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Hermen Who? – Bible Hermeneutics: An Excursion in Fantasy or Exercise in Discipline?

by G. Richard Fisher

“Whatever!” read the caption on a cartoon that pictured a teen-aged girl, hands on hips and eyes rolled back, looking as bored as could be. That one word flawlessly conveys the look and attitude. The picture captures today’s prevalent attitude toward biblical interpretation. Many believe that the meaning of the Scriptures is to be subjectively determined. If the supposed or suggested meaning helps, or makes us feel good, then that’s good. The Bible can mean, “Whatever!”

Subjective interpretation can get so wild, silly, and bizarre that R.A. Coombes “proves” America is Babylon because there is a Babylon, N.Y., (with a large population of Jews) and it is near Amityville, which is purported to be the gateway to hell!¹

The danger of trying to divine truth from feelings and experiences was seen by George Whitefield as he warned in the 19th century:

“I think it is tempting God to require such signs. ... I think it will encourage the French Prophets, take people from the written word, and make them depend on visions, convulsions, etc., more



than on the promises and precepts of the gospel.”²

Toronto Christian Fellowship pastor John Arnott has decided that some

prophecy has to do with people making animal noises. He argues that roaring, clucking, howling, braying, and barking all “act out the prophecy — complete with sound effects — ... I’ve observed that animal sounds are often part of an intense acted-out prophecy.”³

Walter Martin, the late professor of apologetics, often said that cult leaders use biblical words, but write their own dictionary. There is a huge language barrier to scale when people such as Arnott begin inventing meanings for Bible words and terms. Martin said:

“It is therefore possible for the modern theologians to use the terminology of the Bible and historic theology, but in an entirely different sense from that intended by the writers of

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Editorials

WHAT IN THE WORLD IS GOING ON?

We have been waiting for someone to say what we are going to say in this editorial, but no one will. They will not because it is "religiously incorrect" and may cut into the profits of some. There is a new cult apologetic that says we must be sweet and not too direct or confrontational or it negates our criticism. Of course, the intensity of our objections is a subjective thing in the end.

Some Protestants and perhaps even some Charismatics bristle when people kneel before the Pope in veneration and adoration and kiss his ring. Often they say, "He's only a man." We have all seen pictures of this repeated activity in the newspapers over the years.

All of a sudden the criticism gets muted when men like Benny Hinn go to visit and honor the Pontiff. This plays well to a Catholic or ecumenical audience, but should it just be brushed aside as inconsequential?

Seeing men, even religious men, as objects of veneration or worship (or kneeling to them) was clearly rejected by the Apostle Paul as he cried out to the adoring Lyconians, "Men why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you" (Acts 14:15). The activity of lavishly adoring or venerating a human is sheer idolatry and Paul knew it. The Ten Commandments blare out: "Have no other Gods before Me!" If we really do not think men are Gods, we should not act like it.

The Apostle Peter, like Paul, abhorred such idolatrous activity and told those kneeling to him in Caesarea, "Stand up; for I myself am also a man" (Acts 10:26).

The Corinthian church was shot through with problems and divisions. It was infected with old pagan thought and ways and chided for the hysteria, emotionalism, and pandemonium of its meetings. Some writers have called it phenomenalism, meaning that the Corinthian church members did not believe God or His Spirit were at work unless they were in a frenzy. God was limited by their adrenaline or perhaps really evident by their altered states.

Along with the above was the tendency to unduly and undiscerningly revere certain teachers. In other words, certain teachers were put on a pedestal and seen as more important than unity in the body or as a mark of superior spirituality. A human was put before the Word of Christ. They divided over these teachers and almost put them in the place of God. Following a man became more important than anything else. Paul had to chide them and then, in effect, blast them for their contentions because "each of you says, 'I am of Paul' or 'I am of Apollos' or 'I am of Christ.' Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you?" (1 Corinthians 1:12-13).

Unfortunately, the spirit of Lyconia, Caesarea, and Corinth is alive and well in the Charismatic and Evangelical world today. It is even worse when professed Christians turn to dead icons.

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NOT SO BRIGHT FUTURE FOR MISS CLEO?

While popular psychic Miss Cleo concentrates on the future of her clients, Florida's Attorney General is more focused on her past. Miss Cleo, who rose to fame on television infomercials, tells her millions of viewers that she's a Jamaican shaman. The state of Florida thinks otherwise.

Jennifer Vaughn, an investigator for Florida's Attorney General's office, has identified "Miss Cleo" as Youree Harris, a 39-year-old woman residing in an upscale area of South Florida. Apparently, Miss Cleo has better insight into her patrons' future than her own. When Vaughn tried to serve Harris with a subpoena in February, Harris (Miss Cleo) made a 911 call that brought a Broward County sheriff's deputy to the scene. The police officer warned Harris "about calling 911 and trying to dodge a subpoena." Harris then accepted the court summons from Vaughn.

Assistant Attorney General Dave Aronberg said people who are spending millions of dollars have a right to know the truth about Miss Cleo. "That's important because the whole concept of Miss Cleo is premised on her being a shaman from Jamaica. If she's from the Bronx instead, that would be fraud," Aronberg said in a *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* report. Officials have publicly stated that they do not expect that either Miss Cleo or the various corporations with which she is affiliated will be able to document that she is the "world-renowned or acclaimed master psychic" she claims to be.

The state of Florida is not the only fog that may eventually cloud Miss Cleo's crystal ball. Just hours after the Florida indictment, the Federal Trade Commission filed its own lawsuit charging Miss Cleo's psychic network is "permeated with fraud." The FTC made its move after it had received a "high volume of consumer complaints." Miss Cleo has been the recipient of previous investigations and/or lawsuits by the attorneys general in Missouri, Arkansas, and Pennsylvania.

On popular commercials, and more lengthy infomercials, Miss Cleo incites viewers to make a "free" call to learn more about their spiritual journey or future, including their love life. The first three minutes are free, but it is claimed that during that time, callers are put on hold or questioned for basic personal information. After that the call is forwarded to a 900-telephone number which charges \$4.99 a minute. Some callers have racked up charges as much as \$300. According to the FTC, the average bill is about \$60. The lawsuit also charges that Miss Cleo's "readers" are paid for the amount of time

they spend on the phone with callers. These "readers" (or operators who answer the phones) are paid on a per-minute basis and are fired if they are not able to keep patrons on the line for a minimum of 12 minutes, the FTC lawsuit said.

—MKG

THE HIGH PRICE OF EXORCISM

A Fort Worth jury has found pastor Lloyd McCutchen, former youth pastor Rod Linzay, and several other members of the Pleasant Glade Assembly of God Church of Colleyville, Texas, liable for an exorcism gone wrong. The jury awarded a \$300,000 judgment to Laura Schubert. Schubert brought suit against the church for two exorcism attempts made on her in June 1996. She was seeking more than \$500,000 in damages.

Schubert, who was 17 at the time of the incident, claimed that as many as eight youths pinned her to the church floor while trying to exorcise demons, as adults from the congregation watched. Schubert, now 23, and other witnesses testified that she kicked and tried to break free as the church's youths tried to expel the demons. "This was not a situation of prayer. They were trying to commit an exorcism on me," she told jurors.

David Pruessner, an attorney for the church, argued that Schubert had exhibited a pattern of overdramatization and had developed a mental disorder. "Laura Schubert breathes in attention the same way we breathe in air," Pruessner told the court. "Before she showed up at the church, she had a pre-existing personality disorder," he said. The attorney said the hardship of periodic uprooting and travel because of her missionary parents contributed to her condition.

Schubert's attorney, Bill Wuester, disputed Pruessner's claims, stating the teenager was a model student at her high school, worked at a job, and had paid for her own car. "The girl had no problems. ... She had a great life," Wuester said.

An earlier court ruling in the lawsuit prohibited jurors from hearing any religious aspects of the case, including explicit details of the two exorcisms. According to a *Star-Telegram* report, Schubert's original indictment described "a bizarre night in which church members anointed the sanctuary with holy oil, rapped on pews and propped a cross against the church doors to keep or drive demons out." However, the "jurors heard none of

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TOO GOOD TO BE DAMNED?

The Religious Pluralism and Creedless Faith of the Unitarian Universalists

by Derek R. Keefe



Although unitarianism — the belief that there is only one person in the Godhead — and universalism — the belief that all ultimately will be saved — can be traced to the first few centuries of the Church, the two specific movements that converged to form the Unitarian Universalist Association¹ were born in 18th century America. Unitarianism, in its American manifestation, developed largely in response to key theological underpinnings of the First and Second Great Awakenings. As revival fervor spread, some in the local churches of New England and the Mid-Atlantic states took exception to notions of radical and universal human sinfulness and a wrathful God angered by sin.²

With their more optimistic and “rational” views of God and human nature, Unitarians formed their own congregations, with the designation “Unitarian” indicating their conviction that the doctrine of the Trinity, among other Christian doctrines, was illogical. Early leaders of the American movement were the British Unitarian minister Joseph Priestly and Episcopal minister James Freeman Clarke, but Unitarian minister William Ellery Channing of Boston was the movement’s most important exponent.³ His 1819 sermon, “Unitarian Christianity,” gave the movement its definitive intellectual and theological shape and inspired the formation of American Unitarian Association in 1825.⁴

At roughly the same time that the Unitarian movement was taking shape in America, churches that identified themselves as Universalist were springing up in the South, the Mid-Atlantic, and New England, with the first being the Independent Christian Church of Gloucester, Mass., organized as a Universalist Church under the direction of Methodist excommunicant John Murray in 1779.⁵ Murray, who immigrated to America in 1770, and George de Benneville, who immigrated in 1741, were two of the earliest champions of Universalism in America.⁶ However, the emergence of Universalist preacher and scholar Hosea Ballou in 1800, and the adoption of the *Winchester Profession* in 1803, gave the movement its greatest momentum after it was officially organized in 1793.⁷ The Universalists, who tended to be more evangelistic than Unitarians, labored to spread their message throughout the eastern United States and Canada.⁸

Like Unitarians, early Universalists were bothered by prevailing theological views, which they perceived as painting a rather unflattering view of God and an undesirable future for humanity. In an effort to counter these views, they too put forth more optimistic views of God and humanity, but with a slightly different emphasis than Unitarians, one that is succinctly summarized by later Universalist minister Thomas Starr King: “Universalists believe that God is too

good to damn people, and the Unitarians believe that people are too good to be damned by God.”⁹ In addition, the aforementioned *Winchester Profession*, the standard expression of early American Universalism, promoted Jesus as moral exemplar and leader, and trumpeted “salvation by character.”¹⁰

Throughout the 19th century, adherents of these two movements repeatedly aligned themselves on the same side of theological questions, ethical concerns, and social causes, but showed little enthusiasm for merger.¹¹ By the 20th century, both groups cared less about retaining “Christian” as a self-designation and the narrower theological debates that gave impetus to the movement in its earliest years seemed a thing of the past. Both groups, perhaps because of their theological starting points, had grown increasingly inclusive and pluralistic. However, what had remained constant in both groups from their inception was a profound humanistic orientation that manifested itself in concern for human rights and liberties, political and religious tolerance, social justice, and a general interest in the religious and “meaning-making” activity of humanity. After a series of overtures toward union, the two groups completed their consolidation in May 1961, when the UUA was formed.¹² The UUA now gave the broad humanistic concerns of both groups a united — and therefore stronger — voice.

Understanding UU views concerning the nature of humanity is the key to understanding the UU system of thought.¹³ But before doing this, one must consider the particular methodological difficulties and concerns involved in determining UU views in this or any other area of study.

METHODOLOGY

UUs take great pride in the fact that their faith is “creedless.” Insofar as UUism neither promotes an “official” list of answers to major theological and philosophical questions nor recognizes any book or ecclesiastical official(s) as being the final authority on religious questions, it is without a creed. In UUism, the answers to such questions are determined by the individual. This accounts for the extremely wide range of beliefs — often mutually exclusive — found under the UU designation.

Despite this great diversity in theological particulars, there are indeed some underlying commitments, ideals, and values shared by all UUs. Their primary allegiances are not to specific theological assertions, but to commonly held humanistic values and an open forum for individual religious searching and “meaning-making.”¹⁴ In general, the emphasis in UUism is on the process of belief formation, not the beliefs themselves.

The nature of these shared commitments is best articulated in the UUA Principles and Purposes,¹⁵ which were adopted in 1985. This is the closest thing that UUs have to a creed,

and along with the “six sources,”¹⁶ they constitute the most authoritative articles in all of contemporary UUism. These must be our starting point for understanding UU belief, but because they are so minimal, they cannot be our last if we are to truly understand UU thought. The accompanying box below offers a hierarchy of authority (moving from more to less authoritative) for contemporary UUism according to two different categories: publications and persons.¹⁷ This list gives us at least a start in helping to understand this group.¹⁸

UU DOCTRINE OF HUMANITY

Given the fact that the Principles and Purposes and the “six sources” serve as the most authoritative documents in all of UUism, they will be used as the starting point for this discussion of UU views on the origin, nature, and destiny of humanity. The principles are:

“We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote: The inherent worth and dignity of every person; Justice, equity and compassion in human relations; Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations; A free and responsible search for truth and meaning; The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large; The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all; Re-

spect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

The living tradition we share draws from many sources: Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life; Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love; Wisdom from the world’s religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life; Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God’s love by loving our neighbors as ourselves; Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit; Spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

Grateful for the religious pluralism which enriches and ennobles our faith, we are inspired to deepen our understanding and expand our vision. As free congregations we enter into this covenant, promising to one another our mutual trust and support.”²⁰

SOURCES OF CONTEMPORARY UU THOUGHT

Publications:

1. Principles and Purposes; “six sources”
2. *UU Pocket Guide* — published by UUA
3. UUA Pamphlets; John Sias’ *100 Questions*¹⁹
4. *UU World* (formerly *The World*) magazine and other official UUA publications (including on-line information and articles)
5. Beacon Press publications on UUism — owned by UUA
6. Skinner House Publications — affiliated publisher of UU material

Persons:

1. President of the UUA, currently Rev. William Sinkford
2. National UUA Officials/Spokespersons
3. “Star” Clergy; Prolific UU authors; UU “saints” (Channing, Emerson, etc.); Professors or administrators at Starr King and Meadville-Lombard, UU ministerial-training schools
4. Regular UU clergy
5. UU lay persons
6. Non-UU religious liberals

HUMAN ORIGINS

Although the Principles and Sources do not explicitly address the question of human origins, they hint at the most commonly held opinion in UU circles: that we are the result of evolution.²¹ In case there is any doubt, numerous quotes in other UU sources verify this conclusion:

"[Question:] Do you believe in the concept of evolution? [Answer:] Yes."²²

"Unitarian Universalism is cooperation with a universe that created us."²³

"For we are the earth speaking — the universe grown conscious of itself."²⁴

"Similarly, we are part of the whole universe. We were before we took our present form; we always will be."²⁵

"Our thoughts are the products of millions upon millions of years of evolution, and our religious myths have emerged from within the stream of human consciousness just as the various species of animals have emerged from within the life stream."²⁶

"It is sometimes said that we are born as strangers into the world and that we leave it when we die. But in all probability we do not come into the world at all. Rather, we come out of it, in the same way that a leaf comes out of a tree or a baby from its mother's body. We emerge from deep within its range of possibilities, and when we die we do not so much stop living as take on a different form."²⁷

"I find wondrous a fact that most people seem to take for granted — that the universe has evolved in such a way as to try to understand itself," Helen Berg wrote in *The World* in 1996. "Humans are not exotic beings visiting the universe on a research project but exquisite systems of the same elementary particles that make up all the systems of the universe," she further stated.²⁸

Because UUism is a creedless faith and houses many "Christians"²⁹ and

theists, there are most likely some within its ranks who do believe that God is guiding the evolutionary process and is ultimately responsible for our creation. However, UUs mostly consider natural selection to be the mechanism of the evolutionary process.

HUMAN NATURE

The fact that an affirmation of the worth and dignity of the human is the first item in the Principles and Sources indicates the centrality of the human subject in UU thought. This claim is reaffirmed in many of the other principles and sources. No one can argue that almost all of the other principles and sources are just footnotes to this first one, in that it serves as the presupposition for each. It is only because every human has inherent worth and dignity that UUs can promote and affirm the other goals and sources.

All UU values are derivative of the prime value of human-ness. Beginning with this principle, here are what appear to be the core UU affirmations about human nature and some of their logical corollaries.

"We believe in the worth and dignity of each human being. All people on earth have an equal claim to life, liberty, and justice; no idea, ideal, or philosophy is superior to a single human life."³⁰

"Unitarian Universalism is a fierce belief in the way of freedom and reverence for the sacred dignity of each individual."³¹

"I agree with Protagoras that 'the human is the measure of all things' and with Sophocles that of all the many wonders of the world there is 'none so wonderful as the human,'" Kenneth W. Phifer wrote in *The Faith of a Humanist*. "I see with Shakespeare what a piece of work is the human being," Phifer also noted.³²

In answering the survey question, "What things should your congregation be most intent on helping children learn?" 51.8% answered, "A sense of their inherent worth, self-respect."³³

In fact, because we cannot be sure of the existence of any being greater than the human (such as God), it is the individual human subject that is the locus of religious authority:

"We believe in the authority of reason and conscience. The ultimate arbiter in religion is not a church, a document, or an official, but the personal choice and decision of the individual."³⁴

"Each individual congregant must, of course, determine for him or herself what rings true. It is not required that people agree with all that is said."³⁵

"Because we have learned by experience that, in religion, the truth that matters above all, is not that which is expressed in a traditional holy book, nor in creeds or doctrines; rather, it is the truth that emerges in the minds and hearts of each living individual in community, as they share in a lifelong search for truth and meaning."³⁶

"We believe that personal experience, conscience, and reason should be the final authorities in religion. In the end religious authority lies not in a book, person, or institution, but in ourselves. We put religious insights to the tests of our hearts and minds."³⁷

"The primary source of authority in religious matters, we believe, is not the Bible or the Koran, not official doctrine or ecclesiastical officials, but each individual in conversation with tradition and in community with others. You know better than I what religious affirmations square with your personal insights and experience."³⁸

Even those UU "Christians" who criticize this state of affairs cannot deny the following assertion:

"[Ralph Waldo Emerson] essentially shifted the authority for truth from Jesus Christ to the sovereignty of the self. Once that transformation is accomplished in the believer's heart, the rest of

our history is merely footnote. ... In the Emersonian epistemology, each individual person is invited to tailor-make a designer religion out of one's own experience, needs, and taste."³⁹

UUism teaches that man is not inherently sinful, but is born with a capacity for great good (or evil), possessing the power to direct history and change the world for the better.

"We have the power within ourselves to realize the best we are capable of as human beings."⁴⁰

"There is a unique spark of divinity in each of us by virtue of our human endowment; we need only try to find it."⁴¹

"A universal of humanism is the optimistic belief that human beings can perform saving acts, that indeed only we can."⁴²

"Not only do we have a hopeful and optimistic attitude about life, we believe strongly that humans have great potential to recognize right, correct wrongs, find solutions and make this a better world."⁴³

"...our theological starting (and ending) place **will always be** our bedrock spiritual confidence that persons come to us PRECIOUS AND POTENTIAL in their essential nobility and goodness."⁴⁴

The "or evil" was placed in parentheses above because on rare occasions UUs do admit to the reality of human evil, at times even speaking about it in strong language:

"The problem is that even as a theology based upon evil and sinfulness tends to stint on goodness, one based upon goodness may be equally obtuse when it comes to evil and sin. Too much mercy can squeeze out justice; and too much attention to our better nature can blind us to the awesome human capacity for evil."⁴⁵

"I am a liberal who has a deep belief in our natural sinfulness," UU leader F. Forrester Church said in a 1990 interview. "I don't mean that we are born evil, I just believe we are

born capable of an enormous amount of rationalization that allows us to do evil things while we think we are doing good things."⁴⁶

However, the overall tenor of their discourse about human nature is generally optimistic. Even though they may acknowledge human "weakness" or "frailty" — UUs rarely use the word "sin" — UUs operate with the assumption that proper education and nurturing can overcome this problem:

"Rather than feel bound by human weaknesses and frailties, we emphasize human strengths. We believe people have the strength, power and intelligence to make good things happen. You might call it a 'can do' religion."⁴⁷

"There is a belief in the devastating power of evil; and a belief that all people can do good if their innate capacity for goodness is well nurtured and guided."⁴⁸

"There is nobility in everyone, even if it does require a little more recognition and support to bring it out in some people than in others."⁴⁹

"What most distinguishes Unitarian Universalism from orthodox Jewish and Christian traditions is that WHEN IT COMES TO HUMAN PERSONS AND THEIR BEHAVIORS, WE SEE THE GLASS AS AT LEAST HALF FULL (RATHER THAN MORE THAN HALF EMPTY AS PURITANICAL THINKERS DO)."⁵⁰

UUism maintains that we are finite beings limited in knowledge, power, perspective, and time.

"No matter how spiritually astute we may be, we are limited, like the blind persons with the elephant, by who we are, by where we are standing and by what our perspectives are and can be. None of us has, or ever will have, the total picture."⁵¹

"Among other things, this theology suggests that we must acknowledge the partial nature of our understanding; respect in-

sights that differ from our own; and not only defend the rights of others to believe their own truths so long as they do not deny us the same privilege, but also credit them with a measure of truth (with a small *t*) even though it may conflict with the truth that we embrace."⁵²

This last statement demonstrates that when one holds both affirmation number one (and the corollary that the individual is the locus of authority) with its radical subject-centered epistemology, and affirmation number three, with its major epistemological limits, then a kind of inclusive pluralism (which we find in UUism) is inevitable. If, as we quoted above "no idea, ideal, or philosophy is superior to a single human life" then certainly none of our limited, individual, "small *t*" truths is worth contending for.

Accordingly, UUs believe we are relational beings that thrive in community.

"We believe in the importance of a religious community. Peers confirm and validate experience, and provide a critical platform, as well as a network of mutual support."⁵³

"Although individual religious and political philosophies differ widely, our congregations have one thing in common: they exist because we need one another. As religious liberals, we sometimes feel ourselves to be a misunderstood minority, and our church home — whatever shape it takes — gives us the courage to be more fully ourselves than we might be without it. A sense of community is part of the vital support system we all need in order to live whole, productive, satisfying lives."⁵⁴

Further taught by UUs is that we are spiritually⁵⁵ inclined beings with religious and "meaning-making" impulses, the source of religious thought.

"In a Unitarian Universalist church, revelation is an ongoing

process; each of us is a potential harbinger of meaning."⁵⁶

"For us there is no closed revelation. We are all prophets and seers and seekers after wisdom. Within our holy gatherings, we find the ways to peace and justice and love."⁵⁷

"As we learn to walk gently upon this planet, we create a true religion. ...that religion is found full within our human condition, both within us as individuals, and among us as community."⁵⁸

"Religion is a human enterprise. It is the human race that has created religions out of that unique self-awareness that drives us to ask questions about our origins and our destiny. It is the human race that has invented religious communities in order to share the burden of our aloneness as individuals."⁵⁹

"The adventure of religion is not in the discovery of Eternal Truth or Absolute Meaning, arenas in which human beings do not and cannot deal, but in our individual and communal search for and creation of meanings and values that dignify and enhance life."⁶⁰

"We are the force that creates and destroys even the gods we worship."⁶¹

"Theology is done by humans for humans. We're the ones who construct the God-images. Our job now is to give those images meaning for our time."⁶²

"I find it exhilarating to believe that the perfection we have poured into the figure of Jesus has come from the minds of human beings, from human imagination, and ethical aspiration," John G. MacKinnon wrote in *Unitarian Universalist Views of Jesus*. MacKinnon further stated, "My faith is that it will grow better as human experience is added to it. I'm for a better and better Jesus, born from the aspiring heart of humanity."⁶³

"[I] believe that a sense of the sacred ... is built into us, virtually imprinted in our genetic code, as part and parcel of our evolutionary devel-

opment as humans," UUA official and minister Khoren Arisian has said.⁶⁴

HUMAN DESTINY

The Principles and Sources really do not address the issue of what happens to a person after death, but according to UU minister John Sias, "very few UUs believe in a continuing individualized existence after physical death."⁶⁵ However, they do seem to believe that we are eternal in two rather qualified senses:⁶⁶

"We believe immortality manifests itself in the lives of those we affect during our lifetime and in the legacy we leave when we die."⁶⁷

"Immortality is found in the examples we set and the work we do."⁶⁸

UUism also argues that we are eternal in the sense that we, as matter, simply take on another material form after death and continue as part of the earth.

"We emerge from deep within [the earth's] range of possibilities, and when we die we do not so much stop living as take on a different form. Then death — the return to earth — becomes release from aloneness, shelter from responsibility, and return to continuity and union, from which we emerged for a brief time."⁶⁹

"Similarly, we are part of the whole universe. We were before we took our present form; we always will be."⁷⁰

A BIBLICAL RESPONSE

Human Origins: The biblical response to the UU position is simple. We are not the products of impersonal forces, but are created by God in His image (Genesis 1:26-27; 5:1; 9:6; 1 Corinthians 11:7; James 3:9). Most all of UUism's difficulties stem from this fundamentally different starting point.

Human Nature: When we turn our attention to UU statements about human nature, we see that in some respects UUism and biblical Christian-

ity don't appear that far apart. However, upon closer inspection we discover that they are actually miles away from each other. The difference lies not necessarily in what is affirmed — assuming the appropriate nuances and qualifications — but on what grounds such statements can be affirmed.

Like UUism, Christianity affirms that human beings have worth and dignity. For Christians, however, this is because we are created by God in His image, which means that despite the corruption of the Fall, all of us bear a limited, though defaced degree of God's rational, moral, spiritual, and social likeness.⁷¹ In addition, we are valuable because we are potential recipients of the grace and renewal of God, capable of a loving and intimate relationship with God Himself. That is, we are not necessarily valuable by virtue of our inherited nature, but because of what we once were and still can become by the grace of God. The important question, however, is whether or not UUism's naturalistic worldview permits such a lofty evaluation of humanity. James Sire probes this question:

"[Does] naturalism give an adequate reason for us to consider ourselves valuable? Unique, maybe. But gorillas are unique. So is every category of nature. Value was the first troublesome issue. Could a being thrown up by chance be worthy?"⁷²

Morality and human freedom were also subject to questioning:

"Second, could a being whose origins were so 'iffy' trust his or her own capacity to know? ... If consciousness is an epiphenomenon of matter, perhaps the appearance of human freedom which lays the basis for morality is an epiphenomenon of either chance or inexorable law. Perhaps chance or the nature of things only built into me the 'feeling' that I am free but actually I am not."⁷³

The scientific determinism of a closed naturalistic system swallows up notions of love, meaning, freedom, personality, etc., as simply the func-

tions of inexorable and impersonal laws of the universe. All the sacred cows of the UU understanding of humanity fall by the wayside.

Like UUism, Christianity affirms that human beings do have the potential to do great good (moral likeness), but apart from the renewal and restoration of the regenerating grace of God, this ability is severely impaired by a profound innate sinfulness, our hearts by nature being bent away from the love, holiness, and goodness of God and toward the promotion of self. Even the limited good we do prior to regeneration is "as filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6) because it is tainted by pride and self-curvature, instead of being done to glorify God.

Like UUism, Christianity agrees that humans are finite, limited beings. But, it adds to this the further recognition that God is not. If we were dependent upon reason alone to make our way to God, our human limitations (not to mention our sin) would make meaningful knowledge of God impossible. However, the good news is that God has not left Himself without witness. He has taken the initiative to reveal Himself to us, first, in the handiwork of His creation (Psalm 19:1-2; Acts 14:17; Romans 1:19-20),⁷⁴ second, in His work and words for the nation of Israel, and third, and most brilliantly in His Son Jesus, in whom full human nature and eternal deity were united. We have not been left to seek after God by our own limited powers. In His other-directed love, God takes the initiative and makes overtures toward us.

Like UUism, Christianity affirms that we are relational beings who thrive in community. Here again we turn to the *imago dei* for an explanation of this facet of humanity. It is at this juncture that we see that the doctrine of the Trinity, though frequently scoffed at by those outside of Christianity, is actually one of the most effective apologetic resources Christians have. Even the most isolated introvert will attest to the desire to be loved, understood, and have meaningful relationships with others. What can better account for this universal human desire than the fact that we are created in the social

likeness of a Triune God, in whom from everlasting to everlasting there is an interpenetration of three persons in a reciprocal relationship of other-directed, perfect love?

Finally, like UUism, Christianity affirms that we are spiritually inclined beings who are driven to seek answers to the larger religious questions of meaning and purpose. Yet, we return to the *imago dei*, this time focusing on the spiritual likeness, for making sense of this inclination. Christians affirm that our personhood consists of more than a mere material body, that as humans created in the image of a God who is spirit, there is a spiritual dimension to our being. We ask and seek answers to spiritual questions because our soul or spirit are necessary components of who we are as persons.

Human Destiny: The biblical understanding on this matter differs significantly from the opinion of the majority of UUs, who either deny conscious personal existence beyond death altogether, or remain agnostic about the prospect. The biblical position follows necessarily from the *imago dei*, specifically that part of the doctrine which says we are beings composed of a body and a soul (or spirit), the latter which survives physical death. Jesus and the apostles clearly taught that after death we will continue in conscious personal existence either forever *with* God (Matthew 5:12; 6:20; 8:11; 18:34; 19:21, 23, 29; 25:46; Mark 10:21, 30; Luke 6:23; 16:9; 18:30) or forever *separated from* God (Matthew 5:22, 30; 10:28; 23:33; 25:41, 46; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5).

SUMMARY

One of the primary measures of any worldview or religious system is its explanatory power: its ability to make sense of the data of human experience in a coherent and satisfying fashion. Ironically, at the end of the day, it is the biblical worldview and not the UU's naturalistic perspective that best explains fundamental UU affirmations concerning human nature.⁷⁵ A biblical worldview holds in place much of what UUs believe about human nature — that we are valuable, capable of moral good, spiritually inclined,

capable of love and meaningful relationships — while the UUs are stuck in the closed box⁷⁶ of deterministic naturalism which swallows up all human value, freedom, and meaning. In pledging their fidelity to naturalism, they forgo all epistemic rights to speak meaningfully about human value, and even personality itself, as anything more than processes of the brain. All their moral intuitions, their freedom, are simply illusions.

If Christianity is the more hopeful of the two systems and makes better sense of the data of human experience, why do UUs cling so tenaciously to naturalism? There are two major reasons.

One is because naturalism, based on scientific investigation, scholarship, and "facts," gives the impression of being honest, objective, respectable, and coherent. There are many options available to the Christian that neither neglect the scientific data nor compromise the core teachings of the Genesis account. One need not decide between Christianity and science.

The other reason, and why many UUs cling to naturalism despite the logical trouble it causes for their understanding of humanity,⁷⁷ is that they cannot adopt a Christian worldview unless they also adopt the entire framework within which, and only within which, that understanding can be sustained. And, the starting point for any Christian theology is the affirmation that God is God and we are not; that He is Creator and we are creature; that He is Lord and we are servant; that He is Father and we are child; that He is giver and we are recipient; that He is lover and we are loved. God is the first and the last and is at the center of it all, not us. This admission is simply unfathomable to a group that has spent the last century placing the human subject at the center and ridding itself of such a meddling God who demands — and deserves — our reverence, submission, trust, love, and praise. However much UUs may want all the "existential goodies" entailed in the Christian doctrine of humanity, in the end they are simply not worth the cost of abdicating the throne of the

kingdom of self. Individual autonomy is just too precious to them.

Endnotes:

1. Hereafter I will use the following abbreviations: Unitarian Universalist — UU; Unitarian Universalists — UUs; Unitarian Universalism — UUism; Unitarian Universalist Association — UUA.

2. Gary Leazer, "Unitarian Universalist Association," *CIS Interfaith Report*, Vol. 6, no. 4, June 2001, pg. 3.

3. *Ibid.*; Mark W. Harris, *Unitarian Universalist Origins: Our Historic Faith*. Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1998, pamphlet; John A. Buehrens and Forrest Church, *A Chosen Faith: An Introduction to Unitarian Universalism*, revised edition. Boston: Beacon Press, 1998, pg. 215; Jack Mendelsohn, *Meet the Unitarian Universalists*. Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1997, pg. 14.

4. *Unitarian Universalist Origins*, op. cit.; *Meet the Unitarian Universalists*, op. cit., pg. 14.

5. *Ibid.*; Andreas Reif, *Unitarian-Universalist Association*. Exeter, N.H.: Sound Doctrine Ministries, 1989, pg. 3.; *A Chosen Faith: An Introduction to Unitarian Universalism*, op. cit., pg. 214.

6. *A Chosen Faith: An Introduction to Unitarian Universalism*, op. cit., pg. 214.

7. *Meet the Unitarian Universalists*, op. cit., pg. 14.; *Unitarian Universalist Origins*, op. cit.

8. *Unitarian Universalist Origins*, op. cit.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Meet the Unitarian Universalists*, op. cit., pg. 14.

11. *Ibid.*, pg. 15; *Unitarian Universalist Origins*, op. cit.

12. *Meet the Unitarian Universalists*, op. cit., pg. 15.

13. UUs, of course, would not refer to any of their beliefs or values as doctrines because for them such language smacks of the creedalism they so detest. But, for the purposes of this article, this terminology is quite useful as my focus is on those questions about humanity usually included under the heading of "doctrine of humanity" (or "of man") in systematic theologies and questions concerning the origin, nature, and destiny of human persons.

14. As we will see in the Principles below, in some sense UUist core values are simply the ideals of American democracy in religious garb.

15. My designation of UUA leaflet.

16. *Ibid.*

17. The key word here is contemporary. UUism is a self-professed "living tradition" which is always changing and adapting with the times. Therefore, unlike many historical faiths that focus attention and place supreme emphasis on past

historical events, UUs are more likely to privilege that which is recent, new, and "progressive."

18. However, it cannot be reiterated enough that when studying UUism one must always keep in mind that for them the individual is the final religious authority, and provided that a person subscribes to the short list of affirmations in the Principles and Purposes, they can believe just about anything they want within the parameters of the UU family.

19. Though this is not produced by the UUA, I place it on par with official UUA pamphlets because many UUs refer non-UUs to it as a good source of information and because hard copies of this document (also available on-line) are frequently distributed to visitors by local UU congregations.

20. Principles and Purposes. Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, n.d.

21. Source five tells us that UUs "heed the results of science" and principle seven and source six allude to what they believe to be one those results — the understanding that we are part of the "interdependent web of all existence" or the "sacred circle of life."

22. John Sias, *100 Questions that Non-Members Ask About Unitarian Universalism*. Nashua, N.H.: Unitarian Universalist Church, 1994, pg. 6.

23. *A Chosen Faith: An Introduction to Unitarian Universalism*, op. cit., pg. 77. Here, former UUA President John A. Buehrens is quoting UU layperson Ed Schempp.

24. Paul N. Carnes, "Affirmation," in *Death and Immortality: Unitarian Universalist Views*, ed. Jane Rzepka. Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, n.d., pg. 8.

25. Carl Seaburg, "Death as Part of the Journey," in *Death and Immortality: Unitarian Universalist Views*, op. cit., pg. 12.

26. Edward T. Atkinson, "The Myths Given New Life," in *Unitarian Universalist Views of the Bible*, ed. Daniel G. Higgins. Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, n.d., pg. 4.

27. Barbara Hollerorth, "Separation," in *Death and Immortality: Unitarian Universalist Views*, op. cit., pg. 4.

28. Helen M. Berg, "The Cosmic Significance of Humans," *The World*, Vol. 10, no. 6, November-December 1996, pg. 22.

29. I use the designation Christian only because this is how they refer to themselves. Most all of UU "Christians" are only so in a very generic sense and do not adhere to doctrines such as the deity of Christ, the Trinity, etc., defined in a biblical sense, though there do seem to be a scattered few who may.

30. David O. Rankin, "Our Beliefs," *The Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide*, revised edition, ed. Harry B. Scholefield. Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1988,

pg. 9.

31. Buehrens, "The Known and Unknown," in *A Chosen Faith: An Introduction to Unitarian Universalism*, op. cit., pg. 77. Buehrens is again quoting Ed Schempp.

32. Kenneth W. Phifer, *The Faith of a Humanist*. Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, n.d.

33. *The 1997 Unitarian Universalism Needs and Aspirations Survey*. Document available at: <http://www.uua.org/promise/results.html>. This was the most popular response of 8,118 UU members who responded to this survey.

34. "Our Beliefs," op. cit., pg. 9.

35. Christopher Gist Raible, "Our Ways of Worship," in *The Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide*, op. cit., pg. 36.

36. Alex Crane, "From the Minister's Study: Samplings of Newsletter Columns by UU Ministers." Document available at: <http://www.uua.org/CONG/column99.html>.

37. Marta Flanagan, *We are Unitarian Universalists*. Document available at: <http://www.uua.org/aboutuu/weare.html>.

38. William F. Schulz, Foreword to *Our Chosen Faith: An Introduction to Unitarian Universalism*, John A. Buehrens and F. Forrester Church. Boston: Beacon Press, 1989, pg. x. Schulz was the UUA President at the time this book was published.

39. Duke T. Gray, "Letter to the Christians," *Unitarian Universalist Christian*, Vol. 47, nos. 3-4, Fall-Winter 1992, pg. 43.

40. Sarah Oelberg, *The Faith of a Unitarian Universalist Humanist*. Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 2000, pamphlet.

41. *Ibid.*

42. Brian Eslinger, "Why I Am a Humanist I," *The World*, Vol. 11, no. 6, November-December 1997, pg. 17.

43. *100 Questions that Non-Members Ask About Unitarian Universalism*, op. cit., pg. 11.

44. Scott Alexander, "*Sin*: That *Really Little* Word that Makes Unitarian Universalists *Big Time* Uncomfortable." Document available at: <http://www.rruc.org/sermon99.html>. This is a sermon Rev. Alexander delivered at River Road Unitarian Church on Sunday, Feb. 4, 2001. Bold and upper case in original.

45. Forrest Church, "Deeds Not Creeds," in *A Chosen Faith: An Introduction to Unitarian Universalism*, op. cit., pg. 43.


46. "Interview: F. Forrester Church," *The World*, Vol. 5, no. 1, January-February 1991, pg. 38. This article is a reprint from *The Door*, July-August 1990. At some point in the 1990s, F. Forrester Church changed his name to Forrest Church.

47. *100 Questions that Non-Members Ask About Unitarian Universalism*, op. cit., pg. 11.

48. "Our Beliefs," op. cit., pg. 7.

49. "The Cosmic Significance of Humans," op. cit., pg. 22.

50. "Sin: That *Really Little* Word that Makes Unitarian Universalists *Big Time* Uncomfortable," op. cit., upper case in original.
51. Tom Owen-Toole, "Truth is One, the Wise Call it by Many Names: Our UU Commitment to Religious Pluralism." Document available at: http://www.firstuusandiego.org/public/sermons/sermon_text/2001-01-28-text.htm. This is a sermon delivered by Rev. Owen-Toole at First Unitarian Church of San Diego on Jan. 28, 2001.
52. Forrest Church, "The Cathedral of the World," in *A Chosen Faith: An Introduction to Unitarian Universalism*, op. cit., pg. 87.
53. "Our Beliefs," op. cit., pg. 9.
54. Joan Goodwin, "Our Caring Communities," in *The Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide*, op. cit., pp. 11-12.
55. Though "spirit" and "spirituality" are current buzzwords in UUism, there is little consensus regarding what the terms mean. Most of the discussions I have read are vague, ambiguous, and unsophisticated. Perhaps this is because they realize that they simply can't smuggle a soul or spirit into a worldview informed by scientific materialism.
56. Forrest Church, Introduction to *A Chosen Faith: An Introduction to Unitarian Universalism*, op. cit., pg. xxi.
57. James Ishmael Ford, "On Being a Unitarian Universalist: Is it a Religion?" Document available at: <http://www.vuu.org/jford/SS980201.htm>. This sermon was given at Valley Unitarian Universalist Church in Chandler, Ariz., on Feb. 1, 1998.
58. Ibid.
59. *The Faith of a Humanist*, op. cit.
60. Ibid.
61. "Affirmation," op. cit., pg. 8.
62. Barbara Stevens, "Many Images of God," *The World*, Vol. 7, no. 6, November-December 1993, pg. 20.
63. John G. MacKinnon, in *Unitarian Universalist Views of Jesus*, ed. Daniel G. Higgins. Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, n.d., pamphlet.
64. Khoren Arisian cited by Warren R. Ross in "The Marginalized Majority: UU Humanism in the 1990s," *The World*, Vol. 10, no. 6, November-December 1996, pg. 19. Ellipsis in original.
65. *100 Questions that Non-Members Ask About Unitarian Universalism*, op. cit., pg. 5.
66. Admittedly, some UUs are agnostic about the prospects of a personal afterlife, and at least leave room for such a possibility, though by no means do they affirm it. But, overall, these responses (especially the first) are the most representative of typical UU thought.
67. *100 Questions that Non-Members Ask About Unitarian Universalism*, op. cit., pg. 6.
68. *The Faith of a Unitarian Universalist Humanist*, op. cit., pamphlet.
69. "Separation," op. cit., pg. 4.
70. "Death as Part of the Journey," op. cit., pg. 12.
71. Although every aspect of the *imago dei* has been defaced in natural man, the spiritual image has been especially ravaged.
72. James Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A*

- Basic Worldview Catalog*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1997, pg. 72.
73. Ibid., pg. 73.
74. This revelation alone being sufficient for making all people accountable for knowing God exists.
75. I say this is ironic because the UUs pride themselves in being a religion founded on reason. It is they who frequently denounce Christians as irrational and anti-intellectual. Perhaps some Christians do have anti-intellectual leanings and fail to love God with all their mind as well as with all their heart, soul, and strength. But, it simply does not follow that because some (or many) Christians do not have good reasons for their Christian beliefs that such reasons do not exist. Many UUs have mistaken a criticism of certain individuals for a criticism of the belief system itself.
76. Scientific naturalism holds that humans, as mere matter, are simply part of an unbroken chain of cause and effect. It is a closed box because there it allows no room for supernatural intervention or human freedom.
77. Here I tread cautiously because I have ventured into the realm of speculating about the motivations and intentions of other persons. But, I believe biblical teachings concerning the general orientation of the human heart allow me such latitude. I am not "picking on" UUs as such, but including them as equally a part of the fallen human race. This criticism is not peculiar to UUs, but of human waywardness in general. 

HERMENEUTICS

(continued from page 1)

Scripture. ... the vocabulary of the cults is not the vocabulary of the Bible by definition. ... The cults capitalize on the almost total inability of the average Christian to understand the subtle art of redefinition in the realm of Biblical theology."⁴

If language means anything, it can't mean *just* anything. Misusing the Bible the way Arnott does so radically defines biblical words that it is catastrophic for the Church. Spiritual deconstructionists get pulled into doctrinal quicksand.

A linguistic and contextual study of both the Hebrew and Greek words for prophecy show that Arnott is creating theology from his distorted imagina-

tion. This is another case of "Whatever!"

Prophecy in the Bible always employs intelligible speech. Any rare and peripheral action accompanying it is first, unique; second, commanded by God in direct revelation; and third, explained by that speech.⁵ In defining biblical prophecy we do not have to make up interpretations. The immediate or larger context is always self-evident.

We must remember that the Apostle Paul, under inspiration, informs us that true prophets are never out of control, but speak to edify, exhort, and comfort others (1 Corinthians 14:31-33, 37-40). Edification and exhortation are always intelligible.

It is mind-boggling to see the endorsement of Arnott's book by Four-square pastor Jack Hayford:

"John Arnott clearly is seeking to provide a biblical soundness and a shepherdly care amid the mix of both the familiar and unfamiliar evidences of God's working at Toronto Airport Vineyard."⁶

Arnott's twisted explanation is not biblical. The "unfamiliar" and bizarre is rationalized and smuggled in by hanging a biblical term on it.

At times there is an appeal to and a misuse of John 21:30: "Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book." These other signs might be contained in the other Gospel records: Matthew, Mark, and Luke. If they are not, there is still no reason to believe that out-of-control people are a sign of Jesus at work. There is no reason to believe the other signs are different in nature and character than those

recorded in the Gospels.

The New Yorker magazine recently ran a cartoon and asked readers to send in captions.⁷ The submissions were creative and funny and the result benign. There are some who seem to think that Scripture can be treated in just the same way as we assign it meaning that comes to mind.

One major problem that goes virtually undetected is the confusion between hermeneutics (the art and science of biblical interpretation) and application. Interpretation is not application. Faulty interpretation will always lead to improper application.

There is a so-called “new hermeneutic” — an outgrowth of the neo-orthodoxy of Karl Barth and Rudolph Bultmann — that has tried to make application synonymous with interpretation. Brian Shealy dealt with this issue when he wrote that “failure to isolate application from hermeneutics creates a man-centered rather than a God-centered interpretation of the Bible.”⁸

THINK FIRST ABOUT THE URGENCY

It is said of Theodore Herzl, the father of modern Zionism, that a “Terrible sense of urgency raged in him ... No obstacle could daunt him. He never slackened, never stopped until his life stopped.”⁹ This was all for a political and secular cause. How urgent are we for an eternal cause and the cause of truth?

Jesus said of His words, “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him — the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day” (John 12:48). Those who miss or misinterpret the words and commands of Christ do so at their eternal peril.

Almost everyone employs Bible interpretation and hermeneutics in one way or another at times. People may do it well or do it poorly, but they do it. Even refusing to do it is a hermeneutic of sorts.

A humorous story is told of an elderly woman who returned home after evening services to find an

intruder. As the burglar was racing out with all her valuables, she began to scream, “Acts 2:38! Acts 2:38!” The burglar stopped in his tracks and held up his hands. The old woman quickly called the police. On arrival the policeman asked the man why he had given up. The thief responded, “She said she had an ax and two 38’s!” Proper understanding of words does make a difference.

DISCERNMENT OR DEATH

In that story it all ends well, but cultic Scripture-twisting often ends in disaster such as that seen at Jonestown, Waco, or in the Heaven’s Gate cult.¹⁰

Author and counselor Paul R. Martin states:

“Compared to other social or medical problems, the havoc created by destructive cultism (a type of ‘brainwashing’) is the most under-studied, neglected and ignored mental health and social problem in the world. (The most conservative estimates based on a number of surveys are that 185,000 Americans alone join a destructive cult each year. Of those 185,000 at least 25% will suffer enduring irreversible harm that will affect their ability to function adequately in the emotional, social, family, and occupational domains.) The rate of numbers of people joining destructive cults in other countries equals or exceeds the rates observed in the United States.”¹¹

Cults and aberrational teachers start with flawed hermeneutics. It matters whether a wife believes her Christian husband has a sin problem with his angry outbursts or if he is possessed by a demon of anger. Sin can be repented of and abandoned, and new ways of responding biblically can be worked on through God’s grace, prayer, and daily discipline. If she believes it is a demon — even though anger is called a sin in the Bible and never a demon — she will fall prey to the wild imaginings and quirky panaceas of some self-proclaimed exorcist.

In Jon Land’s mystery novel, *A Walk in the Darkness*, set in Israel, Palestin-

ian detective Ben Kamel goes to Jericho to seek assistance from Father Mike, a Roman Catholic priest. The murder of a number of archaeologists has stunned the world and there is suspicion that a missing scroll is the reason for the crime. The scroll may contain information to disprove the resurrection of Christ. Ben questions Father Mike and describes the ramifications for the Church if such a scroll is discovered. At one point the priest says, “The Church *is* Christ. You can’t separate them.” Land, in this novel, is doing hermeneutics, even though he may not realize it or agree with his character’s conclusion. Is the Church Christ? Is Christ the Church? Is the Church then what I need for salvation or is it Christ? What far-ranging implications there are in that statement and in the answers I give.

HERMENEUTICS AND HISTORY

There is a strange and self-constructed, self-serving hermeneutic that allows the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches to practice homosexuality in the name of God. Its doors are opened to the unrepentant, unchanged, “lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered community around the world.” It teaches:

“Homosexuality is regarded as neither a sin nor an illness, but as one part of oneself that one neither can nor should try to change. As God creates some people heterosexual, others are created homosexual. The Bible does not condemn ‘loving, responsible homosexual relationships,’ and therefore these relationships should be encouraged, affirmed, and celebrated.”¹²

Any honest reading of Romans 1 would not leave one with the impression that God tolerates this kind of sin.

The incredible social reforms of Lord Shaftesbury (1801-1885) in England grew out of his moderate Calvinism and premillennial hermeneutics.¹³ The great English political leader Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881) jeopardized his political career push-

ing forward ideas about the world's debt to the Jews based on his understanding of the Hebrew roots of Christianity.¹⁴

The Puritans labored and lobbied all through England and were the driving force and the root movement for the founding of a Jewish state based on their interpretation of Romans 11.¹⁵ Hermeneutics has not only affected individuals and churches, but has changed nations.

Jesuit and paleontologist Teilhard de Chardin practiced hermeneutics when he stated that "Evolution is a light illuminating all facts, a curve that all lines must follow."¹⁶

A certain brand of hermeneutics misled many and unleashed horror and death in South Uganda on March 17, 2000, as the members of the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments were incinerated in their church by gas-fed flames. Their leaders had lured them into the building with wild claims and prophecies, then nailed the windows and doors shut before fleeing with their wealth. "Afterward, local police guessed that 530 people died in the fire. The dead were hard to count, since ashes were all that was left of many bodies. Within days, police found some four hundred more corpses buried in pits at Kanungu and other sect compounds. The signs were that they'd been stabbed, strangled, or poisoned in the weeks before the fire, though neighbors had heard nothing, no cries of resistance."¹⁷ We could label this the "hermeneutics of horror."

STOP—LOOK—LISTEN!

Observing warning signs and flashing lights at a railroad intersection is good advice. The Bible offers such help. The Apostle Peter warned that "the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, *which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures*" (2 Peter 3:15-16).

Adam Clarke elaborates on Peter's use of the word *twist*:

"the verb ... which the apostle uses here, signifies to *distort*, to *put to the rack*, to *torture*, to *overstretch* and *dislocate the limbs*; and hence the persons here intended are those who proceed according to no fair plan of interpretation, but *force unnatural* and *sophistical meanings* on the word of God."¹⁸

Good hermeneutics could be looked upon as a "fair plan of interpretation."

The Apostle Peter's warning had to do with poor hermeneutics bringing "destruction." Scripture-bending can have devastating and destructive results.

The *Christian News* reported, "Colorado Governor Signs Faith Healing Bill." Governor Bill Owens, in fact, signed a bill into law protecting children from the deadly harm of skewed and faulty hermeneutics. The article stated:

"Colorado Gov. Bill Owens on April 16 signed into law a bill which would make faith healing a crime, under the state's child abuse law, when used in place of medicine for a child in danger of dying, according to The Denver Post. The law was prompted by the illness of Amanda Bates, 13, who died February 5 of complications stemming from untreated diabetes. Her parents, members of General Assembly Church of the First Born, did not believe in medical treatment for their daughter. Since 1974, 13 children of parents who belong to religious sects have died in Colorado from lack of medical care."¹⁹

God only knows the number of Jehovah's Witness children who have suffered neglect and death because of faulty interpretations of Leviticus and the group's erroneous prohibition against blood transfusions. Author Ralph Walter reminds us:

"Even though those who do so may be honest, sincere and have

good intentions, their misuse of the Word is building a faith that is not founded upon the Truth of God's Word. The result is a faith that will fail them when they desperately need the truth to set them free."²⁰

FIZZ, FLUFF, AND FABLES ARE NOT NEW

It is important to know that Scripture-twisting has a long history among heretical groups. David Lindberg informs us:

"This desire to find allegories in Scripture was carried to excess by Origen (185-256) who was likewise associated with Alexandrian thought, and he managed thereby to get rid of anything which could not be harmonized with pagan learning."²¹

It was faulty, subjective, and relativistic hermeneutics that allowed Jane Lead in the 1600s to teach her followers that her church, called the Philadelphia Church, was the last-days remnant Church and would escape the imminent Great Tribulation. This she did by promoting the view that Revelation 3:7-13 applied only to her followers.²²

Sir William Ramsey helped to excavate the Philadelphia region in Asia Minor and shows that Revelation 3:7-13 uniquely applied to the very church Jesus was addressing in the first century. Ramsey observes:

"Philadelphia, therefore, was the keeper of the gateway to the plateau; but the door had now been permanently opened before the Church, and the work of Philadelphia had been to go forth through the door and carry the gospel to the cities of the Phrygian land."²³

People often wonder how the cultist can get so much error out of the same book from which the Orthodox get so much truth. A simple cooking illustration will show us the Apostle Peter's point. If I were to take from the freezer a large batch of frozen breaded shrimp, drop them into a sizzling deep fryer, I could serve a nice meal to the delight of any shrimp

lover. However, if I took the same shrimp and decided to leave them out in the heat for a day and then serve them sprinkled with cockroach powder, I would surely have extremely sick and maybe dead guests.

Same freezer, same shrimp, but different preparation. The cultist takes the same words, the same doctrines, but through neglect, mistreatment, misuse, misinterpretation, and deadly additions, serves an unhealthy brew of error and destructive doctrine. Same book, same words, different preparation. It really is all in the hermeneutics.

AN UNDERSTANDING OF PROPER HERMENEUTICS

Ezra knew the importance of proper biblical interpretation for his fledgling nation as he and others “read distinctly from the book, in the law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them understand the reading” (Nehemiah 8:8).

The Apostle Paul commands us to be “rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). It is obvious from those words that we can *wrongly* divide the Word. Charles Ryrie elaborates on Paul’s clear command, saying, “*handling accurately*. I.e., correctly handling the Word of God, in both analysis and presentation — in contrast to the inane interpretations of false teachers.”²⁴

Faith healer Benny Hinn may boast that “The anointing from above is your source of knowledge. That is how it is possible for you to operate in revelation rather than in education.”²⁵ That may have a nice ring to it, but it is more hype than truth. If it only took “revelation,” Hinn would not make so many goofs, gaffes, contradictions, and false prophecies. His misstatements and embellishments could make it to *Funniest Home Videos*. His wife’s “Holy Ghost enema” discourse made it to national television.²⁶

The Church has all the final revelation it needs in the pages of the Bible (2 Peter 1). The Church also has a wonderful history of a “fair plan of interpretation.” There is a history of conservative, orthodox, and evangeli-

cal hermeneutics that comes out of properly handling the “Apostles’ doctrine” (Acts 2:42).

Any honest student of Church history would have to admit that the historical grammatical method, which gives the author’s intent, is the safe and spiritually healthy method of orthodoxy.

DEFINITIONS, NOT DAFFYNITIONS

The practice of handling Scriptures properly and interpreting the Bible in the context of all other Scriptures goes back to Jesus Himself. We do not find our Lord handling the Word of God in a cavalier fashion. Wilbur Smith elaborates on the fact that hermeneutics is a concept derived first of all from the Bible itself:

“St. Luke, in his record of what has been called by some the most beautiful chapter in all the Bible, the account of the walk of the risen Lord with the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, tells us that Jesus, ‘beginning from Moses, and from all the prophets, interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.’ The word here translated *interpreted* is the Greek word *dihermeneuo*. If we take away the first two letters, the prefix, and give a rough breathing to that initial letter ‘e’ we have exactly the word from which our word *hermeneutics* is derived, meaning, then, the science of interpretation. (In the New Testament this word, in its various forms, may be found, e.g., in Matt. 1:23; Mark 5:41; 15:22,34; John 1:8,38; 9:7; Acts 4:36; 9:36; 13:8; I Cor. 12:10; 14:28; Heb. 7:2.)”²⁷

Bernard Ramm defines hermeneutics:

“Hermeneutics is the science and art of Biblical interpretation. It is a science because it is guided by rules within a system; and it is an art because the application of the rules is by skill, and not by mechanical imitation. As such it forms one of the most important

members of the theological sciences.”²⁸

Brian Shealy defines hermeneutics as “a set of principles for biblical interpretation.”²⁹ He further states that “God has communicated by having men write in language that human beings can understand. The natural way for humans to interpret any such communication is through employment of rules of hermeneutics to understand a passage’s meaning.”³⁰ Because God has given us the message in words, it makes sense to use our minds and linguistic tools to get the message right.

In *Biblical Hermeneutics*, Milton Terry elaborates on how sound hermeneutics brings us great safety:

“The Principles of Biblical Hermeneutics are the governing laws and methods of procedure by which the interpreter determines the meaning of the Holy Scriptures. These principles are of the nature of comprehensive and fundamental doctrines. They become to the practical exegete so many maxims, postulates, and settled rules. He is supposed to hold them in the mind as axioms, and to apply them in all his expositions with uniform consistency. ... Many different and often contradictory methods of exposition have been adopted, and some enthusiasts have gone to the extreme of affirming that there are manifold meanings and ‘mountains of sense’ in every line of Scripture. Under the spell of some fascination many have strangely misled, and have set forth as expositions of the Scriptures their own futile fancies. Sound hermeneutical principles are, therefore, elements of safety and satisfaction in the study of God’s written word.”³¹

PART OF THE SPIRIT’S WORK

This in no way disparages or lessens the work and illumination of the Holy Spirit in interpretation and application. The Spirit works more readily through order than He does through chaos. Terry urges that “the expounder of the Holy Scriptures

needs to have living fellowship and communion with the Holy Spirit."³²

The Holy Spirit inspired the writers of the Scriptures (2 Peter 1:21). He led them in giving propositional truth in words and sentences. The interpreter must prayerfully and carefully handle those sentences and words with integrity and proper definitions. He must never interpret Scripture unscripturally, but will seek the real and intended sense of each verse in its context.

So we need to look at the interpreter's head and heart. This is not to create a false dichotomy between the two, but for ease of analysis to study each side of the same coin. Head and heart both must be in the process, lest there be imbalance. Intellect and spiritual devotion are both necessary. A good exegete is one who is applying the truth to his own life as he learns. He is sure to be taking the "log out of his own eye first," growing and maturing in sanctification and taking heed to *himself* as well as his doctrine (1 Timothy 4:16).

A seminary professor received a phone call from a recently graduated student who was in a panic. "Prof," he said, "I have my first funeral and I don't know what to do." The professor told him, "You had all that material in class." The quick reply was, "Yeah, I know, but this guy is really dead!"

There is a difference between class academics and application, between information and real life, between study and reality. We must have a head for the Word, as well as a heart for the Word. As Scripture is personally and properly studied, it must be personally applied. There is a biblical middle ground between Pharisee and Gnostic, legalist and mystic.

Knowledge can puff up, but truth applied keeps one humble before God. Hermeneutical rules without a devotional life and sensitivity to God are a great danger. As A.W. Tozer said:

"It is altogether possible to be instructed in the rudiments of the faith and still have no real understanding of the whole thing."³³

Warren Wiersbe asks, "Is God *real* to you? Is your Christian experience a

set of definitions, a list of orthodox doctrines, or a living relationship with God? ... Is your heart hungering and thirsting after personal holiness?"³⁴ The best hermeneutics combine head and heart, they never set one against the other. The whole package is needed. We must be warmly orthodox (Luke 24:32).

THE HEAD OF THE INTERPRETER

This is a golden age of knowledge. Never has more study material been available. We are deluged with good study books and have instant access to libraries by way of the Internet. The availability of mountains of information is unprecedented.

While it is of great help to know the biblical languages — Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek — it is not absolutely necessary today. We have the incredible availability of all kinds of linguistic helps, all in English.

Even Christians who have not had the privilege and advantage of higher education in a seminary have no excuse. Just being able to read English puts the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures at their disposal through writers who have labored to put it all before them from their mother tongue. Johann Keil and Franz Delitzsch, Marvin Vincent, Adolf Deissmann, W.E. Vine, Kenneth Wuest, A.T. Robertson, and Gerhard Kittel are just a few. Good Bible encyclopedias, Bible atlases, and Bible dictionaries have put the Bible world at our fingertips. Wonderful, dependable Bible commentaries are everywhere available. Information on Bible archaeology is readily and easily obtainable through books and periodicals, many of them crammed with photos. Never has there been a day when so much was available to so many.

In spite of the availability of good information, there is a move away from learning and toward feelings and emotions. *Charisma* magazine favorably reported on a Punk church in Portland, Ore., where "Pastor" Deborah Loyd tells her audience: "Jesus is not going to dump on you" as a preface to her 7-½ minute sermon.³⁵ One adult member commented,

"We're trying to help these kids get unstuck from theology and on the right road to relationship."³⁶ Relationship seems to be a code word for physical manifestations.

FOLLOW THE RULES

We will consider some hermeneutical principles by using the acrostic CULL. We want to cull out of the Bible as much of the proper meaning as we can. The word *cull* is defined as: "to select and gather. ... to examine carefully so as to select or reject."³⁷

The C is *Context*. The word context is from the Latin and means literally, woven together. It has to do with connections of words with their setting. We must observe the context, or setting, of words to determine their true meaning. If I say, "Sometimes I wake up grumpy..." you will think a certain thing about me. Suppose though I finished the sentence and add, "...but other times I let her sleep!" Now we have an entirely different meaning and message because of the fuller context. The setting has changed the entire communication.

If I used the word *ray*, one would not know by the word alone what I meant. It could be something out of science fiction or have to do with laser surgery. I could be talking about the sun, or a fish, or even a person. Without a context you would be lost. If I added two words and said, "My friend Ray," one begins to understand. Without an even larger context one still would not know if Ray is male or female, a child or adult, short or tall, dead or alive, related or unrelated, white or black, young or old, near or far.

C.W. Slemming states the importance of context:

"To understand a text we must know the context, otherwise our interpretation may be a pretext. We must ask ourselves such questions as: 'Who is speaking — God or man? Is it the Old Testament or the New Testament? Is it a historical statement or is it of doctrinal intent?' By doing this we shall be better able

to 'correctly handle the word of truth.'"38

Every cult going thrives on out-of-context proof texts. How important it is then to observe context, since many Greek and Hebrew words can only be understood in their contextual setting and not by etymology or word derivation alone. D.A. Carson reminds us:

"One of the most enduring of errors, the root fallacy presupposes that every word actually *has* a meaning bound up with its shape or its components."³⁹

The Hebrew word *olam* when used of persons or institutions, though translated "forever" in English translations, only means age-long or an undetermined amount of time. It can also mean a foreshadowing of the eternal. However, when used of God and the work of God in salvation, it always means forever and ever.⁴⁰

We must also familiarize ourselves with the historical and literary context, as Daniel Doriani points up:

"The world of the Bible includes its politics, geography, agriculture, economics, social customs, methods of warfare, family structures, and gender roles. Just a little knowledge of daily life — how people ate and dressed, worked and slept — illumines hundreds of passages."⁴¹

Understanding the religious context can bring the Bible alive in a new way to the reader. In John 7:37, Jesus announces that He is the "water" and that the thirsty can come and drink. Verse 37 also informs us of an important fact with the pregnant phrase, "on the last day, that great day of the feast." So what? Most would read right over that statement.

In his Bible study, Alfred Edersheim informs us that on that last day of the feast, a colorful and festive procession of bands of priests — with trumpets, palms, myrtle and willow branches, and great fanfare — slowly walked down to the Siloam Pool to assist the High Priest in gathering water in a golden pitcher. As the Temple procession returned through the Water Gate,

the anticipation of the people built to a crescendo:

"The two Priests ascended 'the rise' of the altar, and turned to the left. There were two silver funnels here, with narrow openings, leading down to the base of the altar. Into that at the east, which was somewhat wider, the wine was poured, and, at the same time, the water into the western and narrower opening, the people shouting to the Priest to raise his hand, so as to make sure that he poured the water into the funnel."⁴²

Edersheim continues his narration:

"Immediately after 'the pouring of the water,' the great 'Hallel,' consisting of Psalms cxiii. to cxviii. (inclusive), was chanted antiphonally, or rather, with responses, to the accompaniment of the flute. ... We can have little difficulty in determining at what part of the services of 'the last, the Great Day of the Feast,' Jesus stood and cried, 'If any one thirst, let Him come unto Me and drink!' It must have been with special reference to the ceremony of the outpouring of the water, which, as we have seen, was considered the central part of the service."⁴³

After nearly 30 trips to Israel, this writer can say that even one trip would give a person a geographical context that would make the Bible read like a new book. It is another way to enter the context of the Bible. The sights, sounds, and smells of the Holy Land are incredible. The green rolling hills of Galilee and the carpets of flowers on the hillsides, as well as the rocky soil give the parables of Jesus a more immediate reality. Seeing just one storm on the Sea of Galilee, with white capped waves on a normally tranquil lake, as the wind whistles and barrels over the Golan Heights, gives a new appreciation of the cry of the Apostles, "Carest thou not that we perish!"

Walking westerly down the steep incline of the Mount of Olives toward the Kidron Valley and feeling the legs straining, gives a new appreciation for

the manhood and stamina of Jesus. Experiencing the distance from the little port of Jaffa to the coastal city of Caesarea gives an new appreciation of the hard 2-3 day walk of Peter just to share the Gospel. Standing on Tel Megiddo and looking at the vast expanse of the Valley of Armageddon brings Solomon, Ahab, and Josiah nearer. At that place, thoughts of Revelation's forecasted last days battle crackles in the imagination.

The video series, *That the World May Know*, is a visual feast and a tool that will give the viewer information on Bible geography and the cultural background of Scripture in a compelling and interesting venue. With aerial views, maps, charts, and on-site teaching, historian and teacher Ray Vander Laan opens vistas of the Bible that are compelling and informative.⁴⁴

We need to do all that we can to get a proper understanding of the context of Scripture: its cultural, religious, and geographical context.

Two urgent questions that one *must always* put to the context: 1) *Does the context or prior or subsequent revelation limit the application?* and 2) *Is the teaching normative for today?*

NEW? NOT TRUE

False teachers and Charismatic extremists often lead people astray telling them that the fleshly nonsense going on in their meetings is the "new thing" prophesied by Jeremiah. No one thinks to check the context. In Jeremiah 31 the "new thing" is clearly spelled out as "the New Covenant." By twisting and distorting the Word, people are conned and robbed. Real violence is done to the Word of God. Zephaniah's words ring true: "Her princes in her midst are roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves that leave not a bone till morning. Her prophets are insolent, treacherous people; Her priests have polluted the sanctuary. They have done violence to the law" (Zephaniah 3:3-4).

How often selfishness and greed is hidden under the words "ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you." What is the "whatever" in John 15? David Roper explains it beauti-

fully and simply, based on the context that Jesus Himself gave:

“We should understand that God’s resources are granted not for random shows of strength, or to be prostituted on selfish ambition. God has a greater thing in mind for us than earthly good: Most of His giving is to make us good. Jesus put it this way: ‘I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ... *If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.* This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples’ (John 15:5-8).”⁴⁵

The context and key to Jesus’ promise is “fruit.” Roper, true to the context, goes on to explain:

“His unequivocal promise: ‘Ask whatever you wish and it will be given to you,’ is conditioned by the context and controlled by the concept of fruit. The ‘fruit’ is the fruit of the Spirit: ‘love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control’ (Galatians 5:22). We can ask anything that involves acquiring the characteristics of God. When we ask for His character He begins to give it, working through time and circumstance to conform us more closely to His will. This is the use to which He puts His power.”⁴⁶

So the context of fruit governs the meaning of “whatever.” This corresponds to Colossians 1:11: “Strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, *for all patience and long suffering with joy.*” It also parallels Philippians 4:13: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” The “all things” is not anything that I want to do, but rather “all things” in the will of God. I can do whatever God commands me to do as a believer since I have the empowerment of grace and God’s Spirit. It is the “all things” of His Word and ways. Regarding pleading with God for fruit in our lives, whether it is the fruit of character, or the fruit of converts, God

invites us to keep on asking. He welcomes prayers like this and we will never be sent away disappointed.

These wise words of Dr. Jay Adams sum up the above:

“...whenever the heavenly Father requires anything of His children, He always provides instruction and power to meet those requirements.”⁴⁷

At times the context of the entire book must be taken into account. The book of Ecclesiastes is an example. The writer is working through the first 11 chapters to describe what life on earth without God is like. His conclusions in many places are true, as far as they go, in terms of what life is without any reference to a Creator. Therefore we would not try to establish major doctrines about the afterlife on those chapters because the context is “under the sun,” that is, life on earth. Rather, we would go to chapter 12 where he introduces God and an eternal perspective into the picture and then over to the fulness of the New Testament, knowing that Christ “brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Timothy 1:10). We must always look at Scripture in its full context.

The statements of Job’s friends, at points, are deficient. It is true they made the statements, but they may be as untrue as the statements of Satan. We must observe the intended thrust of passages in their intended setting. “There is no God,” we are told by the Psalmist (Psalm 14:1). There is a big difference when we read it in context and add, “The fool has said in his heart.. .”

The U is *Usus Loquendi*. Milton Terry explains:

“Hence the importance of attending to what is commonly called the *usus loquendi*, or current usage of words as employed by a particular writer, or prevalent in a particular age. It often happens, also, that a writer uses a common word in some special and peculiar sense, and then his own definitions must be taken, or the context and scope must be consulted, in order to determine the precise meaning intended. There

are many ways by which the *usus loquendi* of a writer may be ascertained. The first and simplest is when he himself defines the terms he uses.”⁴⁸

So, it is asking how the writer defined and used the word or term. Examples of *usus loquendi* can be seen all through Hebrew poetry where the writer uses parallelisms. The second phrase explains, amplifies, and completes the first, as in Psalm 1:1. To “walk in the counsel of the ungodly” is to “begin to associate with ‘the way of sinners;’ finally, he would settle down permanently in ‘the seat of the scornful.’”⁴⁹

SINLESS AND PERFECT?

How are we to understand the English word *perfect* in 2 Timothy 3:17 (KJV)? Is it absolute perfection or a state of being completely like God? Somehow experience as well as Scripture makes us uncomfortable with thinking we can be absolutely perfect in every way, short of glorification.

It is hard to believe that religious groups have taught forms of absolute perfection. Anne Hutchinson of Massachusetts taught her followers in the 1600s that salvation made one a “perfected being.” It no longer mattered how one lived since the behavior of a perfected being could not be called sin.⁵⁰

Shadrach Ireland, during the same period, taught that he was so perfect that he was immortal and would not die. He shared that information until the day he died.⁵¹ His body then was kept around for months hoping for resurrection before it finally was buried.

In our day, popular Bible teachers, steeped in mysticism, express this same false concept. Consider the words of Charismatic prima donna Joyce Meyer:

“I’m going to tell you something, folks: I didn’t stop sinning until I finally got it through my thick head I wasn’t a sinner anymore. And the religious world thinks that’s heresy and they want to hang you for it. But the Bible says that I’m righteous and I can’t be righteous and be a sin-

ner at the same time ... All I was ever taught to say was, 'I'm a poor, miserable sinner.' I am not poor, I am not miserable and I am not a sinner. That is a lie from the pit of hell. That is what I was and if I still am then Jesus died in vain. Amen?"⁵²

The Apostle Paul actually defines and amplifies the word, which is translated "perfect" by what immediately follows in the initial phrase ("that the man of God may be perfect") of 2 Timothy 3:17: "*thoroughly furnished* [or completely equipped] *for every good work.*" So it is experience, maturity, living out the Word in ministry, and service which Paul has in mind; being grown up as a Christian and not a babe. W.E. Vine has this to say of the English word *perfect* (Greek: *teleios*):

"It is used (I) of persons, (a) primarily of physical development, then, with ethical import, 'fully grown, mature.'"⁵³

An immediate example would be a 2-year-old in a restaurant compared to a well-mannered adult.

Imagine the cultic impact if a false teacher insisted on some kind of absolute perfection and then started to determine the requirements for that perfection. Paul encountered a problem with man-made rules and asceticism in Colossians 2:20-23. The potential for mischief, deception, and hurt is realized very quickly in perfectionistic cults.

COMPARE, COMPARE, COMPARE

Usus loquendi also can be helped along by what is called the analogy of faith. This simply means comparing Scripture with Scripture. Ascertaining the *usus loquendi* can often be done by a meticulous comparison of other Scriptures through cross-referencing. A good topical Bible and a harmony of the Gospels are helpful. A subject may just be touched on in one verse, but treated more fully and extensively in another place. This also means that we always interpret passages that are unclear, obscure, doubtful, or difficult by those that are plain and simple. We cannot overturn clear, well estab-

lished doctrines on the basis of one difficult verse. "Baptism for the dead" mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15:29 must be brought to other clearer Scriptures, lest we create and involve ourselves in a false spiritistic, unbiblical practice such as that of the Latter-day Saints.

Why does Zephaniah declare judgment on Ethiopia (2:12)? There is no reason given in the verse. Joined with Isaiah 18:1-7 and Ezekiel 30:4-6, we learn that they had created alliances with pagan Egypt and other nations that were the enemies of God. Comparison of Scriptures is a great hermeneutical tool and a way to better understand the intended meaning of the author.

Good hermeneutics are surely a protection against exploitation of cults and their propensity for ripping verses out of context to use in a self-serving way.

The first L is *Literal*. There are allegorical, as well as mystical and rationalistic, approaches to Scripture. The literal method also is called the grammatical-historical method. This means that the Bible is not looked at in a wooden literal sense, but interpreted as are other books and writings, recognizing grammar, syntax, and normal word definitions.

Since the Scripture writers used words and wrote in sentences, we assume they wanted to be understood and did not want to mystify or bewilder us. They wanted us to comprehend their words as we would any communication. The Apostle John said: "These things I write to you" and "These things have I written" (John 1:4; 5:13). He then unfolds what it is he would have us know and understand. The difference is that this is communication from God even though conveyed in human words. All the more reason to handle God's Word properly, carefully, and honestly. R.C. Sproul reminds us that "Written statements come to us within a grammatical structure of some sort."⁵⁴

David Larsen wisely says:

"Like much literature, the Bible has both literal and symbolic

passages. It is generally prudent to heed A.B. Davidson's rule with respect to interpreting biblical prophecy: 'Read it literally — assume the literal meaning is his meaning.' However, wooden literalism that fails to see the figurative is as unsound as excessive spiritualizing that avoids the historical. The most advisable approach to interpretation is to seek the plain, natural and normal meaning of a text in its content. Let us be like Luther who said, 'I have based my preaching on the literal Word.'"⁵⁵

This is to recognize that the Bible writers gave us metaphors, similes, idioms, irony, parables, figures of speech, symbols, poetry, prophecy, anthropomorphisms, and types. We interpret them in the normal way that these figures are interpreted, recognizing their uniqueness.

Bernard Ramm explains literal not as literalism, but as normal interpretation and says:

"*The customary, socially-acknowledged designation of a word is the literal meaning of that word.* But there is enough usage of terms in speech and writing to create a *common language mentality*, if we may so speak, and the literal meaning of terms is their native meaning in this common language mentality. ... The literal meaning of a word is the *basic, customary, social designation of that word.*"⁵⁶

So in the literal grammatico-historical method, we interpret words and sentences in their normal, usual, and customary proper designation. This includes all figures of speech. This is certainly a safeguard against the fallen imagination and mystical impulses of many.

A WHOLE LOT OF SHAKIN' GOING ON

An example of the total violation of the literal or normal approach can be seen in the Shaker movement of the 18th century. John and Jane Wardley, who broke from the Quakers' movement, founded the Shakers in England in 1747. To justify vigorously

scratching their bodies, shaking, trembling, and screeching in their meetings, they applied Isaiah 2:19 and Ezekiel 38:20, disregarding the obvious meaning of the words.

The immediate context and obvious meaning of these verses is straightforward and the words show clearly that these statements have nothing to do with worship meetings at all. They clearly have to do with lost people herding themselves into caves trying to escape the imminent judgment of God. They are a parallel to the latter chapters of the book of Revelation.

This kind of Scripture twisting and ignoring the plain sense of the words gave the Shakers justification to follow any irrational emotion or outlandish fleshly manifestation, no matter how crazed. It also allowed them to teach that Ann Lee (who was illiterate, had a history of anorexia, and spent time in an insane asylum) was the “second appearance” of Jesus Christ.⁵⁷

THE HEART OF THE INTERPRETER

The second L is *Live It*. Proverbs 1:7 tells us that “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.” We must handle and read the Word of God devotionally, always ready to apply it to our own struggles and growth.

As we study Psalm 51, and the historical details of David’s sin, we may see the need of using the Psalm as our own prayer of confession and repentance. As we ferret out meaning in Paul’s armor passage (Ephesians 6), are we putting on the whole armor of God? Peter says we must “desire the unadulterated milk of the Word” if we are to grow (1 Peter 2:2). As we get behind the words in Ephesians 4, are we daily seeking to “put off the old man and put on the new”? As we dig into Romans 12, are we praying for transformed minds and being more loving, hospitable, prayerful, and returning good for evil as the context commands? Are we letting our studies in the Word convict us, shape us, mold us, discipline us, instruct us, and help us grow as 2 Timothy 3:15-17 suggests?

A BALANCED LIFE

Hermeneutics must be an exercise of head and heart. A loss of balance here can create either Pharisees or mystics. Just as a train needs two tracks lest it lose control, so we need the two tracks of a serious study life and a serious devotional life.

Howard Hendrick’s book, *Living by the Book*, is an excellent introduction to hermeneutics. It is non-technical and has a section on application, as well as a chapter on “A Process of Life Change.” Jay Adams’ *What To Do On Thursday* is equally helpful. Its subtitle, “A Layman’s Guide to the Practical Use of the Scripture,” emphasizes the book’s instruction of understanding and application of Scripture on a daily basis.

T.M. Lindsay reminds us of God’s intent and the power in His Word in dealing with us directly:

“All the Reformers of the sixteenth century, whether Luther, Zwingli, or Calvin, believed that in the Scriptures God spoke to them in the same way as He had done in earlier days to His prophets and apostles.”⁵⁸

James 1:22 commands us to “be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” If the Scriptures are just an exercise of the mind and not a life-changing dynamic, we are deceived. Paul E. Little gives us a way to read the Bible devotionally so as to get “spiritual food” and personal application with the use of questions:

“Is there an example for me to follow? Is there a sin for me to avoid? Is there a command for me to obey? Is there a promise to claim? What does this teach me about God and about Jesus Christ? Is there a difficulty with which I need further help? What should be my prayer for today from this passage?”⁵⁹

We may want to add, “Does this passage teach me anything about doctrine? Does it reprove, correct, or instruct me? Does it convict me in any way and surface any sin I should confess? Does it urge me to any duty I have been avoiding?” It is unthink-

able that we would try to feed others while starving ourselves. We must stay tender and teachable as we walk before the Lord.

James adds, “But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does” (James 1:25, NASV). Blessing comes from application and obedience.

The application of Scripture and the maintaining of a godly lifestyle is the constant theme of the book of Titus. Our lives must “adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things” (2:10). Are we making doctrine attractive by the way we live?

CONCLUSION

During Hitler’s Holocaust, Oskar Schindler finagled the German authorities into letting him employ 1,100 Jews in his factory for the war effort, thus saving them from the death camps. He paid the German government a price for each one, and today there are more than 6,000 descendants of the 1,100.

At the end of the film, *Schindler’s List*, Schindler is at the train station — the war just ending. He is to see those he saved for the very last time. They give him a letter of thanks so the American government will know what he did for them and not try him as a war criminal. They then give him a ring that they were able to make secretly. On the ring is an inscription from the Talmud, “Whoever Saves One Life, Saves The World Entire.”

In an incredibly powerful and moving scene, Schindler begins to weep and says, “I could have got more out. I could have got more — I don’t know — if I just — I could have got more out if I’d made more money. I threw away so much money. You have no idea — if I had just. I didn’t do enough. This car, [Amon] Goeth would’ve bought this car. Why did I keep the car? Ten people right there. Ten people. Ten more people. This pin. Two people. This is gold. Two more people. He would have given me two for it; at least one. He would have given me one, one more. One

more person. A person, Stern."⁶⁰ Collapsing in sobs and tears he cries out, "For this I could have gotten one more person and I didn't. And I didn't."⁶¹ He looks at the 1,100 wishing he had gotten even one more.

We need to get serious about properly handling God's Word with passion and intellectual honesty and understand the urgency of getting clear and precise teaching out to others while there is still time. "Only one life twill soon be past" is more than a cliché.

How many Christians in days to come will shed tears of regret and say, "If only I had taken the Word of God more seriously. If only I had studied it more diligently. If only I had been more committed to rightly dividing the Word of Truth. If only I had applied the truth more personally to my own life. If only I had obeyed it more fully. If only I had done more for the cause of truth, more for my Savior, more for the Church of Christ, more for the lost and confused. If only..., if only..., if only..."

Don't wait. Be doing it *now*.

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The idolatry has taken two hardcore shifts in our religious culture by unduly adoring and venerating the living as well as the dead. Yes, the dead, and this is not just in Catholicism.

When 15,000 people gather at Graceland every year on August 16 to mourn the dead Elvis, Christians say, "Oh that's the world!"

When Princess Di's grave becomes a place of pilgrimage for so many, we sputter, "Oh, the unsaved."

But when legendary healer, pastor, and multiple divorcee Aimee Semple McPherson died in 1944 of an apparent barbiturate overdose, she was laid out for three days in bronzed casket that weighed 1200 pounds and cost \$10,000. Twelve minister pallbearers staggered under the weight of the coffin. The glut of flowers at the Angelus Temple cost over \$50,000 (and this was in 1944). Adoring fans lined the streets for miles and for three days, just to pass by her displayed dead body. Two large kneeling angels are at the head and foot of her polished Italian marble grave site like a modern Ark of the Covenant. The costs were obscene and this was and surely is rank idolatry — the adoration and veneration of the dead religious figure. It can all be documented by the massive news coverage at that time and no one bristles — not even a little bit.

Our culture may be into body worship, health clubs, stomach stapling, liposuction, plastic surgery, and adoration of our corruptible hulks — but a corpse? This is ridiculous. It is more a move toward the Prince of Darkness than the Prince of Peace. Amazingly, McPherson's grave at the famed Forest Lawn Cemetery in Glendale, Calif., still is a big draw for some.

By his own admission and boasting, Benny Hinn claims to have gone to McPherson's grave and felt her supposed "anointing" still lingering. His "terrific anointing" graveside visit sparked no outcry from the Charismatic world. Not a peep. "I believe the anointing has lingered over Aimee's body," Hinn is so bold to say and no one on his staff stands to protest, but rather are told to accompany him on a future visit so that they, too, can experience the "anointing."

People must prefer dead corpses to a living Christ, the real anointed one. Hinn's Middle Eastern superstition has gotten the best of him. His activity, however, has jaded the sensibilities and discernment of countless thousands. Throw in Hinn's admitted fascination with the grave of Kathryn Kuhlman and her post-death appearances to him (or so he claims), and who knows what is next.

Perhaps Hinn's Greek Orthodox childhood in Israel will be his albatross. The Greek Orthodox Monastery in Mar Saba near the Dead Sea proudly displays the embalmed, desiccated, blackened body of their founder, St. Sabas, in a glass case. I have seen it. I have been in the

Monastery of St. George in the Wadi Kelt and observed Greek Orthodox priests kneeling to kiss another glass case holding the withered remains of their long dead founder. As we have seen above, Charismatics cannot claim, "Oh, it's those other, non-Spirit filled religions."

Certainly God was teaching us a lesson by recording that the body of Moses was in an unknown burial place, never to be found (Deuteronomy 34:6, Jude 9). Imagine the claims if idolatrous humans got loose around the grave site of Moses. Surely some "prophet" would be giving us "God's new revision of the Ten Commandments," perhaps even directly from Moses.

John Calvin's example needs to be applauded before the Christian world. He was buried in an unmarked spot and no one knows the place of his grave. Would people today be getting anointed "tulips" from that place? I would not be surprised even though the question is asked half in jest. Church historian Philip Schaff says that "Calvin had expressly forbidden all pomp at his funeral and the erection of any monument over his grave. He wished to be buried, like Moses, out of the reach of idolatry. This was consistent with his theology, which humbles man and exalts God" (*History of the Christian Church*, Vol. 8, pg. 824).

How commonplace nowadays to hear self-proclaimed prophets, healers, and quacks declaring themselves as God's anointed, God's point of contact, God's point of direct revelation, and so forth, *ad nauseum*. In some cases they actually say they are "little gods." Even the Latter-day Saints (Mormons) are not gods yet. These little god-teachers gather a following and no one even blinks. That they spawn confusion, teach heresy, and amass millions of dollars in money and real estate does not even warrant an objection and those who do are attacked, maligned, accused, damned, and rejected as unspiritual, skeptical, judgmental, and unloving. Maybe "gods" should have the richest and finest and that's why their followers leave them alone as far as an accounting.

In the meanwhile, God is right in our face reminding us of how corruptible, weak, and pitiful we really are. Miracle man and gold dust dispenser Bob Shattles died on July 17, 2001, his whole body shot through with cancer. He dispensed gold glitter in meetings and tried to convince his followers it was heavenly gold dust. He ran the Revival Fires Ministry and convinced people he had a special anointing and healings and miracles were there for all of them. In the end he was just like the rest of us — frail and subject to death. No doubt his followers will move on to a new icon and God will keep reminding us that the best of us, no matter what claims we make, are no more than dust and corruption. Shattles' pretense could not withstand cancer.

We have talked to professional scam busters who observed Shattles bring his Bible to the platform in a plastic bag. What followed during the preliminary song service they described as a "carney trick." Shattles would move around the platform carefully tapping gold glitter out of the Bible pages and brush others around him,

transferring the plastic gold to their back, arms, shoulders, and other body parts. It was calculated, deliberate, and surreptitious, but it would get the audience going. In all honesty, it was shameless.

Shattles also promoted a woman named Sylvania Mercado. Avid followers would jostle to get near her as she claimed to dispense holy oil from her head and hands. She transported the glitter in her hair and scalp. I personally observed Mercado scratching it out of her head and brushing her hand on those next to her. I have seen Mercado purposely avoid wheelchair sections and in one almost comic scene, observed a quick wheelchair driver chase her through the prayer line and almost run her over. All to no avail. He left in his wheelchair. Idols always fail us. The glitter would be swept into the trash by the janitors. The show was over, at least there.

We have been told by security firms that are hired by televangelists that part of their job when the televangelist is having meetings is to keep the fans from surging and trampling one another as they press and push forward, trying get near or touch their idol men. It seems that some are ready to hurt and maim for a healing. Broken bones and even deaths have been documented.

During the erstwhile heyday of the Brownsville fireworks that have since sputtered out, I spoke to a line guard at the Pensacola church who said he had to break up fights and kept order as people jostled and fought to get in first to be near the front, close to anointed vessels Evangelist Steve Hill and Pastor John Kilpatrick. I remember the surge and press at a Grand Rapids, Mich., service just to get to touch Hill as he kept screaming at people not to crowd him. Lyconia and Corinth all over again. Very few caught on that at Brownsville they were counting the same anointing-seeking returnees (or junkies) over and over again and reporting massively inflated numbers. It all seems so silly now, after the nosedive of a "revival" that was supposed to sweep the halls of Washington and change the United States and the world. No doubt the groupies are fighting in line at some other Pentecostal Lourdes. What a tragedy.

Word Faith leaders teach positive confession, which blatantly says they are like God, able to create. Pat Robertson was so bold to teach in *The Secret Kingdom*: "We speak to money, and it comes. We speak to storms, and they cease. We speak to crops and they flourish." Who else but God has all this power? This talk sounds like they are Jesus on earth.

Kenneth Hagin declares the following blasphemy: "He made us the same class of being as He is Himself." Casey Treat pronounces: "When God looks in the mirror, He sees me! When I look in the mirror, I see God." Kenneth Copeland brazenly says: "When I read in the Bible where He [Jesus] says, 'I Am,' I say, 'Yes, I Am, too!'" I cringe even repeating these statements. No wonder the adoring followers bow. They should be tearing their clothes in repentance and stopping their ears in horror, but they have become inured and impenetrable. Bible bookstores

stock and sell this witches brew and no one complains but a few small handful and they are merely written off as cranky.

Where has the Charismatic and Evangelical world gone — and where is it going — with the endorsement of graves, death, and living idols who claim to be on a level with God? God, it seems, is just our next-door neighbor and anything goes as we tell Him what to do. We are surely being swept back into superstition, idolatry, and the Dark Ages!

Jesus alone must be our pre-eminent significant other, not a human "healer" or human hero. The Word of God must be our final authority, not someone's frenzies, feelings, or figments of imagination.

Sociologist Emil Dirckheim (1858-1917) has been called the Father of modern sociology. Dirckheim contends that cultures make religious symbols from their own transient values. These symbols, in effect, are symbols and projections of themselves. So then, Dirckheim reasons, cultures create deities and worship what they create. These gods, he said, are in fact images of themselves so that they are effectively worshiping themselves. Paul warned in Romans 1 of the innate human leaning toward worshiping the creature rather than the Creator. As we move away from the revelation of the Bible we slide more toward deifying man and setting up a human as an idol. How close modern apostate Christianity is coming to New Age thought. It is absolutely staggering.

What would be gained if we had fewer of these religious idols and little god-men (sought and pursued from city to city and meeting to meeting)? What would be gained if *Charisma* magazine and others like it would stop advertising and parading this kind of nonsense to gullible followers all for the sake of advertising dollars? Much, we think. Much in every way.

There would be more people leaving their television sets to go to their local churches just as Hebrews 10 commands. There would be fewer trips made to crusade cities and anointing centers, and more money given to and for the work of struggling local churches. More given to legitimate struggling discernment ministries. There would be more given to legitimate mission endeavors. There would be less purchase of heretical books and videos which are glutting and corrupting homes.

There would be more people praying and trusting God more than trusting in men. There would be less heartache and disappointment from dashed hopes and unfulfilled promises and claims. There would be more people showing up to listen to faithful pastors expound the Word of God without all the sensationalism. There would be less scandal and offense as the unsaved world looks on in mockery at the gullibility of professing Christians.

There would be more people walking with God in the everyday normal routine; more open to responding to God in the needs all around them, rather than gauging everything by the sensational and dramatic. There would

be people living longer because they have not thrown away their medicine or neglected their child's medical care. There would be fewer people suffering and dying alone (without the help of their television idol) because they would have been connected to a pastor and church family that would be with them personally in their crisis times. The gain would be spiritually enormous and the glory of God would be enhanced in lives. The Bible would be elevated and the idolatry, heresy, and confusion slowed to a crawl, rather than a gallop. May God have mercy on us and help us.

—GRF

NEWS UPDATES

(continued from page 3)

that," the Fort Worth newspaper stated.

McCutchen, who is liable for half of the judgment, said the verdict will not destroy his congregation. "The church will go on," he stated.

—MKG

UTAH RANKS FIRST IN ANTIDEPRESSANT USE

Utah ranks number one in the use of anti-depressant drugs, according to a recent nationwide study. "Antidepressant drugs are prescribed in Utah more often than in any other state, and at a rate nearly twice the national average," the report said.

The study, conducted by Express Scripts Inc., a St. Louis-based pharmaceutical management company, also said antidepressant use in Utah was twice that in California and nearly three times greater than in New York or New Jersey. Maine and Oregon also ranked high on the list.

While the report did not record antidepressant use by gender, statistics from the National Institute of Mental Health show that nearly twice the number of women suffer from depression than men.

According to a report in the *Los Angeles Times*, "the pressures of Mormonism" may be the cause for the highest national average. "Utah's large families — the biggest in the nation, according to the 2000 Census — are often cited as a contributing factor to depression," the newspaper stated.

Dr. Curtis Canning, president of the Utah Psychiatric Association, said, "In Mormondom, there is a social expectation — particularly among the females — to put on a mask, say 'Yes' to everything that comes at her and hide the misery and pain. ... You are supposed to be perfect because Mrs. Smith across the street can do it and she has three more kids than you and her hair is always in place. I think the cultural issue is very real. There is

the expectation that you should be happy, and if you're not happy, you're failing."

Seventy percent of Utah's population claim membership in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

—MKG

HARE KRISHNAS FILE CHAPTER 11

Facing a \$400 million lawsuit over alleged sexual abuse by leaders in its schools, the International Society of Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) has filed for protection under Chapter 11 of the federal bankruptcy law. The Hare Krishna group hopes the move will lead to the dismissal of the lawsuit.

The 94 plaintiffs in the lawsuit, which was filed in Dallas, say they were abused during the 1970s and 1980s while living at Hare Krishna *gurukulas* (boarding schools) in India and the United States. Hare Krishna children were placed in such schools to allow their parents more time to proselytize. Children as young as five were also sent to the boarding schools so that they would become pure devotees of the Hindu-based religion.

In 1998, after the accusations were made public, the Krishna organization established the "ISKCON Office of Child Protection," devoting \$1 million to a multiyear program to help the children of its members who suffered physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. (See further, *The Quarterly Journal*, July-September 1999.)

Krishna representative Anuttama Dasa defended the bankruptcy move. "We don't believe that innocent members and congregations should be held accountable for the deviant behavior of individual acts committed 20 or 30 years ago." ISKCON also announced plans to establish a compensation fund for those who were abused at its schools.

—MKG

BOOKS IN REVIEW

(continued from page 24)

movement, including Albert Mohler, John MacArthur, Michael Horton, Os Guinness, and G.A. Pritchard.

Crucial sections in the book include chapters on psychology (with several pages of key fundamental differences between psychology and Scripture), the content of preaching, and the pivotal role of music.

Far too many pastors (and their congregations) look to growth as a sign of God's favor. Gilley sounds a necessary alarm that we cannot measure God's blessing by success. This is a much-needed book to wake up a Church inspired by pragmatism.

—MKG



Books in Review

KING JAMES ONLY?

by Robert A. Joyner

Community Baptist Church, 143 pages, \$8.99

There are those who say that the King James Version is the *one and only* Bible translation for mankind. It alone, they say, is the most accurate, most faithful, and most reverent of any translation known to man. Moreover, many key “KJV-Only” advocates indict any and all modern translations, charging the translators of these versions with abandoning the cardinal doctrines of the faith and stunting the spiritual growth of those who read these translations. One KJV-Only advocate says modern translations are occultic.

The average layperson can become mired in the marsh of rhetoric and minutiae of a KJV-Only advocate. Robert Joyner’s volume is a great asset for the Christian who wants to know the facts, but has no knowledge of Hebrew and Greek. *King James Only?* is simple in presentation and non-technical in its approach. Yet it is competent and convincing in dealing with the key issues of KJV-Only arguments.

Joyner evaluates the purported superiority of the KJV from a variety of angles. He establishes for the reader, chapter by chapter, how the claims of pre-eminence for the KJV collapse under the weight of historical evidence, doctrinal study, common sense, logic, and comments made by the King James Version translators themselves. He reminds readers that the genesis of the KJV-Only movement is but a half-century old and was founded by Benjamin G. Wilkinson, a Seventh-day Adventist who died in 1968.

Joyner is not opposed to using the King James Version. He states, “The King James Version is accurate and trustworthy” (pg. 36). Joyner, like many other critics of the KJV-Only position, stands for balance and honesty when examining any translation. “If a person wants to use only the KJV, that is well and good. However, if they tear down all other versions, they are destroying people’s faith in God’s word,” he writes (pg. 49).

The closing pages of the book contain a word-for-word reprint of “The Translators to the Reader,” the preface of the 1611 version of the KJV. This is a valuable essay, because the translators themselves contradict much of what KJV-Only advocates attribute to them. While the translators’ memoirs are wordy and cumbersome, Joyner

underscores the salient pronouncements: those which undermine the tenets of KJV-Only belief.

Joyner effectively shows just how inconsistent it is to be a KJV-Only advocate. He demonstrates clearly the Bible truth that God will preserve His Word forever, not only in the King James Version but in other and more modern translations. The book is a fine defense against the cult of KJV-Onlyism.

—MKG

THIS LITTLE CHURCH WENT TO MARKET

by Gary E. Gilley

Xulon Press, 144 pages, \$10.99

Pastor and author Gary Gilley again takes on pragmatism in the Church. His previous book, “*I Just Wanted More Land*” — *Jabez*, unraveled the defective Bible interpretation found in the “Prayer of Jabez” frenzy. His new book evaluates the Church on a much larger scale — namely how the Christian community has moved from being Scripture-based to being market-driven.

The nucleus of Gilley’s judgment, while simple, is quite serious. “The old gospel is about God; the new gospel is about us. The old gospel is about sin; the new gospel is about needs. The old gospel is about our need for righteousness; the new gospel is about our need for fulfillment. The old gospel is foolishness to those who are perishing; the new gospel is attractive,” he writes (pg. 94).

What is this “new gospel”? Gilley tells us, “its focus is on what the consumer (unchurched Harry) wants and thinks he needs, rather than on what God wants and what He says Harry needs. In other words, market-driven churches are built upon the foundation of polls, surveys and the latest techniques instead of upon the Word of God” (pg. 56).

Along the way, the reader is introduced to the prime promoters of the megachurch movement, namely Bill Hybels (Willow Creek Community Church) and Rick Warren (Saddleback Valley Community Church). Gilley does recognize what’s right (and/or benign) about these churches and their methods, but that which is unbiblical or detrimental to the cause of Christ far outweighs that which is admirable.

Gilley draws from a wide source of men whose writings are likewise critical of the market-driven church

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Editor’s Note: The publications featured in PFO’s *Books in Review* section are available from **Personal Freedom Outreach** (P.O. Box 26062, Saint Louis, Missouri 63136). Please add \$1.75 to the price listed for shipping and handling. Due to occasional price changes by the publishers, the retail amounts listed are subject to change without notice. These publications are also available to those who help to financially support the work of PFO. Please see our funds appeal flyer for details.