

AlbertMohler.com

Youth Ministry in a New Key? Substance over Sugarcoating

Monday, October 30, 2006



TIME magazine, not to be mistaken for a journal on youth ministry, suggests in the current issue that evangelical youth ministry is trending toward substance and away from what it calls a “sugarcoated” approach.

From the article by Sonja Steptoe:

Youth ministers have been on a long and frustrating quest of their own over the past two decades or so. Believing that a message wrapped in pop-culture packaging was the way to attract teens to their flocks, pastors watered down the religious content and boosted the entertainment. But in recent years churches have begun offering their young people a style of religious instruction grounded in Bible study and teachings about the doctrines of their denomination. Their conversion has been sparked by the recognition that sugarcoated Christianity, popular in the 1980s and early '90s, has caused growing numbers of kids to turn away not just from attending youth-fellowship activities but also from practicing their faith at all.

Now, that is an astounding approach — maybe these kids are hungry for biblical substance and something more than entertainment and pizza. Well, they probably still want the pizza, but they don’t want to waste their time in useless and superficial youth programs. After all, they are swimming upstream against an adolescent culture. In many cases, they are more seriously-minded than their parents. They have to be, because the stakes are higher.

I am constantly asked a fascinating question by parents: Why are my children more conservative than I? The answer is complex, but when it comes to today’s youth and young adults, the fact is that they have had to think clearly about the genuine options available. They have had to make hard decisions about life, meaning, morality, truth, and significance.

The fact that *TIME* found this story interesting is a story in itself. Now, if only we could encourage these parents to be as serious as their teenagers — and their pastors as serious as their youth ministers.

NOTE: *TIME* looked at youth ministries at Calvary Baptist Church in Bellflower, California; Shoreline Christian Center in Austin, Texas; and Covenant Life Church in Gaithersburg, Maryland. A nice comment about Covenant Life Church: “Similarly, teens at [Covenant Life Church](#) in Gaithersburg, Md., are embracing the big doses of Bible study youth pastors now recommend. Teen ranks have tripled, to nearly 600, since the mid-1990s.” I have seen the [Covenant Life youth ministry](#) up close, and they do dispense “big doses of Bible study.” It shows.

Photo credit: Covenant Life Church

