

Can Christianity Be Cool?

In his new book, 'Hipster Christianity: When Church and Cool Collide', Brett McCracken continues the generations-old conversation about the relationship between Christ and culture. In particular, McCracken explores the preoccupation of some churches with being relevant, trendy and, well, hip. Can churches be cool without becoming lukewarm? Brandon O'Brien asked McCracken how what he discovered impacts the local church.

Is being "in the world but not of it" still a useful way for the church to think about its relationship to culture? Maybe. But we need to be clearer about what we mean by "in the world" and "of it." I've grown up hearing that phrase quoted anytime discussions about the relationship of Christianity to culture come up, as if citing it answers the question. But what exactly does being "of" the world mean? Are we "of" the world if we drink a beer occasionally? Are we "of" the world if we spend all weekend watching sports on TV?

As for being "in the world," I think it is getting harder for the church to understand its place both within and distinct from culture. In our post-Christian culture, the church is no longer the heartbeat of the worlds of, say, art and academics, as it was for many centuries in previous eras. Now that the church occupies a more peripheral relationship to "the culture," which is now largely secular, it's naturally going to be harder to figure out just how we as Christians should approach and evaluate culture.

What elements of culture do pastors and churches find most seductive? These days, being up-to-date on technology is a huge allure, and for obvious reasons. Things like social networking (Facebook, Twitter), iPhones, iPads, and podcasts have direct application to ministry because they make communication more efficient and more relevant to tech-savvy audiences. And technology is relatively easy to adopt.

A deeper temptation is having "relevant" tastes, wanting to be savvy to what music is cool right now, what films people are talking about, or what the right hairstyle is. It's incredibly hard to keep up with these trends. So when we try to seek after it, we're usually a few steps behind.

So churches don't need to adopt the latest trends to attract young people? A church is truly relevant when it seeks first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. It becomes irrelevant when the tangential worries (packaging, PR, what brand of coffee is served in the foyer, etc.) take precedence over living and preaching the biblical gospel. The life-transforming, history-altering, salvation-offering gospel of Christ is eternally relevant. An "authentic" church is one that preaches the gospel and is honest and open about its imperfections and open with one another in love and accountability.

Taken, in part, from ChristianityToday.com