

# Glory or the Ghetto

(A Pastoral Perspective on Two Viewpoints of Culture)

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## Chapter One: Introduction

After serving twelve years in the United States Army I learned a little about E and E (Escape and evasion) and that is the first thing that comes to mind when it comes to the view point of the majority of Believers in regards to popular culture.

However, this is not the only response. There are those that believe that instead of barring the doors and running for the hills believers are instead supposed to engage the culture and its influence on the community at large.

My hope is to present in this paper a balanced view on both sides from a pastoral perspective that will allow the reader to make an educated and prayerful decision on where they stand in regards to this hot button issue.

Regardless of where you find yourself as a pastor or leader, one thing is for sure this is an issue that is not going to go away. We are part of the popular culture and have been since the beginning.

I do not know whether you are on the side of the ban and boycott bandwagon or if you are on the side of the embrace, engage and enjoy. Maybe you are actually somewhere

in the middle of the two. It does not matter the point is that you definitely have to find yourself somewhere with a viewpoint.

The people that you lead are definitely consumers of the culture and so are you. The choice you have to make is will they be informed or ignorant consumers?

You have a part in answering that question. I believe that you also have a responsibility. I encourage you to take that responsibility very seriously and with great humility.

It is important not to be so quick just to condemn or condone. The question that we will base this paper on is this: Is God for engaging the culture or is He against it?

I cannot help but be reminded of the Apostle Paul at Mars Hill, Jesus at the well, and the fact that the majority of the time Jesus invested his time in the tax collectors, fisherman, prostitutes, and just the plain old sinner.

His goal was not to make healthy people even healthier, but his purpose and plan was to make the sick person whole. He went just about anywhere and by any means to make that a reality.

## Chapter Two: The War on Cultural Terrorism and the Hollywood Hijackers

One does not have to go very far to find filth and a lack of faith when it comes to the popular culture and the endless stream of muck that the media produces and peddles. A person at times might feel that there is nothing that has the least bit of value on the television, big screen, internet, or the music scene.

There are those that have all but written the obituary for America and the chance that she will once again be a "Christian" nation. Rebecca Hagelin in her highly hailed book *Home Invasion* (2005) has this to say in the introduction about the state of America:

Is there any place in America where families are truly safe? Where children can grow up in innocence? Where moms and dads can know that it is their influence over their children's lives that will shape their values, choices, and futures? There was a time in America when parents raised their children with high morals, when adults instinctively created a protected space in childhood, free from exposure to 'adult' issues. I fear that America is all but

gone. (P.xi.)

In another book author Philip Patterson, PhD of *Stay Tuned* he also lays down an indictment on the firestorm that the media can and will cause if not tamed or tempered.

This book is a call to know the potential for 'fire' we have in our homes with our computers, our multiple televisions, ubiquitous radio receivers, vcrs, dvds, and all the rest. Respect them and they can be useful. Turn our back on them, and they can bring an explosion of worldliness into our homes like no other generation has ever faced." (pp.16-17)

So what if you dropped an A bomb on all your entertainment apparatus packed of the VW van and headed for the hills. Then certainly you could escape all the madness and mind numbing. Don't pack that van just yet according to Hagelin that won't solve the problem either.

Even if you pitch your TV out of a window, declare the local multiplex off limits, and never buy another bad video game, your kids [or you] are hardly safe. And why? Because the products you're avoiding still infect the overall culture. (2005, p.19)

So the key seems to be that unless culture changes you will not see any noticeable difference as we progress into future generations.

One has to be living in a cave to not see the collateral damage that has cascaded over the culture as a result of what some would deem an irresponsible and irreverent constant attack of the Hijackers of Hollywood and Madison Avenue mafia.

Perversion equals profit, the problem is that the price is not pennies but precious lives of our children and the product that is produced is broken and hurting people everywhere.

Today's divorce rate is around 50 percent. The problem of pornography is epidemic and research reveals that children of all ages have been affected by the pervasiveness of pornography through television and the internet. The loud and clear lie is that many sexual partners and encounters lead to a fulfilled life. The result of this lie is out of control teenage pregnancy and drug abuse problems.

The question remains and is obviously a matter of opinion if things have always been this bad or do we desperately need a return to the "Good Ol Days"? One

perspective on this matter is what is shared by Hagelin.

"Americans once shared a collective understanding that ours is a society based on faith in God, and His immutable laws of unconditional love, decency, and the simple but powerful concept of treating others as we would be treated"

(2005,p.7.)

During these times Biblical principles were echoed through our schools, families' fellowshiped together in churches, prayer was a priority in both private and public life. Americans were taught and guided by the Ten Commandments and Judeo-Christian values.

It maybe comforting to some to find peace in those "back when" days and it may cause warm and fuzzies and an internal urge to belt out a lively rendition of Koom by ya. Please don't pat yourself on the back yet.

In times as early as Jonathan Edwards it is well known by a variety of sources that the morals were not as pure as you might think they were. Kids were known to "bundle" together to stay warm and they were known for running the streets and causing problems. This is just one small example that I have shared.

Remember; when you point a finger there is always three pointed back at you. This matter is know exception to

say the least.

As adults we are responsible for producing the television and movies that promote and peddle the trashy lifestyle that we absolutely abhor. This is done for the simple sake of the almighty advertising dollar that the majority of Americas bows before in pursuit of the American Dream.

It is grown ups not giggling girls and boys that pound out marketing plans, music lyrics, movie scripts, and many more media types for the promotion of the perverted for the sake of pure profit. "The sexual images that pummel them also promise popularity, security, and acceptance."

(Hagelin, 2005, p.30)

The problem remains that even though these things are promised they never produce and this in turn leaves the person wanting for more and thus starts the cycle all over again.

It is very understandable that the media is a major power broker in the culture. This potent power does not only come from what we watch, but from the fact that we do watch.

There are now wide ranging studies from a variety of sources that estimate that the average household keeps

there TV on more than seven hours each day. By the time that a child reaches the age of eighteen they will have watched between 18,000-19,000 hours of television. This is double the time spent on formal education.

This proves across the board that we are as a society watching whatever is put out there. The more important point is that the true source of the media's power is "the ability to define reality, to alter our expectations about what constitutes normal life." (Patterson, 2002, pp.29-30)

It is interesting to hear the variety of opinions that are out there regarding the effect that the media has on us and our children. There are those that believe that it is simply entertainment and that it is harmless fun.

Then there are those that vehemently disagree and wonder if we can really be intellectually honest and think that us and our children will be motivated by media to be more responsible when it comes to the environment and global warming, but not be affected that the sex anytime, anywhere, any how is ok.

The same exact media pounds each message and it is not selective and either is the audience that receives the messages. If advertising had a zero effect then we would certainly not have a multi-billion dollar advertising

industry.

It is interesting that we would think that the popular culture media machine would have the ability to police itself. The fact remains that whatever sells is what they will sell. The idea that there are consequences to the messages that they produce through their programming does not seem to register.

The morality of the media is easily understood: If it attracts an audience , a media message is moral...Media companies don't merely want you to come back; they need you to come back, and they will do anything in their power to ensure that." (Patterson, 2002, p.13)

Media companies for the most part put something out based on if it will benefit the company bottom-line and the stockholder's. We as pastors and leaders look at something and ask does it benefit the people?

According to Hagelin the "average child sees some twenty-thousand advertisements per year...by the time a child reaches age nineteen, they will have seen some three hundred thousand placed ads." (2005, p.45)

As pastors and leaders we must be awake and not asleep at the wheel in the understanding that not only are the

people that we lead a target for the tenacious marketing, but what is being sold to them is a sloppy counterfeit reality as a lifestyle. If followed the way they lay it out both spoken and unspoken it will not be absent major consequences.

The media messages either through advertising or entertainment are like time bombs. At an unknown time and unspecified location they will explode. Some will hit a target and some will fail, but over time and with a radical resume of repetition a tremendous number of these cultural warping time bombs will hit their mark.

Less you still not be convinced of the all out assault of the cultural Terrorist, Hollywood Hijackers and the Madison Ave Mafia here is a few more bytes of information.

According to Hagelin the continual onslaught of images "that have invaded our homes are degrading, debasing, and desensitizing all of us." (2005, p.36)

The consequence of selling sex to the masses has both long and short term negative effects. It derails and destroys a persons ability to develop loving intimate, and lasting relationships. These are the ingredients that are required to live an unfulfilled and unmanaged life.

That is the result of the selling of sex. Look at what

happens as the vendors of violence also peddle their goods:  
"According to estimates by the American Academy of  
Pediatrics, by the time a child reaches the age of 18, he  
or she will have seen at least 8,000 murders and about  
100,000 other acts of violence just on television"  
(Patterson, 2002, p.79.) Put into the mix video games,  
music, and the movies and the pervasive theme of the  
culture is violence unchecked.

This is a pretty alarming indictment on the current  
popular culture. To many this is no less than an all out  
war and holiness and morality hang in the balance.

To those that hold this view it is nearly impossible  
to see any redeeming quality of any of the popular culture.  
As a matter of fact it seems that if a giant earthquake hit  
California and as a result Hollywood went to the bottom of  
the sea there would be very few tears shed.

The operation order is to get in the defensive and  
hunker down and hope that it passes. Then there are those  
that have been promoted to the Special Forces and are on  
the offense and there motto is take no prisoners. Their  
plan is to censor, legislate, and to obliterate all that  
does not meet the requirements of their viewpoint.

## Chapter Two: Finding the Holy in Hollywood, and His Majesty on Madison Avenue

From this perspective the magnifying glass is not pointed at the peddlers of the media, but instead is pointed first and foremost to the Creator and then to us as believers that are in the middle of the culture.

It is much easier to point fingers and boycott than it is to look in a mirror and take responsibility. Bob Briner in his book *Final Roar* speaks to this exact point. He concludes that we as Christians are the ones that have failed. "Rarely, if ever, in the annals of human history have so many with so much to give their society actually given so little and done it so maladroitly as have American Christians over the past fifty years. (2001, p.5)

As a matter of fact as believers most of us don't know exactly where we fit or where to draw the line between the sacred or the secular. The point is not the line, but the point is that we are in the sand.

Most of us ride on a perpetual seesaw between the sacred and the profane, and there is little encouragement from either side of the spiritual spectrum to embrace the other. When one is up, the other is down, and there is little teaching and

fewer models of those who try and bring the two together. Those who try are suspect in both camps- too sacred for sinners and too sinful for the saints. (Fischer, 2003, p.10)

This remains the challenge and inevitably what we do as believers is we will gravitate toward finding the negative and pound on it until it is lifeless convinced that if people can just see the truth then they will get it.

As a matter of fact for the most part we are so focused on people being saved from the culture and themselves and ultimately for eternity that we fail to ask the right questions.

We are so committed to getting people saved that we often magnify the despicable nature of their unsaved state. We have a need to paint the unsaved in the worst possible light, but what if they happen to like their lives? What if they don't want to be saved? How can we justify Christianity when folks are already doing comparatively well?

(Fischer, 2003, p.79)

Their eternal salvation is of the ultimate importance; however it is important that we learn to engage people

where they are at in the hope that we are able to help them discover the truth. This does not mean always pointing out the negative or the disdainful.

We are not able to change people, nor are we able to make choices for others. The case could be made that we are personally and corporately responsible as believers when we fail to engage those in the spheres of our influence and give them a clear perspective of God and what He means and does as they make important choices in their lives.

The problem remains that when we do this in regards to the popular culture usually we are uninformed, ill equipped and biased as we approach the cultural community. What can happen when the spiritual is a commodity is that a chasm is formed separating the sacred and the secular. This chasm was never intended to exist.

A chasm is often created in communities where spirituality is a commodity- a kind of reality chasm, you might call it. Those who aspire to be more spiritual are less believable than the sinners. The sinners are real and dirty; the saints are holy and aloof- often counting on their separation from the rest to foster a certain aura of righteousness. The big question of real Christianity is how to

bridge the chasm. Can you bring God down without getting Him dirty? Can you lift sinners up without making them phony? (fischer, 2003,p.11)

There in lies the problem for most. We have somehow as believers produced a mindset that what you look like is more important than what is on the inside. We have a dislike for what we take in, but give no attention to what is going on in the inside. The Bible tells us to be transformed by the renewing of our mind not a church membership.

Thinking like a Christian is less important than looking like one and acting like one in a Christian environment. Christianity is more membership in a club than it is smart intelligent membership in the world...If the wider world is a Christian's enemy, then a Christian is certainly not going to think about finding God there. Such a Christian is thinking more about fighting the world and running skirmishes in and out of it than they are connecting with their world in any way. (Fischer, 2003, pp.47-48)

Our responsibility is then not to run and hide but engage the popular culture right smack in the middle of

Mars Hill. Whether it is on Hollywood Blvd. or Madison Ave. as a believer it is important that we become salt and light and make an effort to present a Christian perspective, biblically based answers, and alternatives based in truth to those we know and contact regularly. To the extent that we have failed to do this is the extent that we as a body of believers have failed society as a whole.

We have a great opportunity to offer truth in the context of culture to those around us that seem so desperate for something even though they may not know what it is.

Christians are to offer the peculiar and particular insights of Christianity and the Bible. We are not to sell them, force them, develop power blows to install them, sue to have them enacted, or legislate them into being. We are to offer them...By our lives, by the way we live, we are to demonstrate their appeal, and then we are to offer them as answers to the perennial questions and as solutions to the most stubborn of human problems. (Briner, 2001, p.9)

It is important that as believers we are connected to the culture and we are candid when it comes to our own lives.

Until Christians are real people, caught in the joys and the sorrows of the human experience, but touched by the reality of the presence of God in their lives, the world is going to continue to get the wrong idea about following Christ, and we are going to continue to give them the wrong reasons for being saved. We are not saved to live a better life. We are saved to know God and enjoy Him forever.

(Fischer, 2003, p.81)

Some might say that we are attempting to bring God down to the level of the people as we attempt to find Him in the popular culture. John Fischer disagrees and this is what he has to say on that point: " We are not bringing God down, we are merely bringing our thoughts into conformity with the truth. We are correcting our vision. We do not only look up to see God; we look across. We look over. We look inside and out." (2003, p.15.) This is where genuine faith begins: seeing God down, around, in, out, through, beyond, before, after, between, and in the middle of everything.

The shift happens when instead of clashing with the popular culture you learn to see God in all things. After all He is the author of all good things. You learn to

worship God where you are at and help others to do the same. If you do this you will find yourself not only worshipping God in the sanctuary, but also in the streets. This is done by looking for and finding God in all things. This is fueled by the belief that you can find Him in all places, at all times, and usually where you would least anticipate finding Him.

I believe that John Fischer explains this well. Here in his own words read what he says about seeking and finding.

Does this mean if you don't seek you won't find? As it relates to God, I believe it does. If God is hidden how will anyone find Him unless they look for Him. There are no God-indicators pooping up in various places. There are no labels on sacred things. Finding God is a factor of two things. The person doing the searching and God's will in revealing Himself. There are no guarantees you don't go to 'God School' to get this. You seek and you pray and then you seek some more. Pretty soon your whole life is bent on seeking...I would venture to put forth that not many Christians - or those who claim to be Christians- are actively seeking God in their

daily lives...Many Christians find it adequate enough to have God in the God compartment of their lives, and they don't go looking for Him anywhere else...they worship on Sundays, they pray to Him in their devotions, and when they are really in trouble they call on Him in the middle of the day, but the rest of their lives are lived in a world where, for all practical purposes, He doesn't exist...The world as they see it is unsuitable for God, but a necessary evil for them. It is a bad place for the holy certainly a place God would want to avoid. (Fischer, 2003, pp.10-13)

It is important that we put God into the framework of our daily lives not just a compartment to be used in case of an emergency or just on Sundays. The next time you leave a movie or a restaurant take a minute to wonder what God might have thought. The Bible encourages us to have continual thoughts about God. Unless He is a part of all that we do that would be impossible.

As Christians we are also instructed to be set apart. It is important to understand the cultural context of being right in the middle of an unsanctified environment not removed from it. God never instructed us to remove

ourselves from society. His purpose and plan is that we would reflect His nature right in the middle of the mess.

As a believer when your main goal is to avoid the world at all costs, then it becomes very difficult not to form negative attitudes and judgments toward the world and the people in it. Not only are you in a lofty position glaring down on sin, but you also become very unforgiving and you aggressively oppose the culture and the influence that it has on you and others.

How can we possibly go into all the world with the love of Christ when we are carrying along these attitudes as baggage? We can't. So we end up withdrawing our faith further into a Christian shell [Ghetto] and becoming more separatist in our thinking, judgmental toward others, and convinced the only safe place for us and our loved ones is to be tucked away in a subculture [Christian Ghetto].

(Fischer, 2003, p.92)

That is the goal regardless of the culture or media the goal of every Christian should be to receive God's amazing love and give it away to the next person that they meet. As a person does this it is the love of God that will ultimately change the people that you pastor.

The answer is not more boycotts, lawsuits, and legislation the answer is to be a clear demonstration of the true nature and character of God to all people.

## References

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