

¶¶ for Parents

April 23, 2007

“...religion, like everything else, is presented, quite simply and without apology, as an entertainment. Everything that makes religion an historic, profound and sacred human activity is stripped away: there is no ritual, no dogma, no tradition, no theology, and above all, no sense of spiritual transcendence. On these shows, the preacher is tops. God comes out as second banana.”

Neil Postman

Neil Postman was a professor at New York University for most of his life. In the above quotation, from *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Professor Postman, as an unbeliever, is dispassionately analyzing what he sees of the Christian faith as he sees it communicated over television media. What would he see (as a disinterested third party observer who happens to be a media expert) if he looked in on a Cornerstone chapel service?

Anyone who has been paying attention for the past twenty years can tell you that the most controversial area of church decision-making revolves around philosophy of worship. Whether it's traditional, blended, or contemporary, everyone has an opinion about what is pleasing to God. Second-guessing the whims of a fickle public has become more than a parlor game for church leaders – it's a decision that affects their very livelihood. If no one shows up for your market-driven, consumer-based, entertainment-oriented worship services, there's no show. It takes an audience to pay the bills.

In Christian school chapel services, we have a more captive audience. We also have the sober realization that what they learn in school at this impressionable age may color their view of worship for the rest of their lives.

Following the lead of their parents, most covenant children feel that worship is about themselves – how they feel, what they like, what they don't like. When children report their preferences to their parents, parents are rightly concerned because they don't want children to “hate” church when they grow up. So they give schools (at least those which ask for feedback) the feedback that the school chapels need to cater more to ... (you fill in the blank: whatever is the whim of the moment).

If classical Christian schools believe there is something transcendent about the sweep of western culture and civilization that ought to dictate what is taught in the classroom, perhaps it should affect chapel as well. Yet I find the same people who have no problem with their children memorizing a sonnet in Elizabethan English are very

concerned about their child memorizing King James English (another term for Elizabethan English).

It goes against the grain of church growth experts and the culture of “cool” to think of Christian faith as rooted in something that’s been around for thousands of years. “Old” isn’t necessarily better just because it’s old, it’s just there because it’s an inescapable inevitability. If I want to illustrate a Bible story in chapel, I can do it with a print by Rembrandt (thanks to “new” things – the internet and power point projection) or I can do it with tasteless Sunday School art.

By the same token, we can “follow the fads” in music and storytelling (trivialized Bible story videos come to mind) or we can focus on connecting covenant children with the God of the Ages, the Ancient of Days, the Lord God of Sabaoth.

Recently, Pastor Matt Uldrich used the story of Elisha cursing the rude children in illustrating a lesson he was teaching in one of our fourth grade classes (2 Kings 2). I can imagine that some parents would be horrified to hear that the Bible has a story about a prophet cursing forty-two children and looking on as they are eaten by a couple of bears.

But the Christian faith is a not a “designer” religion. It is what it is. We take God at *His* word, and we let *Him* tell us Who He is and how He should be worshipped and served. Whether in chapel, or in Bible class, or in affirming scriptural revelation during a science lesson, we stand on God’s word and desire to please Him, rather than merely entertain at the level of the lowest common denominator.

“The United States has produced the most entertainment-oriented people the world has ever known. We have more forms of amusement than have ever been known to man, but we still want more. In our age, everything is designed to appeal to our emotions and to entertain us. We seem to have forgotten our worship service is to bring glory and honor to God, and not to entertain ourselves. People expect divine will to conform to what seems right in their own eyes. Proverbs 12:15 says, ‘The way of the fool is right in his own eyes.’ The emphasis is how can the worship service be made more entertaining to people to please themselves, and not God.

Unidentified Christian pastor