

Book Review
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Already Gone, by Ken Ham and Britt Beemer with Todd Hillard, published by Master Books, Green Forest, Arkansas, 2009, 190 pp., \$12.99, ISBN: -10: 0-89051-529-8.

Ken Ham, Britt Beemer and Todd Hillard have teamed up to give a snap shot of the beliefs of young people from *fifteen different religious groups* including the Churches of Christ (p.167). The picture is bleak. George Barna research produced the following statistic: “A majority of twenty-somethings—61% of today’s young adults—had been churching at one point during their teen years but they are now spiritually disengaged (i.e., not actively attending church, reading the Bible, or praying) (p. 19). The authors attempt through careful analysis of a survey of 1,000 young people in various churches to give answers as to the reason for this dramatic decline.

Ken Ham is the president and CEO of Answers in Genesis and the Creation Museum now located near Cincinnati, Ohio. He has authored many books in the field of apologetics. Britt Beemer is a past researcher for the Heritage Foundation. He has been involved in research and planning for 14 senatorial campaigns. In 1979, he founded America’s Research Group, a full-service consumer behavior research and strategic marketing firm. He did the survey research for this study. Todd Hillard is a freelance writer from San Antonio, Texas. He helped construct the book with Ham and Beemer.

The book is divided into two major parts with seven appendices. It contains information about both of the authors and Todd Hillard the collaborator.

The first part of the book, consisting of four chapters, reveals the epidemic of disappearing churches and church members in England and in America. The second part of the book, consisting of three chapters, addresses solutions to the problem.

The book begins with an introduction where the authors portray the state of decline of all churches in England. “Since 1969, 1,500 churches in England have heard that final *thud* as their doors were shut after their final service after hundreds of years of active life” (p. 10). Further information concerning these disappearing churches is given along with pictures of churches that have been turned into a rock climbing center, night club, theater, restaurant and even a Sikh Temple.

Chapter one is titled, *Already Gone*. The focus of chapter one is to reveal the epidemic many different church denominations are facing. George Barna defined the problem: “Based on interviews with 22,000 adults and over 2,000 teenagers in 25 separate surveys, Barna unquestionably quantified the seriousness of the situation: *six out of ten 20-somethings who were involved in a church during their teen years are already gone*” (p. 23). The problem is further defined by the following information: (1) 61 % of today’s young adults who were regular church attendees are now “spiritually disengaged; (2) 20% of those who were spiritually active during high school are maintaining a similar level of commitment; and (3) 19% of teens were never reached by the Christian community, and they are still disconnected from the church...” (p. 24). This raised questions: who was leaving? Why? And when were they leaving the various churches? These questions lead to some interesting facts. The top ten reasons why these young people dropped out of church are: boring services, legalism, hypocrisy of leaders, too political, self-righteous people, distance from home, not relevant to personal growth, God would not

condemn to hell, Bible not relevant/not practical, and couldn't find their preferred denomination in the area (p. 29).

Chapter two addresses the role of the Sunday school in contributing to the drop-out problem. This chapter addresses the *Sunday School Syndrome*. The key finding revealed was this: "Sunday School is actually more likely to be detrimental to the spiritual and moral health of our children" (p. 38). Children who attended Sunday School (61%) were compared to those who did not (39%). Those that attended Sunday School were: more likely NOT to believe that all the accounts/stories in the Bible are true/accurate; more likely to doubt the Bible because it was written by men; more likely to doubt the Bible because it was not translated correctly; more likely to defend that abortion should continue to be legal, more likely to defend premarital sex; more likely to accept that gay marriage and abortion should be legal, much more likely to believe that God used evolution to change one kind of animal into another and more likely NOT to believe the earth is less than 10,000 years old. Eight more serious conclusions are mentioned (p. 39). The authors recommend a renovation of the Sunday School as it now is to a more dynamic presentation of the truth on critical topics. Also, the Sunday School has to be backed up by solid support and Bible instruction at home.

In chapter three, the authors discuss the two different kinds of kids leaving the church. Basically, the group of young people who were no longer attending church could be divided into two parts. The first part is made up of those who come at least during Easter and/or Christmas. The second part is made up of those who don't come at all. The latter group has little to no faith in the Bible. The former group still believes the Bible.

Another important question was addressed in this chapter. The question is, "Do you expect to attend church regularly when you have children?" (p. 61). Of those who have left the church 38% said yes; 32% said no and 30% said they did not know. Two-thirds of the people who have left the church are either planning on coming back or they might be considering coming back.

Belief in the Bible is a major predictor of behavior in these situations (p. 64). Two major groups emerged. Group 1 views the Bible as irrelevant to them and the people (church) are too. Group 2 still holds to the basic beliefs in the Bible, but the church is not relevant to them. They are disillusioned by hypocrisy, legalism and self-righteousness. They desire to see God's people living God's truth.

Irrelevance is the key word of chapter four. When considering the two groups mentioned in chapter three, the authors make the following conclusions. Group 1 believes the Bible is irrelevant. Group 2 believes the church is irrelevant. What is the root of all the doubt? The authority of the Bible has been attacked consistently for the last 150+ years by secular humanism! Also, people in mainline denominations have failed to stay true to the principles of God's Word. The authors suggest the following answer to this dilemma: defend the Word, live the Word and stand uncompromisingly on the Word of God (p. 91).

Chapter five makes the transition to part 2 of the book dealing with solutions to the problem addressed in the first part of the book. It is titled, *The Ready Defense*. It addresses the problems of Group 1. What is involved in developing a worldview? The authors assert that many young people want to know the truth about origins, the Bible, right and wrong, but the church has failed them. They are defenseless against the tide of error they are exposed to. They have issues with biblical authority. Belief in God's Word is undermined by questioning the veracity of the creation, or account of Jonah and the great fish. If they don't believe in creation, how can they believe the rest of the Bible? For instance, in answer to the question, "Does the

Bible contain errors?” Forty percent said yes and another 30 percent didn’t know. Only 30 percent of thousands of young people who left church said no (p. 107-108). The authors affirm that churches need to prepare better to defend the Word of God.

Chapter six addresses the problem of hypocrisy in the church. It is titled, *The Real Deal*. It addresses the needs of Group 2. How do you make the church relevant to today’s young people? When 1,000 young people were asked whether or not they believed the church was relevant, only 47 percent said yes and a full 53 percent said no/don’t know (p. 119). The church can become relevant to a generation of younger adults by living the word—becoming the real deal.

Chapter seven gives instructions to parents, the Christian educator, the youth pastor, and the pastor concerning how each individual or group can teach the Word, defend the Word, and live the Word. The authors call for a renovation of church as we know it in America today. They call for a new reformation (p. 165).

Following the body of the book, the authors include seven appendices. Appendix 1 contains the Survey referenced in the book. Appendix 2 contains the 15 questions of life. Appendix 3 reveals resources for upholding the Word. Appendix 4 provides resources for parents. Appendix 5 lists resources for Christian educators. Appendix 6 contains resources for youth pastors and Appendix 7 gives resources for pastors.

The book gives brief backgrounds of the authors: Ken Ham and Britt Beemer and the collaborator, Todd Hillard.

This book will help churches assess where their young people are in relationship to the world around them. Perhaps each church should conduct its own survey of its youth to determine the precise needs that they have and their understanding of the Scriptures. Then, they could develop their own problem/solution approach to countering secular humanism and postmodernism.