

THE ADULT-ORIENTED CHURCH (AOC): INTRODUCTION

CBC-25 Apr 2010 AM and PM

Opening texts: Acts 8.12; Eph 6.4. Married 28 years to Kathy. We raised 2 children, now young adults and baptized church members. A pastor for 21 years, almost 19 years at CBC. Much opportunity to learn about church and family by Bible study, fellowship with others, experience, trial and error. Been thinking about this a long time.

As I compare the biblical pattern of both church and family life with what is typical in modern American evangelicalism, I am encouraged but also deeply concerned. Some very good things are happening, but many churches bear little resemblance to the apostolic, NT pattern. The typical Christian family likewise can be somewhat commended, but it too has drifted far in some ways from God's revealed will in Scripture for families of every generation.

No small part of my deep concern has to do with the relationships of the churches and families with adults and children. Evidence abounds that many churches have become substantially child-oriented, while families have become adult-oriented with child-rearing delegated to people outside the family—even in the case of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. Many parents wrongly expect the church to provide most, if not all, the religious education for their children, and many churches have adopted a marketing strategy of providing this service in the interest of numerical church growth. Many times the first question a pastor hears of inquirers is, "What programs do you have for children?," and this is the litmus test of whether the new family will attend.

Many well-meaning pastors and churches and parents have unwittingly let these popular customs and unscriptural traditions which have grown up over the last century mold their ministries and families instead of looking to Scripture for guidance, but not even the best intentions can justify or redeem a departure from the biblical standard of the way things ought to be.

May God use these several messages as a means of great and widespread reformation for the blessing of many families and churches to his glory.

I. **THESIS.** Simple rule about church + a necessary corollary about family:

Churches ought to be primarily adult-oriented; parents have primary responsibility for the spiritual discipline of their minor children.

"Churches" → local churches, divine institution not human invention.

Comparable to the divine institutions of family and human government, basic building blocks of society, all with divine authority in their respective spheres.

"Ought to be" → moral obligation, not left to our discretion, anything less is sin.

"Adult-oriented" → Our supreme priority is Godward, but our manward ministry should concentrate on winning *adult* converts, baptizing only them, adding only them as church members, and teaching especially them to obey Christ completely, including his revealed will about family life and parental

responsibilities. "Oriented" → "directed toward the interests of a particular group" (MWCD), that is, aiming its ministry especially toward adults.

"Primarily adult-oriented" → We agree that churches should minister to children, but that ministry should not become a church's primary focus.

"Parents with minor children" → usually married, young to middle-aged, and a substantial fraction of the whole church membership.

"Primary responsibility" → God ordained the family. The normal pattern is marriage, then child-bearing, then child-rearing in all its aspects, in that order. There are many variations in God's plan for families (i.e., some suffer barrenness, some adopt children, some marry a widow with children, etc.), and my comments do not intend any aspersions on those variations. Still, parents have the primary responsibility for rearing their own children. Yes, parents can certainly enlist qualified helpers for the child's various needs, but they cannot escape the divine mandate that parents, not churches, are mainly responsible for general child-rearing.

"Spiritual discipline" → By "discipline" I include 1) its obsolete sense of "instruction," 2) the idea of training that corrects, molds, and perfects the moral character, and 3) control gained by enforcing obedience or order (MWCD). By "*spiritual* discipline," I mean the parental ministry of child evangelism and discipleship in the context of a Christian family. Specifically, Scripture lays upon parents the responsibility for bringing up their own minor children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

This is not to advocate an anti-child climate in the churches! Spiritually-minded churches have a deep concern for the salvation and spiritual edification of children, but they benefit most when churches refuse to become surrogate parents and help parents to fulfill their divine calling.

What about the children of unbelievers? We plan to address that problem in a later message, but suffice it to say that this is an ancient problem, and it does not justify overthrowing the whole biblical pattern of church and family.

1. Sadly, my thesis is *provocative*. It would not be so if our families and churches stuck more closely to Scripture. I pray these messages will bring more biblical fidelity and unity among many churches.
2. My thesis is *easily proved from Scripture*. We need no interpretive "sleight-of-hand" to demonstrate these things. Many elements are plain and obvious to the unprejudiced mind, but many who cannot refute my case yet refuse to act consistently with its inevitable implications.
3. My thesis is *potentially transformational*. Its faithful application to modern churches would radically and dramatically change many of them for the glory of God and the good of souls, both adults and children.
4. My thesis *rests upon certain basic presuppositions*. Disputing parties often disagree because they do not share the same presuppositional beliefs. Let me set forth a few most important for this topic, commending you who agree and calling for your embrace of them otherwise.

II. PRESUPPOSITIONS. Foundational to a sound policy from biblical data.

I dwell on them because we must keep them constantly in mind to avoid error, and we must agree on them to come to the same conclusions.

➤ The Supreme Authority of Scripture. The best concise statement:

The supreme judge by which all controversies of Religion are to be determined, and all Decrees of Councils, opinions of ancient Writers, Doctrines of men, and private Spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Scripture delivered by the Spirit, into which Scripture so delivered, our faith is finally resolved (1689 LBCF I.10, unedited).

Historically against Socinian rationalists (reason is supreme), Anabaptist mystics (inner supernatural light is supreme), RCC papists (church tradition is supreme). Beware of your own rationalism, mysticism, and traditionalism.

By Rationalism is meant the system or theory which assigns undue authority to reason in matters of religion. . . . Those who ignore or reject the guidance of the Scriptures, and assume to be led by an inward divine influence into the knowledge and obedience of the truth, are properly called . . . Mystics (Hodge, SysTheo).

By Traditionalism we mean giving equal or greater authority to post-apostolic tradition than to Scripture.

So these are unfair objections to biblical teaching: That does not make sense to me, that does not accord with what I just know inside to be true, and that is against what most Christians believe and practice.

Classic proof text for the Bible's supreme authority is Isa 8.20 (expound).

It is the will of the Lord that we shall depend wholly on his word, and that our knowledge shall be confined within its limits; and therefore, if we lend our ears to others, we take a liberty which he has forbidden, and offer to him a gross insult. Everything that is introduced by men on their own authority will be nothing else than a corruption of the word; and consequently, if we wish to obey God, we must reject all other instructors (Calvin, in loc.).

Brethren, let all be tested by Scripture! There is no biblical support for youth-oriented churches or child-neglecting families, but only condemnation.

➤ The Ecclesiastical Sufficiency of Scripture

This is a step beyond biblical authority. By "ecclesiastical sufficiency" I mean that the biblical revelation of the church's nature and ministry is enough to instruct us in God's will concerning these things, and we have no need to add doctrines and practices beyond what Scripture authorizes and requires. A classic proof text for this is 2 Tim 3.16-17 (expound briefly).

What then does it mean that Scripture is sufficient? It means that the Bible is sufficient for the church's life and work. It is able to draw unbelievers to Christ, to enable me to grow in godliness, to provide direction to my life and to go beyond myself and beyond the church

to transform and revitalize all of society. . . . Almost every church, at least in the evangelical world, would include in its statement of faith that they believe in *sola scriptura*, even if they do not use those words to do so. And most of these churches do believe in the Bible's authority, inspiration and inerrancy. However, few would believe and put into practice the idea of the Bible's sufficiency. The evidence of this is visible in churches all around us (Tim Challies' blog).

Tim cites evangelism as an example with churches innovating new methods like music concerts, drama, outreach programs, all without clear preaching of gospel doctrine. Do we not also see a gross departure from the biblical methods of child evangelism and discipleship in the sphere of the church and the family? You will not find any of these recommended or practiced in Scripture: youth pastors, vacation Bible school, graded Sunday school, children's church, puppet ministry, AWANA programs, etc., etc. Now surely no one can seriously argue that Scripture requires any these of us, and I for one have grave reservations about some of them.

Many assume they do not need Scriptural warrant for these things because of their underlying belief in biblical insufficiency for church ministry today. If God wants us to manage our stewardship of children this way, wouldn't he have told us in his Word?

➤ The Functional Governance of Scripture

By this I mean a genuine and constant resort to Scripture for practical guidance in the nature and ministry of our churches and families. This is another step beyond a confession of biblical authority and sufficiency.

If understood and sincere, "Jesus is Lord" is the good, the saving confession, and a mark of true Christians and churches. But this is not just a slogan; it is a faith commitment that expresses real submission to Christ our King. As with the individual, so with the church: a bare profession is not enough (Luke 6:46). Christ governs his church by Scripture (cf. 1 Cor 14.37; 1 John 4.6).

III. PRE-COUNSELS TO SYMPATHIZERS. Please, no radical Carlstadt's!

➤ Love and Respect Brethren Who Differ in Doubtful Things

The full application of these clear biblical truths to specific policies of the church and family is not always clear in some cases, and very worthy brethren will have differences about that. These doubtful things cry out for the exercise of love and respect among brothers required by Rom 14. Potentially explosive, these controversies can best be discussed a climate zealous for the church's unity and spirituality.

➤ Exercise Patient Tenacity for Solid Reformation

I warn any sympathizers with me, especially pastors, who happen to be in churches with a greater need for reformation in these areas, to exercise all patient tenacity in the meekness of love, the spirit of 2 Tim 2.24-26. A bull in a china shop is not a true reformer but a destroyer. Pray, teach, set a good example, and lead gently; this is more likely to do good than anything else.

THE ADULT-ORIENTED CHURCH: EVIDENCES

CBC-2 May 2010 AM and PM

AOC: INTRODUCTION. THEME VERSES: Acts 8.12; Eph 6.4.

THESIS. Simple rule about church with necessary corollary about family:

Churches ought to be primarily adult-oriented; parents have primary responsibility for the spiritual discipline of their minor children.

We proceed today upon our presuppositions previously explained:

- 1) The supreme authority of Scripture
- 2) The ecclesiastical sufficiency of Scripture
- 3) The functional governance of Scripture

We remind you today of our pre-counsels to sympathizers with AOC:

- 1) Love and respect brethren who differ in doubtful things
- 2) Exercise patient tenacity for for solid reformation

We focus today on the simple rule of our thesis. The biblical evidence for AOC is overwhelming, fully-justified by the “big picture” of (see points I-III below), but we can only skim the surface of these things.

Lastly (IV), the historical novelty and failure of YOC, though some tout it:

<http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0917/p20s01-ussc.html>

I. A BIBLICAL VIEW OF ADULTS AND CHILDREN

Much wrong thinking and misguided local church youth ministry stems from a failure to appreciate and apply the biblically-conceived categories of adults and children; namely, that **children are not just little adults.**

By “children” I mean pre-adults. “Teenager” is not a biblical category; the idea and identity is a development of the 20th century when pre-adult years were stretched beyond age 13 or 14 by laws against child labor and for mandatory schooling until age 18, so that for four or more years childhood irresponsibility was combined with adult urges—a toxic combination. Today many do not reach full social adulthood until their mid-twenties, if then.

- Childhood is distinct from adulthood (1 Cor 13.11). 3 verbs: 1) “spake” (prob. → “prattle,” to trouble by persistent speech), 2) “understood” (prob. → childish interests and concerns, NIGTC), 3) “thought” in the context distinguishes this from complex adult thought processes. Cf. 1 Cor 14.20. “Man” → the context indicates a full-grown man rather than a boy. Alt.: “When I was a child, I used to talk like a child, and see things as a child does, and think like a child; but now that I have become an adult [Wuest: the status of an adult], I have finished with all childish ways” (NJB). “Childish ways,” a comprehensive term of childhood traits.

- Little children, characterized by ignorance (Isa 7.16, meaning soon).
- Children are unsuitable for leadership, so Isa 3.4 is a curse. Cf. 1 Kgs 3.7, Heb. idiom → to carry out my duties, to exercise leadership.
- Children are naive, religiously unstable, and vulnerable (Eph 4.14).
- Children are not qualified to handle adult responsibilities (Gal 4.1-2), to make adult decision (Heb 11.24-26), or to speak for themselves regarding adult commitments with adult consequences (John 9.21).
- Many passages suggest that adulthood with its privileges and responsibilities begins around 20 years old (Exod 30.14; Num 1.3; 14.29; 1 Chron 23.27; 2 Chron 25.5; Ezra 3.8). Israel compared to a young woman past puberty, of full height, ready to marry (Ezek 16.7-8).

Ironically, our culture treats adults like children and children like adults!

II. THE ADULT-ORIENTATION OF OT RELIGION

No parallel with today’s “children’s church” of a juvenile form of Judaism. When considering this matter, it becomes striking how adult-oriented it was.

- God created the first human worshipers, Adam and Eve, as adults of marriagable age (Gen 2.25) with assigned vocation (his, keeper of Eden, Gen 2.15; hers, a helper suitable for him, Gen 2.18).
- Their first children, Cain and Abel, first appear offering their own worship when they are adults with their own vocations (Gen 4.1-4). Their entire childhood is passed over in total silence.
- Heads of households called to choose the household’s religion (Gen 18.19; Josh 24.15). Even idolatry was a family activity (Jer 7.18).
- No specific responsibilities for public worship were laid upon children generally, but only adults (Exod 35.22). Heavy responsibility of parents for inculcating true religion into their children at home (Deut 6.7). Worship was a family-integrated activity led by adults (Deut 12.7; 14.26; 15.20). Whole families stood together for hours to hear Scripture readings (Deut 31.12-13). On Ezra 8.1-3, “Men and women and all who were able to understand” involved the entire community, including young people and children. The Jews became known as “the people of the book.” The OT emphasizes that God’s Word is to be known and used by all the people, not only the priests and leaders. Early Christians adopted this same principle (NAC).
- In the OT, God addresses children through their parents. Wicked households are punished as one, sometimes including little children (the flood in Noah’s day; Sodom and Gomorrah; Num 16.26-33).

III. THE ADULT-ORIENTATION OF NT CHURCHES

This basic OT framework of child/adult distinction and adult-oriented religion continues in the NT which also lacks “children’s church” or any juvenile form of Christianity. No evidence whatever that the apostolic churches were “youth-oriented” or separated children from adults for “youth ministry.”

- NT Churches Had Adult baptism and membership. Early apostolic practice closely linked baptism and church membership. All indications are that only adults were baptized and added to the membership (Acts 5.14; 8.12; 17.12).
- NT Churches Had Adult instruction and ministry. Like the OT, the entire NT addresses *almost* no counsel specifically to minor children, but the rare cases stress moral duty to parents (Eph 6.1; Col 3.20). This suggests that their particular sphere of moral responsibility was in the home, not in the church or the world at large.
This lack of youth-directed comment in Scripture is all the more remarkable when it is certain that children were there with their parents in the congregations of the early churches where the epistles were read publicly. The language of the whole Bible is intended primarily for mature readers. It is not “simplified” for youth.
- NT Churches Had Adult responsibilities and liabilities. Church membership has serious implications including the responsibility to exercise church discipline (1 Cor 5.4-5), the liability of being excommunicated and shunned (1 Cor 5.11-13), and persecution by outsiders (Acts 8.3; 9.2; 22.4). How could anyone think that any of this is appropriate for minor children?

IV. HISTORICAL NOVELTY AND FAILURE OF YOUTH-ORIENTED CHURCHES

Since all this popular modern YOC ministry does not grow out of the soil of Scripture, what is its origin?

First, in this history of Christendom, it is relatively recent. We could list many examples of common modern practice and discover no precedent in the entirety of church history until modern times. If the apostolic churches, the post-apostolic churches, the Medieval churches, the Reformation churches, and the Anglican and Puritan churches has nothing like any of this—and yet they all successfully perpetuated the faith to succeeding generations—why do we think these youth programs are so necessary?

Much of the current approach is an outgrowth and evolution of the Sunday School movement begun in England around 1780 by Robert Raikes (Source: www.albatrus.org). It began as an attempt to cure the

nuisance of mostly orphan children roaming the streets and to keep them from a life of crime, so it taught reading and writing and basic manners and morality. It was initially a program for the unchurched poor and soon spread to America. During the 19th century it became an institution, helping address the increasing secularism of the public school system. This was a time when parochial schools and private Christian schools multiplied.

Reformed groups, influenced by Abraham Kuyper of the Netherlands, tended to resist the ecclesiastical management of such schools, insisting that this was an area of parental responsibility instead.

The youth ministries of modern churches mostly serve the children of church families anyway with a few friends, and is usually not an effective outreach into the community.

Besides that, the whole modern approach to youth ministry that almost completely by-passes the family and gives this responsibility to the church is statistically a dismal failure. The Barna Group (www.barna.org) has researched this and discovered that of those surveyed:

- Half of teens typically attend church-related service or experience each week.
- Three out of five teens attend at least one youth group meeting at a church during a typical 3-month period.
- More than four out of five teens say they have attended a church for a period of at least two months during their teenage years.
- Despite strong levels of spiritual activity during the teen years, most twenty-somethings disengage from active participation in the Christian faith during their young adult years, and often beyond that.

I.e., this substitute approach to raising godly children is a colossal failure! And for many reasons it also has disastrous consequences for the church’s legitimate ministry of adult evangelism and discipleship.

Only an AOC follows the biblical pattern and can be effective in its God-ordained mission. Therefore,

Churches ought to be primarily adult-oriented.

Next time I plan to describe the biblical ideal for evangelizing and discipling children in particular. Hint: Scriptural youth ministry is called a family!

THE ADULT-ORIENTED CHURCH (AOC): CHILDREN

CBC-9 May 2010 AM and PM

Happy Mother's Day! Way back in 1929 author G. K. Chesterton once asked how society got the idea "that bringing forth and rearing and ruling the living beings of the future is a servile task suited to a silly person." Your holy work of child-bearing and child-rearing cannot be over-rated.

AOC: INTRODUCTION. THEME VERSES: Acts 8.12; Eph 6.4.

THESIS. Simple rule about church with necessary corollary about family:

Churches ought to be primarily adult-oriented; parents have primary responsibility for the spiritual discipline of their minor children.

We again build on these presuppositions: Scripture's 1) supreme authority, 2) ecclesiastical sufficiency, 3) functional governance. We again urge you who agree with us to 1) love and respect brethren who differ in doubtful things, 2) exercise patient tenacity for solid reformation.

AOC: EVIDENCES. The simple rule (AOC) follows from 1) the biblical view of adults and children, 2) the adult-orientation of OT religion and 3) NT churches, 4) the historical novelty and failure of YOC.

Now many would protest with a question: "What about the children? Don't you care about them? Shouldn't the church reach them too just like we reach adults? Aren't they just as important as adults—maybe even more so?" These are legitimate concerns that require biblical answers.

I. REGARDED AS IMPORTANT

Yes, we care about children—all children. They are not little adults but they are *people* worth more than all the world (Mark 8.26). Better to be drowned in the sea than to cause one of these little ones who believe in Jesus to stumble spiritually (Matt 18.6)!

We should view children as God does. He loves them as creatures in his image but he is not a sentimentalist Romantic (one who believes children are more valuable than adults, they are perfectly innocent). We can hardly believe the story in 2 Kgs 2.23-24 because we have strayed in our thinking. The translation "little children" may give the right idea. The original stresses their youth, though their approximate age is disputed.

Surely some people are guilty of pediatry, loving a child or children more than God, instead of loving children for God's sake because it is his will that we should love them. If you have ever chosen to please your child instead of God, you're guilty. Some parents choose a church based on how well their children would like it, or leave one because their children dislike it, when God's approval should be all that matters—and this would be in the child's best interest anyway. Don't worship children!

II. REARED IN FAMILIES. This is the main way to reach children for Christ, and applies to children in Christian homes.

So children are little human beings, very precious, souls made to know and serve God. They need to be saved and grow spiritually as Jesus did (Luke 2.52). So where is the primary sphere of spiritual ministry to them according to Scripture? Does the Bible ever direct churches to have a "youth ministry." No, it absolutely does not. I defy anyone who says otherwise to show me in my Bible! They cannot because it is not there.

However, there IS a simple, clear, biblical doctrine of specifically where children are primarily supposed to learn the Scriptures, come to know the Lord, and be trained up in righteousness, and it is in each child's own family. This is a corollary and very necessary complement to the AOC:

Parents have primary responsibility for the spiritual discipline of their minor children.

Hillary Clinton famously said, "It takes a village to raise a child." No, it takes a family. Many Christians want to replace "village" with "church youth ministry," but that is not God's plan either. Proof texts seem almost unnecessary, but apparently there is prevalent weakness in this area.

A very helpful article on Christian education (i.e., "the steps and processes by which an infant is gradually transformed into a full grown and intelligent [adult]") summarizes the purely biblical pattern:

Leaders and churches [wrongly] presuppose that the spiritual training of the child is largely the responsibility of the church rather than the home. . . . [but] further study [of the Bible] ought to establish the parents' responsibility before God for the training of their children. . . . In the Jewish home as well as the NT home, the education of children was considered very important and was related to other areas in the training of children. . . . The OT principles regarding the education of children are set forth mainly in Deuteronomy and Proverbs. The education of the child was to be according to Scripture. It was not a choice but a command of God. The home was very important in the training of the child and few things were given more consideration in the oriental home. . . . Jewish education was God-centered in every area. Both parents played an important part in the spiritual training of the child. Little children, both boys and girls, were taught by their mother, to whom also the education of the older girls was entrusted. The boys, on the other hand, were soon placed under the care of the father. Even in later times . . . the influence of godly parents and their efforts to train their children in the fear of the Lord remained paramount. . . . Moses commanded each of the children of Israel to teach the law to their own children (Deut. 6:7). This practice continued even into the later periods of Jewish history. That this system of home-centered education was effective became evident during the period of the exile. Even in the lands of the

exile, youths who had been brought up in Jehovah's ways refused, at the risk of losing their lives, to defile themselves or to render homage to anyone or anything other than the God of their fathers. Thus the example of paternal piety, the indoctrination of Jehovah's statutes served as a lamp unto the feet and a light upon the path (CenQ 9:1 Spring 1966, "Christian Education" by Gordon H. Lovik).

Admittedly, children attended worship at the OT temple and the NT church, but their parents brought them and neither was youth-oriented.

- Deut 6.1-9. Note well these things:
 - Here God instructs the nation about passing on the faith to succeeding generations (vv. 1-3); i.e., how to reach children. See Psa 78.1-6 for this pattern of generational faith.
 - The text is directed primarily to adults, for it is presumed that the hearers have children at home (v. 7).
 - Jewish parents must confess the faith themselves (v. 4 is "the shema," the foundational statement of Jewish belief).
 - They must set an example of loving God (v. 5).
 - They must keep God's words in their own hearts (v. 6).
 - They must diligently teach this biblical faith/holiness to their own children (v. 7). This involves instruction at all times by the parents both inside and outside the home, from morning until evening. This suggests that parents and children will be relationally close and nearly always together while the children are minors.
 - Scripture was to be so conspicuous in the home that the children were frequently reminded of their status as a holy family (vv. 8-9).
- Proverbs texts. Child-rearing and spiritual training always parental.
 - 1.8. Father and mother both responsible to teach. Specific address of "my son" appears 23x throughout the book.
 - Parents' instruction is thoroughly theological and moral (e.g., cf. 2.1-5). This fear of the Lord and knowledge of God is the beginning of wisdom (1.7).
 - Parental religious instruction leads to lasting blessedness (3.1-4).
 - It warns against peer pressure (1.10, 15), evil men and lewd women (2.10-19), and directs into fellowship with the godly (2.20).
 - A godly parent seeks the child's loyalty and sets a good example (23.26).
 - Parents express ardent hope for the child to become wise (23.15) for that will vindicate their faith before the world (27.11).

The OT pattern continues in the NT.

- Eph 6.4, the classic NT text.
 - "Fathers" may be broad enough to include both parents, but also to emphasize the importance of his leadership in child-rearing.

- The child's need to be "brought up in the nurture [discipline] and admonition [instruction] of the Lord" is dropped squarely in the lap of their own parents, and this is in a NT epistle addressed to a local church (cf. 1.1).

- 2 Tim 1.5.
 - Faith relayed → grandmother Lois, mother Eunice, son Timothy.
 - Clearly, it was home-centered family-based religious instruction.
- 2 Tim 3.14-15.
 - Taken with 1.5, his childhood knowledge came primarily at home from his mother.
 - This was an inculcation of the content and meaning of Holy Scripture which was still useful to him as a Christian minister.
 - This spiritual knowledge was sufficient evangelistically → i.e., Timothy's mother taught him the essential gospel message.
 - The integrity and love of Timothy's mentors was a powerful motivation for him to receive the teaching (3.14).

Thus, home-based religious instruction by one's parents is sufficient for child evangelism and discipling unto spiritual maturity until adulthood. Specifically-tailored youth ministry in the local church is not commanded in Scripture and superfluous, if not counterproductive, of these ends.

- Through cross-generational relationships and concern in congregational life. We can and should love the children of the congregation, listen to them, talk to them, build relationships, set an example before them, pray for them, etc. Too many church members have considered church kids an annoyance, not an opportunity.

III. REACHED IN OTHER WAYS. This applies to children not in Christian homes.

But protests continue from those favoring a YOC. "All this is fine for children with Christian parents, but the church must reach the children of ungodly homes, since they lack the ordinary means of child-salvation which are godly parents.

What does it mean to "reach" these children? Figurative, "to make an impression on, to communicate with" (MWCD); "to succeed in influencing or having an effect on" (COED). Does God even charge us to reach in particular other minor children for Christ besides our own? "Preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16.15) seems all-inclusive, but those who can legitimately respond in faith and baptism are in view (i.e., adults). "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me" (Matt 19.14) is Jesus' response to his disciples who got in the way of presumably their own parents (clearly not the disciples) bringing them to Christ. Are we really to come between Muslim parents and their six or ten or twelve year olds, treating them like little adults, telling them that they must rebel and refuse to participate in Islam (or RCC, or Mormonism, or JW, etc.) any longer, and follow Christ instead?

No doubt much of the erroneous thinking and practices of YOC's springs from practically ignoring the differences between adults and children when it comes to evangelism and their spiritual care. Scripture just does not charge us to "make disciples" of them, baptizing them and teaching them in the church in the same way we do with adults, and yet many churches strive to do this anyway (child baptism is practiced even in many *Baptist* churches, not to mention paedobaptist churches). Typically, parental consent is required for child baptism, but is this not a tacit admission that the child is not yet old enough to decide for himself?

A Baptist church in MA held VBS and baptized a number of minors in RCC families without parental consent and this caused justified outrage. Why? Because people generally realize that every legitimate ministry directed specifically to minor children with parents must have their fully-informed consent to be ethical. Children are not little adults!

Our well-meaning opponents argue, "But the children need to be saved!" Yes, they do, but that should only fire your zeal to use biblically-justifiable means to win them.

Let me illustrate the principle from the holocaust of abortion. We should pray and use every biblical and lawful means to rescue the babies, but deception and murder are not justified, even if they save infant lives.

Another illustration, more similar to our concerns about YOC, is the BGEC. So many mistakenly rationalize its gross ecumenism and shallow gospel on account of "so many people being saved" through it.

It is amazing how easily people become ethically-confused when they come to imagine that *the end justifies the means*. So it is with "youth ministry." We should only use methods completely consistent with all the relevant biblical principles.

So how can we love and spiritually-influence the children of unbelievers?

- Not by overturning the entire biblical pattern of the AOC. This challenge of reaching children spiritually is an ancient one, and both OT Israel and the early church met the challenge without abandoning the AOC or innovating the schemes of YOC's today.
- Through evangelizing and discipling their parents. If we really win and disciple their parents, we have done more than any YOC to win and disciple their children indirectly. Children of godly parents do not need a SS or youth group to rear their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and ungodly parents will not generally give fully-informed consent for truly biblical ministry to their children.

Now picture this scenario. Your church has a VBS for child evangelism. You promote it in the neighborhood. Some children from RCC families show interest. You seek parental consent. You tell the parents you do not approve of the RCC for their children or anyone else, and you will be teaching their children to trust in Christ alone for salvation—not Christ plus good works, or

plus the Virgin Mary, etc., and that anyone (even a parent) who is not trusting in Christ alone is lost and will perish in hell, except they repent, and that no one should attend the Mass, etc. Now ask if you have the RCC parents permission to teach their child this!

You see if we have worthy aims in child ministry, and if we were completely open and honest and candid with the ungodly parents about our aims, few if any would grant permission, so instead many have opted to be secretive about what they do or to teach a bland quasi-Christian moralism instead of the true gospel!

- Through the neighborhood influence of well-ordered Christian families. We could do so much more if we embraced our calling to be well-ordered Christian families and to bear a faithful Christian witness to our neighbors with their children in our own homes. We can invite them over for meals and playtime and even Bible studies, etc. We can visit them in their homes and be unashamed of our identity as a Christian family, speaking openly of our faith and all biblical matters.
- Through private Christian schools. It is completely legitimate for parents to work together starting and maintaining these, and sometimes the children of unbelieving homes might be admitted.
- Through adoption of needy children into our own families. Ancient Christians in Rome spread the faith by adopting "throw-away children" of the pagans and rearing them to be Christians. Many Christian families should consider this adoption ministry (see [Adopted for Life: The Priority of Adoption for Christian Families and Churches](#) by Russell Moore). There may be no more convincing way to prove the sincerity your concern. It is surely better than complaining that the church should do something.
- There are doubtless other ways, but these may be the most important.

IV. TESTIMONY ABOUT OUR CHURCH AND OUR FAMILIES

For quite a few years now CBC has been implementing these principles of the AOC and the child-rearing family, and it has borne good fruit. While it is not a panacea or guarantee that maturing children will embrace the faith for themselves, we have seen very encouraging results in some. Modesty precludes specific personal examples. Soli Deo gloria!

V. A PLEA FOR BIBLICAL REFORMATION

We are not wiser than God. Do you have the kind of faith that trusts him even in the identity and ministry of the church? Then let us keep our eyes on the biblical ideal and work towards it, leaving results to him. Amen.