

The Tail Wagging the Dog

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Education officials in Anniston have finally realized that school is actually for learning. To help this process, the school board has implemented a strict policy: failing to maintain a 70% average in *all* classes bars one from extra-curricular activities. Unfortunately, this pesky little rule disqualified 500 of the 850 high school students who failed to meet the standard.

Parents in Anniston, on the other hand, still think school is for football, band, choir and other fun pursuits. Instead of attacking the reality of academic mediocrity, the parents have waged war against the school board for this grossly unfair, insensitive and misguided policy. Now there's a case of the tail wagging the dog if I've ever seen one.

Now consider the sprawling complex of the Hunter Street Baptist Church in Hoover. A recent news article reported that ground is to be broken on a \$5.5 million *recreational outreach facility* (read "spa/gymnasium"). Another fine example of "TWD."

Reverent, God-honoring worship and in-depth Bible study are the "dog" being wagged by the "tail" of recreation and entertainment in many churches. How has this come to be? Consider the following observations:

"Until that time (the 1960s, jj) many viewed the church as an institution that *set standards* for society. But in the 1960s they began to view it more as an institution that *met the needs* of society. Many churches, therefore, began shifting their emphasis to meet the new expectations. They shifted their emphasis from God's demands to people's wants or needs. Thus the secular church alters traditional ministries (e.g., evangelism becomes 'outreach') and proliferates a host of new ones through which it seeks to 'meet needs,' attract outsiders, and involve insiders. The emerging secular church becomes a veritable beehive of busyness. Its members are involved in a swelling number of activities and non-traditional ministries ranging from ... stress reduction techniques ... to hiking and ski outings ...

"In all this, the secular church – changing its offerings and samples in response to the appetites of consumers – more nearly resembles a delicatessen than ... its historical namesake ... "Not surprisingly, in the life of the average member of the secular church, the church plays only a marginal role. Secular Christianity is a leisure-time pursuit. The secular church becomes a 'Christ Club,' providing conviviality, 'meaningful personal relationships,' occasional intellectual stimulation, recreation – and just enough religion to salve consciences. The church, however, offers no coherent vision of the universe and no moral framework by which one may live" (*The Worldly Church*, pp. 54-55, 14-16).

Let's not forget our purpose either as individuals or the local church.