

“Healthy churches don’t need gimmicks to grow,” Rick Warren

Rick Warren’s best-selling church growth classic, *The Purpose Driven Church*, exhorts readers that “healthy churches don’t need gimmicks to grow.” Warren tells his readers that “healthy churches grow the way God intends” – “they grow naturally” (p. 17). Following this, Warren explains how his Saddleback Church has carefully engineered its numerical success through such strategies as not using songs with minor keys (pp. 287) and avoiding dead time in worship services to accommodate those with MTV–shortened attention spans (p. 255).

Warren also recommends that

doubling the light wattage in your worship center (he advises “secretly”) alters the mood and may cause a revival (p. 266).

With books like Warren’s *Purpose Driven Church* becoming the accepted technique for church-marketing, it is understandable – however ironic – that Warren predicts the key issues for churches in the twenty-first century will be church health, not church growth (p. 17).

Although Warren doesn’t say so, presumably “church health” will be a major concern in part because “church-growth churches,” weakened by their preoccupation with matters such as lighting and fast-paced entertainment-style “worship,” mistrustful because of manipulative methods and covert means, will be unable to engage the onset of boredom as they fail to keep pace with the ever-pressing demand for newer – larger, louder, faster, brighter – gimmicks.

One recalls Soren Kierkegaard’s observation that whereas Jesus turned water to wine, the state church of Denmark, with its elaborate choruses that reduced congregants to spectators, was out-miraculating Jesus by turning the wine back into water. Were he living today, perhaps Kierkegaard would say the “entertainment model” for worship changes the wine to Kool Aid.