

Media Engagement in Youth Ministry: The Disney Universe as a Case Study

The Disney Universe is a highly influential global media agent in the everyday lives of children, tweens, and teenagers. After a brief summary of significant values in this fictional universe as a case study, this talk introduces a three-dimensional worldview approach for media engagement in youth ministry. First, a Christian worldview provides us with interpretative resources, equipping us to engage influential media stories and values through the lens of a biblical framework. Secondly, a Christian worldview provides us with educational resources, equipping us to teach biblical faith as authentic, credible, and relevant when faced with influential media stories and values. Thirdly, a Christian worldview provides us with spiritual resources, equipping us for personal growth towards maturity and thus influencing our personal attitudes towards influential media stories and values. The talk includes illustrations of how this three-dimensional approach to media engagement may be applied in youth ministry.

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I. Introduction

A. Digital natives

“Children and youth are digital “from head to toe, at home and on the go.”
(Heart and Frejd)

B. Formative stories

“Without question, the media plays an important role when it comes to religious socialization in our culture.” (Lövheim)

II. Disney as case study

A. Global agent

“[Disney is] the only dominant player in the development and promotion of media products for children and youth.” (Hoechsmann and Poyntz)

B. Disneyfication process

The Classic Disney formula was fully established already by the Disneyfication of Grimm’s folktale in ‘Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs’. (cf Wasko)

C. Mixed messages

...Disney, holding both traditional moral values as well as a pluralism of faiths, all being open for exploration on an individual basis, and the autonomous 'self' being the focus. (cf Ward)

D. "Disney Gospel"

"[The Disney Gospel] is all about me. My dreams. My will. 'When you wish upon a star, your dreams come true'. The Disney Bible has but one verse, and that is it." (Pinsky)

III. Introducing a worldview approach

A. Defining worldview

"A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundations on which we live and move and have our being." (Sire)

B. A Christian Worldview – as a fourfold framework

"God has given us a comprehensive revelation... the fourfold scheme of biblical history...: The creation, the fall, the redemption, and the consummation... [These] four events correspond to four realities – namely "the good", "the evil", "the new", and "the perfect"... It gives us a framework into which to fit everything, a way of integrating our understanding, the possibility of thinking straight, even about the most complex issues." (Stott)

IV. Applying a three-dimensional worldview approach

A. Interpretative resources

1. A Christian worldview provides us with interpretative resources, equipping us to engage influential media stories and values *through the lens of a biblical framework*. This approach contains a number of key insights, including

- a. the recognition that neither persons nor media messages are neutral,
 - b. the appreciation of the multifaceted nature of any worldview,
 - c. the interpretation of the Christian faith as a worldview.
2. Such interpretative resources constitute an appropriate platform for *informed cultural critique* and *qualified worldview critique*. Therefore, they enable the youth ministry worker to start with the everyday media experience of the children and the youth.
 3. Case study from Disney

B. Educational resources

1. A Christian worldview provides us with educational resources, equipping us to teach biblical faith as authentic, credible, and relevant when faced with influential media stories and values.
2. This approach includes the following insights:
 - a. The Christian faith as a *coherent* worldview story, which may make sense of individual Scriptural passages and individual Christian doctrines
 - b. The Christian faith as a *historical* worldview story, which claim to touch historical reality and everyday life, especially in its Gospel message about the Cross and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.
 - c. The Christian faith as a *relevant* worldview story, which claims to change and transform persons and cultures
3. Case study from Disney

C. Spiritual resources

1. A Christian worldview provides us with spiritual resources, equipping us for personal growth towards maturity and thus influencing our personal attitudes towards influential media stories and values.
2. The application of “double listening” as a practice constitutes a threefold strength:
 - a. The nature of personal faith as *trust and as the anchoring of meaning*, provides an opportunity to compare and contrast faith in “one God and One Lord” (1 Cor. 8:6) with religious and secular alternatives as illustrated in influential media messages.
 - b. The relationship between “*confessed faith*” and “*lived out faith*” provides an opportunity to explore the privatization of faith as a key challenge, especially related to the feeling of alienation in relation to secular fictional media universes.
 - c. The nature of *worldview formation* provides an opportunity to explore to what extent key worldview elements in influential media messages may contribute to the identity formation of children and youth, thus demonstrating points of contact and points of tension between Christian faith and key media messages.
3. Case study from Disney

V. Q / A – Discussion

Suggested Readings:

Dahle, L. & M. S. Dahle. “Resourcing the Global Church. A Guide to Key Lausanne Resources 1974 – 2013” in L. Dahle, M. S. Dahle & K. Jørgensen (eds.): *The Lausanne Movement: A Range of Perspectives* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2014), pp. 113-131. Available online: http://www.ocms.ac.uk/regnum/downloads/The_Lausanne_Movement-Final-WMF.pdf

Dahle, M. S. “Worldview Analysis of Popular Media: A Christian Perspective” in Grandhagen, E. og Å. Myksvoll (eds.), *Budskap, Årsskrift for FMH*, 7. Årgang. (Oslo: Fjellhaug, 2006), pp. 165-175. Available online: <http://fih.fjellhaug.no/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Budskap-2006-101106.pdf>

Fruzinska, J. *Emerson Goes to the Movies. Individualism in Wald Disney Company's Post-1989 Animated Films* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014)

Giroux, H. A & G. Pollock. *The Mouse that Roared. Disney and the end of Innocence.* (Plymouth, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.: 2010)

Hart, A. D. & S. Hart Frejd. *The Digital Invasion. How Technology Is Shaping You and Your Relationships.* (Grand Rapids, Baker Books: 2013)

Hoechsmann, M. & S. R. Poyntz. *Media Literacies. A Critical Introduction.* (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing, 2012)

Pinsky, M. I. *The Gospel According to Disney. Faith, Trust and Pixie Dust.* (Louisville, Westminster: John Knox Press: 2004)

Sire, J. M. *Naming the Elephant. Worldview as a Concept.* (Downer's Grove, ILL: InterVarsity Press, 2004)

Stott, J. *Issues Facing Christians Today* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan 2006, 4th ed.)

Ward, A. R. *Mouse Morality. The Rhetoric of Disney Animated Film* (Austin, TX: The University of Texas Press, 2002)

Wasko, J. *Understanding Disney.* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001; 7th reprint 2013)