

**Youth Culture Lesson**  
**Finding Teachable Moments in Culture**  
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**Image Isn't Everything...**

But Archbishop Discovers It's Still Important

by Paul Asay

**What Happened**

There's no question the house is beautiful. The Atlanta mansion features two dining rooms, a safe room and 6,200 square feet of space. Built at a cost of \$2.2 million (in a city where an average house costs a 10<sup>th</sup> of that), it *should* be nice.

There's just one problem. The house was built by Atlanta's Catholic Archbishop Wilton Gregory with the diocese's money, and many people inside and outside the Catholic Church, say the mansion wasn't the wisest use of church funds.

The money came from a \$15 million gift from the estate of Joseph Mitchell, nephew of *Gone With the Wind* author Margaret Mitchell. Joseph's will specified the money be spent in the parish and for "charitable causes." The archdiocese said it did spend 25 percent of the gift on charity; but a good chunk of it went to Gregory's new house, with another \$2 million earmarked to remake his old house into a rectory for parish priests.

Gregory said the archbishop's house needed to be big and nice in order to hold meetings and entertain. Because it's the church's property, future archbishops will live there, too. However, with Pope Francis exhorting clergy to live simply and spend frugally, the expenditure struck many as odd; Gregory acknowledged as much in an apology to his flock.

"While my advisors and I were able to justify this project fiscally, logistically and practically, I personally failed to project the cost in terms of my own integrity and pastoral credibility with the people of God of north and central Georgia," he said. "To all of you, I apologize sincerely and from my heart."

Gregory and counselors are now weighing what to do with the mansion.

**Talk About It**

What Gregory built was small potatoes compared to the \$43 million mansion built by a German bishop (whom Pope Francis since has removed). Yet it's a reminder that as Christians, people are watching us to see if our actions match our words. Appearances can be important.

Do you think Archbishop Gregory was out of line to build the house? How do you think church leaders *should* live? Would it bother you if you learned that church money was being spent on someone's lavish lifestyle?

Have you seen Christians act un-Christian? When? What sort of impression did it make on you? What impression do you think it made on non-Christians?

Have you seen Christians accused of or blamed for things that weren't really their fault? When? Why? Was the situation resolved? If so, how was it settled? Do you think it's fair that Christians sometimes come under extra scrutiny?

### **What the Bible Says**

“Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us” (Titus 2:7-8).

“In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16).

“Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12).

Paul Asay has written for *The Washington Post*, *Christianity Today*, *Beliefnet.com* and *The (Colorado Springs) Gazette*. He writes about culture for *PluggedIn* and wrote the Batman book *God on the Streets of Gotham* (Tyndale). He lives in Colorado Springs with wife, Wendy, and their two children. Follow him on Twitter @AsayPaul.