

The Heresy of Worshiptainment

by Mike Livingstone

The great heresy of the church today is that we think we're in the entertainment business.

A.W. Tozer believed this to be true back in the 1950s and 60s. Church members "want to be entertained while they are edified." He said that in 1962. Tozer grieved, even then, that it was "scarcely possible in most places to get anyone to attend a meeting where the only attraction was God."*

More recently, David Platt has asked:

- What if we take away the cool music and the cushioned chairs?
- What if the screens are gone and the stage is no longer decorated?
- What if the air conditioning is off and the comforts are removed?
- Would His Word still be enough for his people to come together? (Radical)

WOULD IT BE ENOUGH?

Tozer got it right: "Heresy of method may be as deadly as heresy of message."

HALLOWEDNESS, NOT SHALLOWNESS

Like Tozer, we should be concerned that so many people in our churches want to be entertained while they worship. We should be concerned when we no longer recognize the difference between the two. And we should be concerned by the growing belief that adding more entertainment value to worship is necessary for the church to accomplish its mission.

I may stand alone, but it grieves me when I see worship services characterized more by props, performances, and pep rally atmospheres than by any sense of divine sacredness; and hallowedness giving way to shallowness.

This is not about worship styles. The issue is not traditional versus contemporary versus blended worship. It's not about organ versus worship band. That discussion misses the point completely. This is about the heart and focus and intent of worship. The real issues, for me, are these:

1. Who or what is the spotlight really on?

If the figurative spotlight in our church services is on anyone other than God, it is not worship. If the spotlight shines brighter on human performance than on the gospel of Christ, it is not worship. If anyone other than Jesus is receiving our adulation and applause, it is not God we worship.

2. What message are we communicating?

The message of the church—the message the world needs to hear from us—is not, "Come and have a good time," "Come and be entertained," or "Come and find your best life now."

Tozer said: "Christ calls men to carry a cross; we call them to have fun in His name."

The message of the church is the message of the cross. Lest we forget, Jesus' cross was a source of entertainment only for those who mocked Him as He hung on it.

3. How are lives changed?

"But our methods are attracting and winning people!" some will say.

Tozer addressed that sentiment:

"Winning them to what?"

- To true discipleship?
- To cross-carrying?
- To self-denial?
- To separation from the world?
- To crucifixion of the flesh?
- To total committal to Christ?"
- To holy living?
- To nobility of character?
- To a despising of the world's treasures?
- To hard self-discipline?
- To love for God?

THE WORD DOES THE WORK

David Platt and the church he pastored, The Church at Brook Hills, decided to try to answer the question, “Is His Word still enough for His people to come together?” They stripped away the entertainment value and invited people to come simply to study God’s Word. They called it Secret Church. They set a date—on a Friday night—when they would gather from 6:00 in the evening until midnight, and for six hours they would do nothing but study God’s Word and pray. People came. A thousand people came the first time and it grew from that. Soon, they had to start taking reservations because the church was packed full. Secret Church now draws tens of thousands of people via simulcast in over 50 countries around the world—with no entertainment, no bells and whistles or smoke machines.

Why do they come? Platt explained in an interview: “People are hungry for the Word. There’s really nothing special or creative about it. It’s just the study of the Word The Word itself does the work!” People are hungry. They are hungry for a diet of substance, not candy.

- More of the Word.
- Deeper into the Word.
- Less of what Tozer called “religious toys and trifles.”

**Tozer quotes are taken from Tozer on Worship and Entertainment by James L. Synder.*