

Reading the Culture: The Faith of Steve Jobs

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Steve Jobs revolutionized six industries—personal computers, animated movies, music, phones, tablet computing and digital publishing. Any one would make him another Henry Ford; all six make him unprecedented.

Walter Isaacson has just published Jobs' authorized biography. In many ways, it is the story of America.

Steven Paul Jobs was the child of immigrants—a Muslim Syrian biological father and an Armenian adoptive mother. When he was born, his biological mother gave him up for adoption. She insisted he be raised by college graduates, so her doctor arranged for her baby to be placed with a lawyer and his wife. But the couple decided they wanted a girl and backed out.

As a result, he was adopted by Paul and Clara Jobs. His father was a high-school dropout who grew up on a dairy farm, became a mechanic and used-car salesman, and once made a living repossessing cars. His mother's first husband was killed in World War II.

The couple soon realized that their son was exceptionally intelligent. When he was in fourth grade, he tested at the 10th grade level. An academic malcontent, he graduated high school early, then dropped out of Reed College after a year. He supported himself by returning soda bottles for spare change, eating free Sunday dinners at the local Hare Krishna temple, and wearing a jacket in the heatless garage apartment he rented for \$20 a month.

His passion was electronics. Jobs eventually got a job with Atari before founding Apple Computers with his engineering partner, Steve Wozniak.

And the rest is history.

Jobs' spiritual life also was quintessentially American—a religion based on self-reliance. His family took him to the local Lutheran church most Sundays. When he was 13, he asked the pastor about starving children he saw in Life magazine. When the pastor assured him God was aware of them, Jobs announced he didn't want to have anything to do with a God who would allow such suffering.

He eventually chose to practice Zen Buddhism but decided that "different religions are different doors to the same house." Near the end of his life, Jobs said: "I'm about 50/50 on believing in God. I like to think that something survives after you die."

What Steve Jobs built obviously will survive his death. His passion was to invent devices and services we did not know we needed: "People don't know what they want until you show it to them. That's why I never relied on market research. Our task is to read things that are not yet on the page."

The Christian definition of success is similar. Our call is not to give people what they want, but what they need: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Steve Jobs gave his life to inventing new products that would make the world better. We are called to give our lives to an old message that will make the world new.

Jim Denison is president of the Denison Forum on Truth and Culture (www.denisonforum.org) and theologian-in-residence with the Baptist General Convention of Texas.