



Not Just Here In America:

The Obstacle of Christian Subculture

John Fischer

The following is excerpted, by permission, from the April 2003 edition of *Relevant Magazine* (www.relevantmagazine.com).



In all my thinking, writing, and speaking on the Christian subculture in America, I have always assumed at least one thing: the phenomenon of a Christian subculture and its accompanying errors and blind spots only exists in America. Surely this separation of Christian and secular is unknown in other places in the world where regular people can be Christians and have a quiet, steady impact on their culture through normal channels of life and influence without getting caught in the crossfire of a cultural Christian guerrilla warfare with all

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its accompanying socio-political alignments and agendas.

I had this assumption shattered recently while talking with a college senior who grew up as a missionary kid in Guatemala and will be returning there to begin an Internet consulting business upon his graduation.

When I asked him how he felt about going, he had very mixed feelings. He was excited about the challenge and the fact that he felt God had opened up a door of opportunity for him there, but he was also very reluctant about it. When I pressed him about the reluctance, he revealed his major concern was having to contend with the fundamentalist evangelical Christian subculture in Guatemala.

"You've got to be kidding," I said. "Not in Guatemala."

"Oh yes," he replied. "It's worse than here."

He went on to tell me how his struggles with the

Christian subculture and its accompanying isolationist and separatist beliefs almost did in his own faith growing up as the son of mis-

sionary parents there. That's how we became acquainted, actually, through one of my earlier books, which he credits for preserving his faith when he was almost ready to leave it for all the wrong reasons.

Apparently, we have not only exported our faith as missionaries, but our bad ideas as well. That means the Christian market is international, and the Christian subculture is a force to be reckoned with worldwide. I guess I shouldn't be surprised. Television, film, and music have exported American values throughout the world. Why not Christian television and Christian movies, books, and music exporting the thinking and values of a Christian subculture?

It is interesting to note how my friend was hesitant to return to Guatemala because of this. For some time I've been wondering if the day would come when, in order to truly minister the gospel of Christ to people, one will have to disassociate oneself from organized and institutional religion of all kinds. Perhaps that time is already here. For all intents and purposes it is here for my friend, who told me this is precisely why he is returning to the country of his origin as a businessman and not a missionary.

He is also careful to note that he is not an under-

cover missionary. He's not disguising his missionary zeal and intent. He's simply taking his newly acquired business expertise where he knows it will have a good chance of success. He is going to begin a business, and his ministry will not be any more or less a part of who he is than it would be for any Christian, anywhere. You could say we are all undercover agents for God, but that is only a way of looking at our God-given place in the world where we live out our faith. It is not an agenda . . .

I don't believe our work should be a pretext for something else. At the same time, being Christians in places of influence is a big part of God's overall plan for the church—something we have often overlooked in our attempts to create a separate contemporary Christian culture. But I see this as His strategy, not ours. Our responsibility is to do all we do to the glory of God, wherever he puts us.

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We are called to be the best at our profession for reasons that have nothing to do with evangelizing. Our motivation should be that which drives us to do everything well to the glory of God. Whatever we do professionally, we do as an end in itself, not as a means to an end. Christians need to be accepted in the workplace at face value for the kind of people they are and the kind of work that they do. Our Christianity and accompanying evangelical fervor is not a "tactic." Our faith, like our work, needs to stand on its own. Our faith infuses our work with meaning, but it stops short of turning it into cover for a covert operation. . . .

Mission Seminars—Fall 2004



WITNESSES TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

September 7–8

Orientation for residents. Orientation begins Tuesday morning. Dr. Jonathan J. Bonk, OMSC executive director. A **public reception** to welcome the 2004–05 OMSC international community of residents will be held Wednesday at 4:00 p.m. All are invited.

September 9–10

U.S. Churches Today. Rev. Geoffrey A. Little, pastor, St. James Episcopal Church (New Haven) and director of the Church Mission Society U.S.A., provides an overview with a guided tour of church life and churches in New Haven, Connecticut. There is no registration fee for this seminar.

September 13–17

How to Develop Mission and Church Archives. Ms. Martha Lund Smalley, research services librarian, Yale University Divinity School. Eight sessions, \$145.

September 20–24

The Internet and Mission: Getting Started. Mr. Wilson Thomas, Wilson Thomas Systems, Bedford, New Hampshire, and Dr. Dwight P. Baker, program director, Overseas Ministries Study Center, New Haven, Connecticut. Eight sessions, \$145.

October 11–15

Doing Oral History: Helping Christians Tell Their Own Story. Dr. Jean-Paul Wiest, research director, Jesuit Beijing Center, visiting professor of Christianity, Tsinghua University, and former director of the Maryknoll history

project, all in Beijing, China, and Dr. Jan Bender Shetler, assistant professor of history, Goshen College, Goshen, Indiana. Eight sessions, \$145.

October 18–22

Nurturing and Educating Trans-cultural Kids. Dr. David C. Pollock and Ms. Janet Blomberg, Interaction International, Houghton, New York. Eight sessions, \$145.

October 25–27

Leadership, Fund-raising, and Donor Development for Missions. Mr. Rob Martin, director, First Fruit, Inc., Newport Beach, California. Five sessions in three days, \$145.

November 8–12

Missions and Consequences. Professor Andrew F. Walls, honorary professor, University of Edinburgh, former director of the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World, and emeritus professor of religious studies, University of Aberdeen. Eight sessions, \$145.

November 15–19

The Nature and Mission of the Church After 9/11. Mr. Patrick Johnstone, author of *Operation World, 21st Century Edition* (2001), former director of research, WEC International, Buckinghamshire, England, and OMSC senior mission scholar in residence. Eight sessions, \$145.

December 6–10

Peacemaking as Mission. Dr. Richard Deats, editor of *Fellowship*, The Fellowship of Reconciliation, Nyack, New York. Eight sessions, \$145.



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