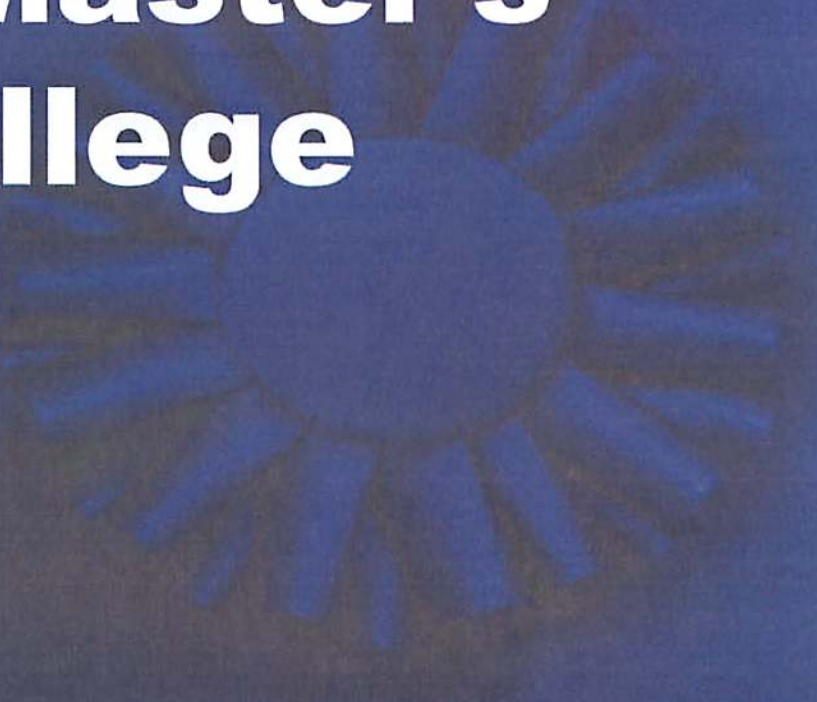


**2008 Chandler Contest  
First Place**

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## Chandler Contest

### GodTube offers a Christian alternative to YouTube

December 21, 2007

Chris Wyatt and the Internet have something going.

In the late '90s, the young television producer helped start [Communities.com](http://Communities.com), the world's first social networking website. The site exploded into the Web's largest pre-MySpace network.

Now, less than a decade later, Wyatt runs [GodTube.com](http://GodTube.com), which was rated the fastest-growing online site when it was launched in August. Wyatt says the site aims to "help the church get people back into the pews."

Wyatt started [GodTube.com](http://GodTube.com), a Christian video-sharing and social-networking site, and is now the CEO of a company that employs about 20 people and has a distinctly Christian outlook.

"We're a traditional Christian site," said Wyatt, a 38-year-old student at Dallas Theological Seminary. "Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior, period."

According to comScore Inc., which tracks the growth of websites, GodTube grew nearly 1,000 percent in its first month, and had 1.6 million unique visitors every month. There are more than 38,000 videos on GodTube.

Wyatt came up with the idea for GodTube after reading a survey about falling church attendance. And while churches can upload video sermons to the website, Wyatt insists that Christians still need to attend an actual church.

"GodTube is by no means a substitute or alternative for church," he said. "We're here to help the church."

Christians aren't the only ones using the Internet to share their faith. For Jews, there's [JewTube.com](http://JewTube.com), and for Muslims, [IslamicTube.net](http://IslamicTube.net).

Although the two sites are considerably smaller -- JewTube gets about 175,000 visitors per month and IslamicTube 23,000 -- the two sites are similar to GodTube in their mission to promote their individual faiths and surrounding cultures.

Jeremy Kossen began JewTube last June after noticing a worrisome amount of anti-Semitic and anti-Israel content on websites such as YouTube. That inspired him to begin a website for "Jewish-oriented videos ... where we didn't allow comments that were racist in nature."

Kossen says the mission of JewTube is not to convert people, but to "promote ... Jewish culture." It also includes informational videos for non-Jews wanting to learn more about the Jewish faith.

IslamicTube officially launched in April to create a clean environment in which to promote to the Muslim faith.

"We noticed Islamic videos ... became a huge hit on YouTube and felt we could help extend ... the true message of Islam," said Abu Ayman, a spokesperson for the site.

Although GodTube has dominated the press in past months, the folks at JewTube and IslamicTube seem to have a positive outlook on the Internet giant. "It's nice to have various religious sites so that people can go and learn about God, understand the differences in religion, and appreciate one another's belief," Ayman said.

Kossen called his opinion of GodTube "very positive."

"Go to YouTube and type 'Jewish' or 'Israel,'" he said. "Tell me what you find. Eighty percent of it is anti-Semitic. Now go to GodTube and type the same thing. What do you get? Ninety-nine percent pro-Israel and pro-Jewish."

In spite of its smashing success, not everyone has such a rosy view of GodTube.

The Rev. Dan Smith, pastor of Momentum Christian Church in Valley View, Ohio, created the video "Baby Got Book," which GodTube used to launch their site. Although the spoof on the rap song "Baby Got Back" has been viewed more than 603,000 times on GodTube, Smith wonders how effective the site will be in reaching non-Christians.

"Most Christians want to reach unchurched people," Smith said, "but you have to be really smart about where you reach unchurched people at."

Tim Ellsworth, director of media relations at Union University in Jackson, Tenn., has his doubts, too. Although he thinks GodTube can have a positive impact on believers, he thinks it's yet another example of American Christians copying elements of pop culture -- from Christian breath mints and energy drinks to a Christian version of "American Idol."

"It's comfortable and convenient for us to surround ourselves with Christian versions of everything rather than to interact with the broader culture," Ellsworth said.

He would love to see a larger Christian presence on YouTube, because there the videos would have a better chance of being viewed by non-Christians. He thinks Christians' tendency to withdraw from the world reflects badly on them.

"It indicates to ... nonbelievers that we don't care as much about them ... whenever we try to make Christian copies of everything," he said.

Nevertheless, Wyatt sees GodTube as his ministry, a way "to bring as many people to Christ ... as possible." He doesn't think he is the reason for the site's success. Rather, it's the result of "God in GodTube."

"I'm not really the CEO," Wyatt said. "I feel like I'm the CEO's man on the ground."

## **Chandler Contest**

### **Some Christians use 'Hell Houses' to reach out on Halloween**

**October 29, 2007**

Cindy Cathcart was angry with God and on the brink of divorce and suicide on Oct. 30, 1998, when her nephew dragged her to "Hell House."

Though raised Lutheran, she had repeatedly refused her sister's invitations to come to church and had no desire for a relationship with God. All of that changed as she walked through Hell House.

Hell Houses are intended to literally scare the hell out of people. Participants walk through several "scenes" depicting the consequences of things like abortion, homosexuality and drunkenness.

"As I went from scene to scene ... (God) just started working on my heart and showing me that it's not him that caused this," Cathcart said. "It was the lack of having God in my life."

By the time she reached the heaven scene, Cathcart was on her knees, begging God for forgiveness and asking Jesus for salvation.

While some Christians aren't certain what to make of Halloween -- unsure whether to embrace or ignore all the goblins and ghoulishness -- some evangelical churches use Oct. 31 as a day to evangelize.

"Hell House is not a celebration of Halloween," said Pastor Keenan Roberts, of New Destiny Christian Center in Thornton, Colo., who created Hell House as an outreach tool in 1995. "It's not even a Halloween event. It is the church taking advantage of America's cultural influence of the haunted house. ... It's the church absolutely capitalizing on the time of year."

Like Roberts, Terry Long, pastor of Calvary Chapel in Salt Lake City, believes the church can turn Halloween into something good. "Instead of cursing the darkness," he said, "just turn on the light."

Each year, Long's church hosts a Halloween-alternative "Hallelujah Party." Kim Giebler, who helps coordinate the event, cited Romans 12:21 as their theme: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

The annual Hallelujah Party allows about 1,000 kids to experience the usual Halloween costumes and candy, but also includes an invitation for them to ask Jesus to be their Savior.

Though many at Calvary Chapel participate in the party, some stay at home. Long has no condemnation for people who opt out of the Halloween alternative; rather, he encourages them to pray for the event's success.

Mike Gilbert-Smith, assistant pastor at Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., said that although his church does not sponsor a Halloween alternative, church members have found their own ways of dealing with the holiday.

Some use trick-or-treating as an evangelistic opportunity, giving out Bible tracts with candy. Others celebrate Reformation Day, recognizing Oct. 31 as the day Martin Luther nailed the 95 Theses to the church door and sparked the Protestant Reformation.

A father of three, Gilbert-Smith said he and his family do not celebrate Halloween. He doesn't see a point in doing so, and would have to have some positive reasons before getting involved.

Still, Gilbert-Smith knows the decision of whether or not to celebrate -- or even recognize -- Halloween can be a challenge for some Christians. He suggested people ask themselves one question: "What would your involvement or non-involvement be telling people about your stance toward evil?"

On the night of Oct. 31, Doug Phillips will spend the evening like he would on any other night: with "family devotions." Phillips, president of Vision Forum, a Texas-based organization dedicated to restoring biblical family values, may tell his eight children stories about Martin Luther and other reformers, but other than that, life will run as normal.

Phillips enjoyed Halloween celebrations as a child, but when he became a Christian, he decided they were "unwise and inconsistent with biblical Christianity."

"It's about what saith the Scripture," he said. "Go to the Bible and ask yourself the question: If all I had was the Bible to lead me to a wise conclusion, where would I end up?"

While Phillips commended sharing Bible tracts with neighbors on Halloween, he doesn't think Christians should take on "the exteriors of ... the occult" to reach non-Christians. "When it comes to evangelism, it isn't anything goes," he said.

Perhaps, says Steve Russo, author of "Halloween: What's a Christian to Do?", but on one of the darkest nights of the year, "why not talk about the light of the world, Jesus?" he asks.

"As an evangelist, I would say, 'What a great opportunity we have!'"

Russo doesn't think Christians need to completely abandon traditional Halloween activities. Rather, he thinks they can find a "balanced, reasonable approach to Halloween" without celebrating its darker aspects.

Russo's 11-year-old daughter plans to go trick-or-treating this year, an activity Russo says can be safe and fun with parental monitoring. "I don't see anything wrong with that at all," he said.

Almost a decade after her conversion, Cathcart is still married and now serves as a Bible study coordinator at Roberts' church. Rather than trick-or-treating, she opts for helping with Hell House on Halloween.

"Sometimes we have to use extreme measures to save (God's) people," Cathcart said. "After all, if someone were in a burning house, would you quietly say, 'Come out, you will die'? No. You would run in there with your arms waving and screaming to the top of your lungs, grabbing them if need be, to save them from an untimely death."

## **Chandler Contest**

### **Does 'Compass' point kids to atheism?**

**November 30, 2007**

It's the holiday season, which means it's time for another Hollywood blockbuster with a cast of talking animals, witches and an earnest child to point the way to truth and justice.

But those who applauded the Christian allegory in "The Chronicles of Narnia" or "The Lord of the Rings" now worry that "The Golden Compass," the silver screen adaptation of Philip Pullman's book that opens Friday, will poison kids' minds with atheism.

Kiera McCaffery, a spokeswoman for the New York-based Catholic League, says the film is a hook to lure kids into a series of what she calls deeply anti-Catholic books.

"Once parents know about the books ...they're going to want to keep their children away from reading the books," said McCaffery, who has yet to see the film.

"The Golden Compass," the first installment in avowed atheist Pullman's "His Dark Materials" trilogy, follows a young girl, Lyra, through a world dominated by a governing authority called the Magisterium -- the same name Catholics use to refer to their church's teaching authority.

Though New Line Cinema has said they watered down the anti-religious themes in the movie, Plugged In, the entertainment-review sector of Focus on the Family, said there is still reason for concern.

"Even if they were (watered down), the theatrical celebration of Philip Pullman's 'His Dark Materials' stories will likely introduce many more viewers to a worldview that's wholly opposed to the gospel message of Jesus Christ," a Plugged In statement said.

While Pullman has said his books "are about killing God," he talks about the value of "the religious impulse" on his Web site. However, he goes on to condemn organized religion that has "burned, hanged, tortured, maimed, robbed, violated and enslaved millions" in the name of God.

"That is the religion I hate," Pullman writes, "and I'm happy to be known as its enemy."

It's the same type of religion Pullman sets up as the bad guy in "The Golden Compass." The General Oblation Board of the Magisterium is responsible for kidnapping children and cutting away their souls.



So is the film specifically anti-Catholic? Nicole Kidman, who was raised Catholic and plays the role of the sinister Mrs. Coulter, the head of the General Oblation Board, doesn't think so.

"The Catholic Church is part of my essence," she told Entertainment Weekly. "I wouldn't be able to do this film if I thought it were at all anti-Catholic."

Donna Freitas, professor of religion at Boston University, agrees. In fact, she said reading the trilogy "reinvigorated" her concepts of God, salvation and the soul. "This trilogy is actually responsible for helping me stay Catholic," she said.

Freitas, who recently co-authored "Killing the Imposter God: Philip Pullman's Spiritual Imagination in His Dark Materials" with Jason King, interprets Pullman's books quite differently than other Catholics. In her mind, it isn't God who's killed in the end, but an angel who has set himself up as a false god.

Freitas doesn't see Pullman's books as dangerous for children, either, because "kids read things very differently" than adults. In November, she had the chance to watch children ask Pullman about his series. Not a single kid asked why he killed God in his books, she said.

Atheist groups, including the New Jersey-based American Atheists, have mixed feelings about the film. They say Hollywood should make more films that aren't afraid to challenge religion, but also chide New Line for watering down some atheist themes in the movie.

For his part, Pullman seems equal parts puzzled, amused and saddened by all the critics, especially Bill Donohue, the head of the Catholic League.

"To regard it as this Donohue man has said -- that I'm a militant atheist, and my intention is to convert people -- how the hell does he know that?" he asked in an interview with Newsweek. "Why don't we trust readers? Why don't we trust filmgoers?"