

★★★★★ **Thoughtful, wide-ranging critique of shallow church culture**, September 15, 2007

By [Andrew D. Rowell](#) (Durham, NC) - [See all my reviews](#)

REAL NAME

Michael Warren draws on a wide range of philosophers, sociologists and psychologists to present the case that normal church practices do not challenge American churchgoers to be anything but thoughtless consumers.

Going to church is not transforming people, Warren says. Christians today are shallow, greedy and stylish. Where are the people who actually act like Jesus? It is not enough to have the right beliefs.

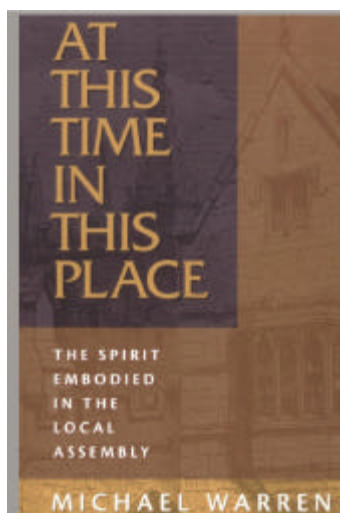
Pastors and priests need to wake up and realize what is happening. The real work of God is deep. For that work to happen, people need to be taught to compare their daily lives to the practices of Jesus. How can we lure people into rigorous Christian reflection?

In some ways, Warren takes on more issues than he can possibly handle: the media, consumerism, and style. But on the other hand, his critique helpfully shows the range of issues that contribute to the problems of the American church.

Though a Roman Catholic, Warren's critique intentionally applies to Protestant churches as well. Warren's perspective is somewhat rooted in liberation theology.

I read this book in "Th.D Seminar: Explorations in Practical Theology" at Duke Divinity School. It is not a fast read. The writing is cumbersome. But I would recommend it as an excellent overview on a scholarly level of the issues that face American churches.

Wipf and Stock are now reprinting this book.







At This Time, in This Place: The Spirit Embodied in the Local Assembly (Paperback)

by [Michael Warren](#) (Author)

- **Paperback:** 181 pages
- **Publisher:** Trinity Press International (March 1999)
- **Language:** English
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Synopsis:

Warren is concerned about: (1) the lack of Jesus-like behavior among Christians in their daily lives and (2) the lack of thoughtful participation during the liturgy. He sees these problems as a result of American consumer culture. Christians too often are enamored with appearance. People come to a worship service to be entertained. Preaching (as opposed to discussion) reinforces the idea that parishioners are simply consumers. Warren thinks that small group reflection would help bring these issues into the light.

-  Michael Warren is Roman Catholic.
-  The title refers to the local church (p. 3).
-  He believes practical theology begins with the situation (as Osmer says) (p. 6). This is good practical theology method.
-  Barth in WWI (situation to reflect on). p. 7.

What we should do	What we should avoid
Work of God is deep	Consumerism – what you own is your identity. (E.g. iPod, Starbucks) (p. 18).
Honest and objective (p. 45).	When the rich go to church, they don't want surprises (p. 19).
Assembly not audience (Kierkegaard) p. 86.	Simulation
Not just changed liturgy but radical transformation! (p. 87).	Starbucks, Ralph Lauren p. 38
Communal intelligence p. 125.	Consumer
Discipleship not catechesis is the main matter (p. 131).	Shallow
Style says: change is needed (p. 40). This good but it calls for surface change only. Approval of radical reformers (p. 78-79).	Easy (effortless)
Advertisers know behavior better than pastors (p. 18).	Rich
Hidden curriculum: “covert claim of ultimacy.” (p. 18, 21). All done or not done is teaching.	Beautiful
Guests p. 77 Andy Stanley's environments or Granger Guest Services First Impressions but we do want to welcome people.	Perfect
Evangelism: Be the church. “a credible and accessible sign” to the world (p. 55).	Utopia
Plea for pietism? (p. 57-58). Then he self corrects himself later saying the “danger of	Style (cover of Christianity Today regarding Emerging Church by Andy

moralizing” (p. 69). He wants to see application in sermons (Dallas Willard, Randy Frazee, Christian Living books).	Crouch).
Too much orthodoxy and not enough orthopraxy. (p. 67). Statements of belief not practice define churches (p. 62). This leads to focus on belief.	Religion
Service evangelism. Serve in the soup kitchen first says Origen. Behave and then believe (p. 12-13).	Claims
First become a Christian and learn about it. Then you will appreciate worship (p. 12). I still think there is a place for seeker worship that teaches “life practices.”	No convictions
What vision of life are we teaching in our liturgy? (p. 11). E.g. contemporary vs. mainline; heaven’s throne.	Supports power structure.
Subjectivity and intentionality matter more than doing the liturgy perfectly. (p. 11). The heart that matters more (Counting Crows “Omaha”). The letter of the law is not as important as the spirit of the law. Liturgy can be dead (p. 9). E.g. Nazis, Sopranos, Argentine death squads. “The Eucharist is not enough!” (p. 8).	Crafted intentionally. (E.g. My Gen-X pastor article).
The purpose of small groups (p. 70) is discernment (p. 69). Patterns must be disturbed (p. 59). Need struggle (p. 69) and process (p. 71). Top down by leaders does not work (p. 73). Need discussion to prevent accommodation (p. 80). Need more participation (p. 11, 84, 88). We need to lure people to reflect and note the problems. We need to remind people how a lack of discipleship affects worship (if people value worship highly as Roman Catholics do) (p. 4).	Cosmetic surgery (p. 41).
Results are show in actions (p. 2, 14). Sacramental; realized.	Ralph Lauren sells dreams (p. 41).
Ask: What images have formative power?	Celebrity
Where is culture different from Jesus? (p. 20).	Be quiet. p. 85.
It might be possible for local churches to prophetically influence US culture. (E.g. class with McClintock-Fulkerson and Kenneth Carder). p. 20.	Power constructs appearance. Eg. Redbook touching up Faith Hill and other magazine touching up Sarkoze new French president. Men’s Health touching up Andy

	Roddick. Film about Flag of our Fathers. E.g. Starbucks vs. Coffee World.
Knowledge and actions both needed (p. 61).	It is easy to be deceived (p. 22).
Coherence, integrity, fidelity not success (p. 4, 15).	Material conditions influence (p. 15).
Do the words of songs reflect reality?	Christianity has undergone colonization (p. 2). It has been domesticated by culture (p. 4).
Jesus' discipleship (in full range of competence) Frazee's 30 areas p. 22.	Spectators, Passive voyeurs (p. 6).
	Bad practices hurt theology (p. 7).
	Churches take for granted many cultural practices (p. 106-111).
	Media manipulation (p. 6).
	Pulpit time is power (p. 82).
	Zip code reveals lifestyle patterns (p. 105).
	Doxa – assumed values. (p. 111-112).
	Operational greed (p. 57).
	Non-responsiveness p. 15