minded rush to increase membership rolls has led to the development of spiritually weak, ill-prepared followers. Instead of emphasizing personal transformation and practical faith according to Scripture, young people in particular have been sold a *feel-good religion*—one that fails miserably when stacked up against the pulls and temptations of society. As Dyck rightly notes, “the Christian life is hard to sustain in the face of so many temptations.” But the church itself has *failed* to equip believers to fight the good fight. “I realized that most [who leave the church] had been exposed to [only] a *superficial form of Christianity* that effectively inoculated them against authentic faith.”<sup>24</sup>

Kinnaman has come to a similar conclusion: “It is easy to embrace a *costless* form of Christianity in America today ... [with only] a *superficial* understanding of the gospel... [But] in a *lightweight* [i.e., emotionally-based] exposure to Christianity, where a decision for Christ is portrayed as simple and costless, [the experience] will fail to produce lasting faith.”<sup>25</sup>

This particularly describes the experience of many young people. As Kinnaman notes, “Most teenagers in America enter adulthood considering themselves to be Christians and saying they have made a personal commitment to Christ. But within a decade, most of these young people will have left the church and will have placed [their] emotional connection to Christianity on the shelf. For most of them, their faith was *merely skin deep*.”<sup>26</sup>

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

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

In fact, for the past few decades popular Christianity has been spawning a new generation of *plastic* Christians—those

whose belief in Jesus amounts to nothing more than a “get-out-of-hell-free card.” As David Kupelian notes in his groundbreaking book *The Marketing of Evil*, “Christianity has been *dumbed down* into a bumper-sticker religion.... This *dumbed-down* version of Christianity doesn’t require honest introspection or courage or self-denial or patience. The only ingredient it needs is a guilty person who’s sick of feeling guilty, wants relief, wants to feel better about himself, and desires an ‘insurance policy’ to keep him out of hell. But even the most insincere person wants to feel better about himself, wants relief from guilt, and fears death.... [Thus,] the trivialization of Christianity into a mantra of belief—but separated from works, from obedience to God’s laws, and even more fundamentally, separated from basic honesty, integrity, love of truth, and *true repentance*—has ushered in a generation of shallow, ineffectual and invisible Christians.”<sup>27</sup> Moreover, as Swanson brings out, Protestantism has “reduced God’s law to a nebulous definition of love”—so that “God’s will [can] be interpreted in a thousand ways by a thousand different people.”<sup>28</sup>

The inevitable result is a *counterfeit* “religious experience”—leading to what Duin calls a “costless Christianity that’s easily maintained.”<sup>29</sup> It’s easily maintained because it’s devoid of *works* or real *obedience* to God’s Word. Jesus corrected the religious hobbyists of His day for this very same approach: “*Hypocrites!* Isaiah has prophesied well concerning you, saying, ‘This people *draw near to Me [God] with their mouths*, and *with their lips they honor Me*’ ”—they say all the right things, call Jesus “Lord, Lord,” sing praises to God every Sunday morning—“*but their hearts are far away from Me*. [Thus,] they worship Me in vain, teaching for doctrine the commandments of men’ ” (Matt. 15:7-9). Jesus applied Isaiah’s prophecy to the scribes and Pharisees of His day, but the passage is just as applicable to today’s “Christianity.”

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

Ezekiel also wrote of such “churchgoers”: “[The] children of your people are ... speaking to one another, each man to his brother, saying, ‘I pray you, come and hear what is the word

## Appendix

### Has Christianity’s Decline Encouraged Aberrant Religious Expression?

As demonstrated by this booklet, there is a growing consensus that Christianity in America is rapidly losing its effectiveness, even becoming irrelevant. Increasingly, “Christians” are becoming nonreligious, turning to secular ideologies such as atheism. More often, however, those who leave Christianity adopt some alternate form of religion, usually one with “new age” or Eastern ideas.

Meanwhile, there is a growing movement underway to associate Christianity itself with *other religions*—a kind of homogenization of faiths. We see hints of this trend in a number of unlikely places. For example, at a recent opening ceremony for the Iowa House of Representatives, a *Wiccan priestess* was invited to give the closing prayer at the invocation.<sup>1</sup> The move sparked considerable outrage in the churchgoing community and several Christian lawmakers declined to attend the ceremony. Some who attended the event turned their backs to the priestess in silent protest.

Why would a normally conservative legislative body allow someone from an occult religion to participate in their opening ceremony? What kind of thinking is behind such a move? Undoubtedly, it is the multiculturalist idea that *all faiths are equal* and that the blending of divergent religions is somehow a good thing.

But why should we be surprised? Today, in the Presbyterian religion, you can be an oxymoronic *atheist Christian*. In Beaverton, Oregon, John Shuck, pastor of Southminster Presbyterian Church, says he doesn’t believe in God—nor does he require his members to believe in God.<sup>2</sup> “I ... invite people to bring their own God,” he wrote. “Or none at all.”

Shuck proudly proclaimed himself an unbeliever in 2011, generating controversy as to how one could serve as a church pastor and not believe the Bible. He wrote: “The concept of ‘God’ is a product of myth-making and ‘God’ is no longer credible as a

world whatever it needs in order to be comfortable, to appear effective, and to be *appealing*. Swanson writes: “If culture is the *living out* of a worldview, then Christians will live as Christians only if they are well acquainted with their own [biblical] worldview.... As long as the church tries to *contextualize* [popular] culture ... it will be powerless to impact that culture.”<sup>37</sup>

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

Why has Christianity been so *easily seduced* by those who market popular culture? Kupelian argues that it is because “a hidden, selfish part of [churchgoers] *wanted* to embrace” the falsehoods of popular culture.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, *we want to fit in, to be of this world*. It is just as God said through Jeremiah—“My people *love to have it so*” (Jer. 5:31). It is just as Ezekiel said—“their *heart goes after their covetousness*” (Ezek. 33:31).

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

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

[preached] which comes forth from the LORD.’ And they come to you [pastors] as the people [have traditionally] come, and they *sit before you as My people* [on Sunday mornings], and they *hear* your words. But they *will not do them*.”

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

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

### Christianity—Seduced by Worldliness

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

Schaeffer adds that it has been “the weakness and accommodation of the evangelical group on the issues of the day that has been largely responsible for the loss of the Christian ethos” over the past few decades. Such accommodation, he writes, is nothing less than “worldliness”—and has led to the further breakdown of America’s moral base.<sup>30</sup>

Kupelian suggests that such “accommodation” by church leaders was ostensibly an attempt to gain new converts, the idea being that you have to go where the unconverted are, act like them, look like them—all in hopes of winning their trust. But this approach is completely contrary to biblical instruction. He gives the following example: “[Youth] pastors at some point started to dispense with their formal attire and instead appeared before teenagers without coat and tie, so as not to appear a stuffed shirt. That’s a reasonable accommodation. But what happens when the youth leader’s strategy of going tie-less turns into his dressing like a rap singer, talking jive, and wearing earrings? That’s what’s happening in Christian pop culture today.”<sup>31</sup>

An extreme example of “accommodation” can be seen in the recent development of “churches” that offer enticements such as free beer or cigars—to be enjoyed during services, of course. This is nothing but an effort to attract non-Christians by appealing to their lusts. Scott Brown of the Center for Family Integrated Churches agrees: “[This is] relating with people by becoming like people.” He says, “When people come into the church, they should see a completely new kingdom, a completely new community. They should see how different God is than they are....”<sup>32</sup>

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

undiluted—and people will start respecting us because we are not giving them something that will [merely] tantalize the flesh. We are giving them something that will bring life to their spirit.”<sup>33</sup>

Whereas Kupelian and others use the notion of “accommodation” to explain where Christianity has gone awry, Swanson uses the idea of *synthesis*—the attempt to mix biblical ideals with worldly philosophies (also called *syncretism*). He argues that in the “war of ideas”—an ongoing cultural crisis that covers every aspect of life, including music and entertainment, education, politics, economics, etc.—Christians must be extremely careful not to *synthesize* their beliefs with the humanistic ideas of the world. Swanson writes that “when Christianity abandons the centrality of God”—by trying to accommodate or *synthesize* with the non-Christian world—“it loses [the] critical, distinctive element of the *Christian worldview*.”<sup>34</sup> The result is an irrelevant and powerless church.

Indeed, no other worldview will do. “For thousands of years, it was pastors and fathers in villages and homes who shaped the culture.” But today, “the media [has] replaced the church and the family as the dominant means by which society transfers information, inculcates worldviews, and forms [its] culture.”<sup>35</sup> Ideally, with a thoroughly biblical worldview, the church will lead or create culture. But if it fails to do so, the church will be *absorbed by popular culture*—to the extent that it practically ceases to exist.

This is exactly where Christianity in America (and Great Britain, for that matter) finds itself today: rather than leading or setting culture, the church now simply *reflects* culture. Like the culture that now dominates it, the church is rapidly being infested with paganism, polytheism, relativism and even nihilism. As Swanson says, “The synthesized church [now] finds itself under the unhappy curse of being both compromised and irrelevant.”<sup>36</sup>

To put this another way, the church has followed the dubious path of “contextualization.” Thus, today the Gospel is preached in the “context” of popular culture. The original framework in which Jesus and the apostles preached the Gospel has become passé; what matters now is how the Gospel conveniently fits into modern society. Whether its music, entertainment, dress, language, morals or even attitudes, *contextualism* allows the church to borrow (synthesize) from the