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(Intro) On this Good Friday, there will be many of you, no doubt, who will go to church, but this half-hour is addressed really to those of you who will not be going to church but who might have at one time. The question we're asking is what would bring you back to church, and whether, in fact, high-tech production values are what you will be looking for. That's the conclusion you might have reached recently in Toronto, when the Inspiration North conference drew 700 church officials from all over North America to take a look at the impact of high technology on religious observance. There was a time when high technology might have meant the rope that rang the bell at the top of the steeple, or possibly the taper that lit the candles. These days, you will see a lot more. Whether this is, in fact, the answer for declining church attendance is the question we'd like to raise with you and raise with Quentin Schultz. Quentin Schultz is the author of many books, among them "Televangelism and American Culture: The Business of Popular Religion. He teaches at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan where we've reached him on this Good Friday morning. Professor Shultz, good morning. What's going on in the arena of high-tech in religion these days?

**PS:** Well, first, what's going on is that young people are not going to church as much anymore. If you look at the typical church in North America, the demographics are skewed towards the older people, and churches are trying to figure out how to get younger people back into the pews on Sunday, how to get them interested in other Church programs and so forth. Particularly the "baby boomers"-that

was sort of the first generation of people that pulled out of the churches. And what a lot of churches are finding is that what really interests "baby boomers", and their kids, in fact, is high-tech kinds of worship and instruction. So we're seeing the movement of things like high-quality video, audio, dramatic performances, all kinds of special effects with lighting and so forth, into the church. So what you have to say is the church in many places is becoming more and more like what you would expect in a theatre or in a kind of virtual reality chamber or something.

**AB:** I was in Los Angeles not long ago and visited Robert Schuyler's Crystal Cathedral. Was stunned not only to see the predictable multi-pipe organ but also enormous TV screens, of the sort that you'd see at a U2 concert, angels flying by on wires, smoke machines creating, you know, clouds around everybody's feet. Give some sense, if you've ever seen one of these hi-tech services, just how far certain churches are prepared to go to woo the baby boomers back.

**PS:** What you saw there at the Crystal Cathedral, let me first of all say is not typical of what would occur every week, because the kind of effort and budget involved in putting on something like that, just like a U2 concert, or whatever, is substantial, so most churches can't afford to do that. What you're likely to see in a weekly service at a church that's going hi-tech is, first of all, an auditorium rather than a church building, so when you go in, there would be no stained-glass, there would be no architecture to remind you of a typical church building, that it would look like an

entertainment auditorium, a concert hall perhaps, a very contemporary one, with individual seating instead of pews. Generally, raked down towards what looks like a stage. In fact, they're building them with stages on so they can do their performances there. You would also notice right away very elaborate lighting possibility so that they can set the mood according to the mood of the worship service. You can imagine, on let's say, Good Friday, what that might be, a very solemn mood, versus what'll it be on Easter Sunday. Then you would notice right away, that the combination of elements of worship would be like Drama, so you would not only have someone preaching, in fact, there may not even be a preacher, though that usually continues to be a part of the service, there would be some drama. This would be done live, there would be some musical performances, and I use the word "performance" there because it's not like a choir, necessarily, but a variety of individuals coming up on stage performing one thing or another to fit in thematically with what's going on, often with contemporary instrumentation, and various audio tracks that could not be duplicated, even with real instruments on the stage but have been created...

**AB:** And lighting panels and sound panels to rival the sort of thing we'd see in a major stadium like the Skydome.

**PS:** And now with some of the newer churches, we're also beginning to see various kinds of special effects. They may have slides, or video which they could even show on a screen behind the people who are perform-

ing or the minister who's preaching as a kind of background setting. And as you saw in the Crystal Cathedral, with some of the larger churches now, we're seeing even HDTV (high definition television) screens, which, for those who can't see what's going on because the arena is so big, they can look up at the screen.

**AB:** I'm going to be very anxious to hear what our listeners have got to say in response to this trend. Maybe some of them have witnessed it in church services they've visited, or maybe they haven't visited a church lately, and they think this would be what would draw them back. Thank you for talking to us this morning.

**PS:** Thanks Andy. Have a great day, buddy.

**AB:** I'd love your response to this trend. Is this inevitable on the part of congregations that would like to grow and can't without being able to offer some of the same entertainment other kinds of theatre do? Is there anything wrong with church trying to be theatrical, in fact, if this is what stirs peoples' souls?

Smoke machines, audio effects, giant-screen videos, multi-media information systems, and electronic lighting. This is the sort of thing that is increasingly either infecting church services, or transforming them into something that will bring people back to those pews. We'd like you to tell us. Bill on line 8, this is CFRB. Good morning, Bill.

**Bill:** I guess what I'd like to say is that I think we need to use a balance and I think, uh, I don't see any harm

in using the technology that's present today, but as long as the prime message of the church, the message of Jesus, doesn't get lost in all of this, to serve the poor, to visit those in prison, to clothe the naked, and really spread the message of God and love and compassion to the people.

**AB:** Okay, I adore what you're saying. Now I want to ask you how you put that into effect. If we spend, as a church, let's say, a hundred G's equipping our church with, you know, all the modern bells and whistles, I mean that literally and figuratively. That is money that is not being spent to feed the poor and clothe the naked. And some would say that it's an obscenity to see that sort of thing in a church which is, presumably, trying to, I guess, follow Christ's example.

**Bill:** I agree with you. I agree with you very much. I think it can be obscene, when the money can be used for other things. On the other hand, we can still be very creative at the church, by using the gifts that God has given us, whether the gifts are in music, whether the gifts are in Drama, whether the gifts are other things that we have. We should allow the creativity of the people in the church to be there, and this is a transforming nature in it's own. I think sometimes churches get so big, that you're sitting so far away, that the only way you can see something, is you've gotta have this technology, and I think we kind of lose an intimacy there.

**AB:** Yes, we do. Thanks for your call. Jane is on line 8 on CFRB. Good Friday to you, Jane!

**Jane:** Thank you! I just wanted to let you know that I do go to a church that is more modern. We... remember you were talking about the church that's become more like an auditorium style, where they have the individual seats, all that kind of thing? Well, I go to a church that's like that. It's Missionary Alliance Church, and it's a wonderful type of church. The program varies, they do have people who perform on the stage, sometimes, in a dramatic way, but they also have a lot of guest speakers and guest soloists and things like that. And it's a wonderful program. I know that in a Christian church, the best way to describe the churches is how it fits your personality, because there are so many different types of denominations. The easiest way I often describe it to friends is, it fits your personality. You tend, in a Presbyterian church, to get more formal, more subdued...

**AB:** But is it right for a church to wrap itself around an individual's personality, or to demand that that person adjust their personality to the expectations of the church? Nice way to conclude that topic. Speaking of the message of Christ, and in this case, I consider it a message for all people, regardless of whether you accept Christ's divinity. ◆

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