

Apostolic or Apostasy? More Churches Include Cold Beer in Church Growth Strategy

It's not easy to plant a church. Even with a strong launch team, you still need a prime location—and that takes lots of money.

Apologia Church has come up with a disturbing way to raise funds for its church plant in Hawaii. Marcus Pittman, its leader, offered tattoos and a Bible conference complete with a beer flight, a sampling of beers much like a wine tasting, to pick up some cash.

“This is actually a fundraiser for our Apologia Kauai church plant, so people of the church are donating to have another member of the church tattoo them so they can go to Kauai and we can plant a church there,” Pittman says in a YouTube video. “So, it's pretty cool.”

As he sees it, the tattoos and beer flights are cooler than a bake sale. It seems many of his followers agree. The ReformCon conference invites people to talk theology over beer at a bar.

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“This ticket allows you to get a beer flight from Boulders on Broadway. All the proceeds from this benefit our Kauai church plant!” the website for the event reads. “Boulders is all about the food, craft beer, bike riding, rock climbing and adventure! With 30 draft handles and 70-plus bottles of craft beer. Bring a friend and check out our selection.”

The trend of mixing beer with the Bible is not new. I

previously shared with you how Rev. John Donnelly of Christ Church Quaker Farms launched a group called Beer, Bible and Brotherhood. The first meeting drew 10 men who downed beer while contemplating Bible verses, the AP reports. He's hoping to build the group of suds-sipping seekers to 50.

Donnelly's club may be a sign of the times. There's a definite cultural shift in the body of Christ to open the bottles, er, the gates to alcoholic beverages. But that's not where it ends.

I also told you how 30 to 40 people flood Zio Carlo brewpub in Fort Worth, Texas, to nosh on pizzas, kick back pints of beer and fellowship. This so-called Church-in-a-Pub also has a worship service complete with Communion.

Irreverent? Sacrilegious? Even Christians who aren't teetotalers may have a problem with washing down their Holy Communion with beer their pastor brewed in his backyard. But it seems quite popular with the 20-somethings.

Then there's the church that organized "Beer and Hymns Sunday" to kick off a discussion about the future of the Christian church around the world. In speaking about this stunt, Evan Taylor, outreach pastor at East Side, says, "We like to rattle the cage a little bit."

Why is it so necessary for the church and the gospel to fit into modern-day culture? Modern-day culture should not dictate the messages we preach or the outreaches we arrange. The gospel of Jesus Christ is not obligated to meet the culture where it is—the culture is obligated to bow a knee to Jesus Christ.

Are beer-based outreaches really edifying in the end? If we compromise the purity and holiness of the Christian faith to win souls, are we really leading them into a true salvation after the bottle of beer is empty? Or are we merely compromising the gospel in the name of soul-winning without

fruit that remains?

Are churches that frown on Christians drinking alcohol legalistic and majoring in the minor, or is the acceptance of alcohol a gateway to apostasy that will usher in sexual immorality and all manner of sin? Would you want to attend a church where the pastor downs a few brews with the boys in a bar over Bible study? Or does that send the wrong message?

Call me conservative, but isn't promoting brewsky on tap for the sake of being nonreligious to attract more people to your church a prime example of being of the world rather than just in the world? (See John 15:19.) Whatever happened to separating the profane from the holy (Ezek. 22:26)? Having church or doing evangelism is one thing, but basing your church-growth strategy on beer is quite another. Have evangelism and church-growth strategies really come down to compromising with the spirit of the world? God forbid!