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Monthly commentary from the President of the
Assemblies of God Theological Seminary

The Latest Version of God and Country
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I live in the Bible Belt. Springfield, Missouri is not one of the most avant garde places in the US. However, we are not exempt from people offering their societal poisons with little conscience. In an unincorporated area near Springfield, where zoning ordinances are minimal, a multi-business adult strip mall has appeared replete with exotic dance club, adult sex novelty and adult video store. Predictably, the local ministerial alliance is launching a protest against what they view as an intrusion into their community. But what makes this story a bizarre sign of the times, is the proprietor of the adult complex. He is a Bible-believing conservative talk show host who just sees this enterprise as a business venture. In an interview with our local newspaper he proclaimed he was "saved." He said, "I'm washed in the blood of Jesus Christ. But my personal relationship with Jesus has nothing to do with this here." He added that this was just a business opportunity. If he could make a living selling snow cones he'd do that, but this was something he was doing to make a good living and provide employment in the community.

This bizarre mixing of business and Christian spirituality is not some trendy coastal thinking that Midwesterners love to chastise. It's a testimony to the human condition that knows no geographical center. The stereotype doesn't fit the "sin." This is not some sleazy low-life porno king. The proprietor carries the flag in one hand and the Bible in the other.

This story, in the middle of the Bible Belt, is testimony to the emerging realities now becoming commonplace. This is not just about an adult business intruding into a small community and the ministerial alliance trying to protest the location of these businesses. It is a picture into the soul of America. Religion has been removed from the public sphere and relegated to private worship and piety. Terms with eternal meaning like "saved" and "washed in the blood" are now relegated to in house jargon where words speaking of eternal transformation are held up proudly as exemptions from personal accountability to Christ's demands on our life. The all-pervasive spirit of consumerism now is the ultimate "justification." The adult store is legal and creates jobs.....that is justification that covers all the bases.

I have no idea what goes on in the mind of this adult mini-mall proprietor. Is it just a service or product or maybe a diversion from the mundane life that's being offered? The French writer Blaise Pascal once wrote that the only thing that consoles us for our miseries in life is diversion. Pascal also noted that overindulging in diversion leads to destruction, because diversion ultimately consumes our time and in so doing brings us imperceptibly to our death.

Overindulging and feeding our senses is a highly vaunted activity these days. From speed in cars, to rave parties fueled by designer alcoholic beverages and adult product strips malls-pursuit of self-indulgence has truly become a sophisticated endeavor fully wrapped in highly funded advertising campaigns. Diversion only delays the inevitable question of what is causing the despair that needs escaping? As long as a human being is apart from God they will run to anything that will occupy their minds and drown their hopelessness.

So is the story of a flag-waving, Bible thumping adult shop proprietor really so bizarre? Or is it just another testimony to the deep tragedy of human existence and the need for human transformation that truly establishes the rule of God's Kingdom in the heart and actions of followers? Sin is not the exclusive domain of Hollywood and righteousness is not the exclusive quality of the Bible Belt. However, self-deception is global and certainly alive and well in Springfield, Missouri.

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