

# The Quarterly Journal



THE NEWSLETTER PUBLICATION OF PERSONAL FREEDOM OUTREACH

VOL. 32, NO. 3

JULY-SEPTEMBER 2012

EDITOR: KEITH A. MORSE

## The Social Gospel Imposing a Cultural Mandate into the Great Commission

by Gary E. Gilley

One of the issues God's people have always faced is their role in society. In the Old Testament, the Lord chose Abraham to be the father of a called-out race of people. Years later, the Lord established the nation of Israel under the Mosaic Covenant. Detailed laws and regulations were given to Israel at the time. These included governance, dealing with poverty, helping widows and orphans, and correcting injustices. These matters were addressed almost exclusively within the context of the nation of Israel, with minor concern for surrounding nations.

The Old Covenant was in force until the dawning of the Church Age in Acts 2. The Church, God's chosen people in this age, comprises regenerate people of all nationalities. It is not a nation in an official sense and has not been given laws by which a governmental structure could function.

Still, most recognize that Christians live as citizens not only of heaven but

also of earth and thus have responsibilities here and now. The nature of those responsibilities and their administration have been debated for almost 2000 years. Over time, the consensus has swung from disinterest in societal problems to making their solution the Church's primary objective.

Most recently, a focus on the social agenda has gained popularity in most evangelical circles and is rapidly attaining equal status with the proclamation of the Gospel message. A two-pronged gospel has arisen, composed of the Great Commission and the so-called Cultural Mandate.

(continues on page 11)



### Inside this Issue:

TBN FRAUD REPORTED .....	PAGE 3
THE IMPERATIVE OF DISCERNMENT .....	PAGE 4
THE SOCIAL GOSPEL OF THE PAST .....	PAGE 12

---

---

# Editorials

---

---

## THE TRICKS MEN PLAY — AND HOW THEY PREY

We have been warned! Ephesians 4:14 says very clearly “that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.”

We have been told there will be unscrupulous religious teachers who will try to prey on the vulnerable. They will devise trickery. They will craft reasonable-sounding lies. They will plan deceptions. They will claim miracles, but never document them. They will promise a hundred-fold (or more) return on the money given to them. They will guarantee a bigger home, a newer car, a better job, and a fabulous marriage.

It is hard to believe that such evil could go on, but it does every day and in every way on “Christian” television, and in “Christian” books and magazines.

The NIV renders Ephesians 4:14: “blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.”

Even the Catholic version of Scripture called *The Jerusalem Bible* renders it: “at the mercy of all the tricks men play and their cleverness in practicing deceit.”

These unscrupulous men know that there are vulnerable people out there — soft targets. Many have been

exposed repeatedly for making millions off their schemes and living a life of luxury. Preying pays very well.

No false teacher says, “We are going to rob your freedom, your mind, your family, and trash them while you give us your money. We will make you very poor in every way while you make us rich.” There is a subtle but seductive process. Cult leaders and cults do not necessarily appeal to people who are uneducated or dim-witted; being vulnerable and biblically untaught are sufficient for spiritual seduction by a cult to be successful. People are trapped in the deceit for a variety of reasons:

- Those going through difficult transitions like losing a loved one, a divorce, a separation, financial reverses, or other personal crises. Their world has been “rocked.”
- Following and connected to the above are promises of stability, predictability, security, and the pretense of absolute answers that help the uncertainty. False teachers pretend to offer all this.
- There may be the promise held out that with insider information the new follower can tap into new mind powers or great insights into the inscrutable. Theologians have wittily referred to it as unscrewing the inscrutable.
- Then there is the alluring possibility held out of no uncertainty — “We have all the answers” — which is really not possible this side of heaven.

(continues on page 22)

### PERSONAL FREEDOM OUTREACH

P.O. Box 26062 • Saint Louis, Missouri 63136-0062 • (314) 921-9800

Visit PFO's Website at: <http://www.pfo.org>

#### BOARD of DIRECTORS:

James Bjornstad .....	Cedarville, OH	Joan C. Cetnar .....	Kunkletown, PA
G. Richard Fisher .....	Dillsburg, PA	Gary E. Gilley .....	Springfield, IL
M. Kurt Goedelman .....	Saint Louis, MO	Robert L. Griffin .....	Gulf Shores, AL
Keith A. Morse .....	Denver, CO	David M. Tyler .....	Granite City, IL

#### BOARD of REFERENCE:

Dr. Jay E. Adams.....	Enoree, SC	Dr. Norman L. Geisler .....	Charlotte, NC
Dr. Ron Rhodes .....		Dr. Ron Rhodes .....	Frisco, TX

© 2012 – PFO. All rights reserved. ISSN: 1083-6853. These articles may not be stored on web pages or Internet sites without permission. *The Quarterly Journal* is the newsletter publication of PFO. Published by Personal Freedom Outreach, P.O. Box 26062, Saint Louis, MO 63136. PFO's *Journal* may also be obtained on CD-ROM in Portable Document Format (.PDF) for use with Adobe® Reader® software.

---

---

# News Updates

---

---

## TBN FRAUD REPORTED

Reports of substantial financial malfeasance — said to be in the tens of millions of dollars — have been disclosed by a former high-ranking official of the Trinity Broadcasting Network. Even more disastrous for the organization, which is said to be the world's largest Christian television network, is that the whistle-blower is the granddaughter of its co-founders, Paul and Jan Crouch.

In September 2011, Brittany Koper was fired by TBN following her discovery of "illegal financial schemes," according to the *Los Angeles Times*. A legal battle has followed. According to the *Times'* report, the "lawsuit alleges that Brittany Koper was promoted to the position of TBN's financial director in July [2011] because the network directors needed someone 'within the family' to keep its financial 'skeletons' hidden."

In the lawsuit, it is claimed that "Trinity Broadcasting's directors, Paul, Matthew and Janice Crouch, bought luxury items for personal use through sham loans to alter-ego corporations. The complaint cites a long list, including a \$50 million 'Global Express' luxury jet aircraft, luxury cars, 'a \$100,000 motor home purchased by Trinity Broadcasting as a mobile residence for director Janice Crouch's dogs,' and mansions and cabins in California, Florida, Tennessee and Texas," according to an online report by the *Courthouse News Service*. It was also alleged that up to \$500,000 is used annually for meal expenses, personal chauffeurs, fictitious rent expenses, and redecorating expenses for the Crouches.

In the network's response, TBN's lawyers claimed that Koper and her husband, Michael, "used forged documents to embezzle funds to buy trucks, jewelry, a fishing boat, a motorcycle, a Lexus and life insurance," the *Times* said. It was also reported that the Kopers gave to Michael's uncle, Joseph McVeigh, "thousands of dollars without authorization."

According to the British online publication, *The Guardian*, "The network's lawyer has denied the allegations calling the McVeigh lawsuit a 'tabloid filing' accusing McVeigh and the Kopers of working together to steal from the ministry."

A TBN lawsuit against the Kopers and McVeigh, based upon the aforementioned allegations, was dismissed in both state and federal court last year. McVeigh says that the funds were a \$65,000 loan he acquired with an agreement to make monthly payments of which he claims he is current. The 13-year promissory note was obtained in 2010 and was approved by the Kopers.

Attorney Tymothy MacLeod, who filed the lawsuit on behalf of McVeigh, also said that Koper plans to file a wrongful-termination suit against the network. In the lawsuit already filed, the Crouches are not named as defendants.

—MKG

## CAMPING ADMITS FAILURE

Approximately 10 months after his predicted date for the return of Christ and the end of the world failed to materialize, Harold Camping of Family Radio finally admitted his error.

In March, the ministry posted "An Important Letter from Mr. Camping" on its Web site. Originally the letter was to be mailed out to Family Radio's listeners, but the document was reportedly leaked onto the Internet without authorization, so the ministry's board made an immediate decision to post it.

The confession sends mixed signals and critics see little, if any, true repentance on Camping's part. "Yes, we humbly acknowledge we were wrong about the timing; yet though we were wrong God is still using the May 21 warning in a very mighty way," Camping wrote. The 90-year-old radio evangelist also maintained, "The May 21 campaign was an astounding event if you think about its impact upon this world."

Camping further wrote: "We must openly acknowledge that we have no new evidence pointing to another date for the end of the world. Though many dates are circulating, Family Radio has no interest in even considering another date. God has humbled us through the events of May 21, to continue to even more fervently search the Scriptures (the Bible), not to find dates, but to be more faithful in our understanding."

Nearly two decades ago, Camping first prophesied the end of the world for 1994. Following that failed prediction, and for the past several years, he predicted the end of the world for May 21, 2011. When his predicted date for May 2011 passed without the foretold result, he decided he must have misinterpreted the biblical data by five months. At that time the end, he said, would occur in October of last year.

Days after the failed May date, Camping suffered a mild stroke.

(continues on page 22)

# The Imperative of Discernment

by G. Richard Fisher



The Old Testament prophet Ezekiel was given a mandate from God that he was to pass on to the leaders of the nation:

“And they shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the unholy, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean” (Ezekiel 44:23).

The leaders were themselves to be discerning, and then teach the people to be discerning. If the nation was going to be God’s nation, its people had to discern.

The Apostle Paul thought discernment was very important. He told the believers in Philippi:

“And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ” (Philippians 1:9-10).

Approving or disapproving of teachings requires that we discern what is being taught. So Paul prays that all believers might abound in discernment. The word “abound” means to go beyond the ordinary.

Commenting on the phrases “that your love may abound” and “ap-

prove the things that are excellent,” Roy Laurin wrote:

“Possessed of such love the Christian would acquire a moral discernment which enables him to judge between right and wrong, truth and error. Where there is real love there is a deep moral sensitiveness. Love provides its own defenses against defection. A fully developed love means the highest development of personality which in turn means maturity. With maturity comes discernment and with discernment these Philippians would ‘remain untainted by error, unstumbling amidst obstacles.’”<sup>1</sup>

So we see that Christian maturity depends on our exercising discernment. Our physical and spiritual health — and maybe even our lives — depends on it.

## THE DISAPPEARANCE OF DISCERNMENT

K. Neill Foster wrote:

“A.W. Tozer was fond of saying that the greatest need in the church was for the gift of discernment. And Dr. Tozer spoke from his perspective in the middle of the twentieth century.

Were he able to comment on today’s religious confusion, I am sure his tones would be more strident, his concerns still deeper. It is certainly clear to Christian leaders everywhere that confusion is increasing. There seems to be a famine of clear thought and penetrating insight.”<sup>2</sup>

One example is a quote in the *Los Angeles Times* by Richard Mouw, president of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena:

“Some are unhappy with me because I have gone on record as saying that [Mitt] Romney’s church, the Utah-based Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, is not a cult. ... I have studied and taught about cults for many years. I have also spent the last dozen years meeting with Mormons — scholars and church leaders — to engage in lengthy theological discussions. ... Based on these conversations and my own careful study, I do not believe Mormonism is a cult.”<sup>3</sup>

Other Christian leaders may also wish to sidestep labeling Mormonism a cult because they think it is a “loaded” term. However, if Mormonism with its salvation by works, its heretical views of God, and its extra-

biblical books is not a cult, then the word “cult” has lost all meaning. Bill McKeever, founder and director of Mormonism Research Ministry, doesn’t agree with those who think the word “cult” needs to be retired.

And Christians have the biblical mandate to expose false teachers and their teaching (Titus 1:11; Ephesians 5:11). Romans 16:17 urges us to have nothing to do with those who would teach contrary to the apostles’ doctrine. Paul, in verse 18, says they do not serve Christ.

## DISCERNMENT IS A BIBLE WORD

To many the word “discernment” is an offensive word. However, the writers of Scripture were quite comfortable with it. The Apostle Paul calls it a gift from God in 1 Corinthians 12 and urges its use. The words “discernment” and “discern” are used about 25 times in the New Testament. Other closely associated words such as “judge,” “test,” “try,” and “evaluate” are also used repeatedly.

Discernment is a gift that has fallen on hard times and is rejected and maligned in some circles. In Acts 17:11-12, the Bereans were called noble because they scoured the Scripture to be sure that their teacher Paul was on track. F.F. Bruce, along with the Scriptures, commends the Berean spirit:

“For, with commendable open-mindedness, they brought the claims made by Paul to the touchstone of Holy Writ instead of giving way to prejudice. Their procedure, ‘examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so’ (RSV), is worthy of imitation by all who have some new form of religious teaching pressed upon their acceptance.”<sup>4</sup>

## STICKS AND STONES

Now Bereans are addressed by other names and even threatened with death, disease, and a “Holy Ghost machine gun.” It is not uncommon for PFO to receive phone calls from hostile callers because they have come across a *Quarterly Journal* article which examines a teacher or author to whom

they have expressed an impassioned devotion. We have been “damned to hell” and told to “repent” for our evaluations. Apparently it is permissible for these callers to judge our salvation, but we are not afforded the opportunity to judge the doctrine and practice of their spiritual guides. Author Dave Hunt has often remarked that such people should more properly be angry, not at the one exposing the false teaching, but rather at the false teachers themselves for their lies, deception, and heretical doctrine. Those exercising discernment, and even doing it with great love, are often written off as mean-spirited, judgmental, hard-nosed, and critical.

Gnostic researcher James Robinson, back in the 1970s, coined the term “Heresy Hunters.” In 1993, James Spencer used that phrase for the title of his book that castigated PFO and other discernment ministries for their critiques of Benny Hinn and other Word-Faith proponents. What Robinson and Spencer did not realize is that the cliché was incorrect because heresy need not be hunted; it is out in the open. It is proclaimed from church pulpits, stocked on the shelves of both secular and “Christian” bookstores, and fills the airwaves via “Christian” television and radio.

The very latest term and epithet for those who would want to discern truth is “the critique police.” Nevertheless, the mandate and imperative to judge between good and evil — Hebrews 5:14 — still stands! Hebrews 4:12 says that the Word of God is central to discernment. It is, in fact, the “discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” Our present Church culture reflects the attitudes that were prevalent in Isaiah’s time when people were calling “evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter” (Isaiah 5:20).

Let’s therefore consider and emphasize crucial points about discernment.

## THE FACT OF DISCERNMENT

The word “discernment” in all its forms and Greek nuances means to investigate, to look into, to scrutinize,

question, examine, or to put on trial. It means to determine the good or bad of a person or thing. The Greek word *kritikos* means to critique, to judge, to evaluate and decide, and even pass judgment. As a judge uses the law as his basis of evaluation, believers use the Word of God as the ultimate court of appeal. It is the Word of God that discerns us. This is why men such as Joel Osteen are appalling and Paul is appealing. When the Corinthians refused to judge sin in their church, the apostle argued, “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters?” (1 Corinthians 6:2). Here we are commanded to discern and judge.

Someone has coined the phrase, “The pathology of sentimentality.” It is a state of mind where we believe that we have to keep everybody happy by agreeing with them on everything. We can’t rock any boat, not even a little, and we cannot disagree with false teaching or try to correct error. Yet Jesus, in Matthew 10:34-36, said:

“I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.”

At times, truth divides no matter how hard we try to present it with meekness, love, and respect. But there must be a separation between truth and error, light and darkness. “And what communion has light with darkness? ... what agreement has the temple of God with idols?” Paul asks in 2 Corinthians 6:14 and 16.

Preaching does not always alleviate or solve problems. There may be times when exposition from the pulpit stirs or creates problems, even when we deeply would like to avoid them or not have it so.

In real life we are constantly discerning things. We discern between a one dollar bill and a ten dollar bill. We discern at the pharmacy and are

sure we are not taking the wrong medication. We discern at home and make sure we keep detergents from being mixed with food. If we have young children we are constantly discerning for them what is right and what is wrong. Life could not be lived without constant discernment and choices. We need it no less for spiritual matters.

### THE FICTION OF "MANY CHRISTIANITIES"

Some, such as Gnostic champions Bart Ehrman and Elaine Pagels, would have us believe that we really do not know what to believe because the Church of the first four or five centuries was a swirl of contradictory and competing variations of Christianity. There was, in fact, only one true Christianity and many heresies. However, Ehrman, Pagels, and others like them try to reconstruct early Church history in a totally different way. They argue that those with the most money, power, and clout won out. They maintain that it was the overwhelming power plays of the Orthodox that made the day, not truth. But that is just not so. The early Church, fiercely persecuted by the Romans, had no power, money, or clout — only grace and truth. The early martyrs had no power, money, or clout — only God's Word. Truth prevailed plain and simple. The truth of the Bible won the day. The heresies trying to compete with the truth were thoroughly trounced.

All throughout the New Testament there is a pattern of orthodox doctrine. It is called the "apostles' doctrine" in Acts 2:42. Paul often refers to it as "the faith," as does Jude who said it to be "the faith once delivered." This pattern of orthodox doctrine was then encapsulated in creeds and held in tact for 2000 years. Read those who succeeded the Apostles. Read the early apologists. True Christianity held the fort, not against competing Christianities, but against competing heresies.

### DISCERNMENT BEGINS EARLY

Another sad fact is that discerners often think they have to discern only full-blown error in its grossest forms

and overlook or ignore the small detours that can lead to all-out heresy. But we must discern error and false teaching even in its earliest forms and its faint beginnings. People oftentimes do not rush into error; they wander there. Proverbs 4 talks about the very early beginnings of sin and false teaching when it says, "Do not enter the path of the wicked ... Avoid it ... Turn away from it and pass on" (vv. 14-15). Don't enter that path; don't even go there — don't even start because of where it ultimately leads. In verse 27 of the same proverb we are told, "Do not turn to the right or the left." Whenever people tell us that "God told them" rather than "the Scripture says," red flags should go up all over the place. When we hear of people journaling their inner voices more red flags should fly. And when we hear talk of added books to the Bible, even more red flags need to be raised. In many instances our red flags have been replaced by white ones.

### OFF THE DEEP END

John MacArthur details a television appearance by Richard Eby who claims to have visited heaven:

"He said that the human brain has twelve cranial nerves and then added that those twelve nerves represent the twelve tribes of Israel. Further, he explained that the primary nerve in God's cranium is the sense of smell. Eby said he learned that the whole purpose of sacrifices was to send a sweet aroma up to heaven to satisfy God's main cranial nerve."<sup>5</sup>

There are two major problems with Eby's declaration. First is that research shows we have 24 cranial nerves: 12 pair. Second, and more important, is the blatant unbiblical intention that Eby ascribes to the Old Testament sacrifices. MacArthur tells us:

"As for the sweet aroma of sacrifices, Dr. Eby betrayed a complete misunderstanding of the biblical sacrifice system. The major feature of sacrifices was the death of the animal, not the

smell of the burning flesh (cf. Heb. 9:22)."<sup>6</sup>

Both MacArthur and William Alnor, who cataloged numerous near-death experiences and visions of heaven in his book *Heaven Can't Wait*, report that Eby claims the cause of his purported trip to heaven was a two-story fall from a balcony onto his head.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps that is the one specific reported by Eby that can be believed.

It is helpful for MacArthur to explain modern-day mysticism for us:

"Mysticism is a system of belief that attempts to perceive spiritual reality apart from objective verifiable facts. It seeks truth through feelings, intuition, and other internal senses. Objective data is usually discounted, so mysticism derives its authority from within. Spontaneous feeling becomes more significant than objective fact. Intuition outweighs reason. An internal awareness supersedes external reality. ... mysticism is at the heart of modern existentialism, humanism, and even many forms of paganism — most notable Hinduism and its close ally, New Age philosophy."<sup>8</sup>

A preacher once said in jest: "I was dreaming one time that I was preaching and when I woke up, I was." While that witticism was designed to catch people's attention, there are intelligent people who have become so mired in mysticism and the bizarre that they believe the late Kenneth Hagin when he said that he, at times, left his body while preaching. He claimed to be able to bilocate into not only a different place, but to a different day and time. Here is Hagin's own description of an episode which supposedly occurred while he was preaching at his church:

"Sunday morning as I was preaching, suddenly that glory cloud came in and enveloped me! I couldn't see a person. I couldn't see anything in the congregation. Again, I could hear the sound of my voice, but I couldn't distinguish a single word I said. I don't know what I

said, but I was just preaching away. I looked at my watch and marked the time. I was in that glory, and suddenly I was gone! Right in the middle of my sermon, I found myself standing along a street in a little town fifteen miles away — and I knew it was Saturday night. ... Suddenly I heard the sound of my voice, and then the cloud lifted. I was standing behind my pulpit. I didn't know what to say, because I didn't know what I had been saying, so I just said, 'Everyone bow your head,' and we prayed. I looked at my watch, and again I'd been gone about fifteen minutes in the cloud."<sup>9</sup>

With similar and insane assertions as above, bodies all over his congregation should have been relocating. Yet, apparently, throughout his life and ministry, few of Hagin's followers ever got up and walked out in protest of such declarations.<sup>10</sup>

Without discernment error proliferates. Paul charges Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:13, "Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you've heard from me." The theme song today seems to be, "I will go where my false teacher leads me, and I will swallow whatever he feeds me." The fact of discernment is replete in Scripture and used to be what we call common sense.

### FAILURES IN DISCERNMENT

A lack of discernment can be fatal. People have died when they discarded needed medicine on the advice of a faith healer who had declared them well. More than 900 people died in Jonestown, Guyana, because they followed Peoples Temple leader Jim Jones. Members of the Heaven's Gate cult died when they allowed Marshall Applewhite to do their thinking for them. More than 80, including 25 children, perished when they pledged allegiance to David Koresh and his Branch Davidian cult. Babies have died when parents withheld blood transfusions as a result of giving their minds to the Watchtower organization or withheld other vital medical treatment because a leader like faith-

formula teacher Hobart Freeman told them to.

To illustrate just how far down into darkness an undiscerning mind can go, we can learn about a man known as Padre Pio. Padre Pio was a Capuchin Monk who lived in an obscure town in southern Italy in the early 1900s. He claimed many powers, including levitation, bilocation, and stigmata (which is the bleeding from his hands, feet, and side like Jesus on the cross). While scientists of his day stated the wounds were self-created with the use of iodine and acid, Pio's followers thought of him as Jesus reincarnated. Pio was revered as hundreds flocked to his small town. Author Sergio Luzzatto has written about Pio's life and shares one shocking and unbelievable outcome:

"The prefect was also asked to guarantee that in light of the arriving droves of believers, the police were taking measures to deal with those exploiting this 'lurid industry,' and doing something to ensure public health — for many pilgrims from towns 'infected with smallpox and perhaps also with typhus,' and when the faithful gathered around Padre Pio, himself ill with tuberculosis, 'they gathered up his bloody sputum.'"<sup>11</sup>

### TRICKY DIVERSIONS AND EVASIONS

At times we fail to discern because we are put off and outmaneuvered by clichés, such as, "Touch not the Lord's anointed." But no one should believe that someone teaching false doctrine is the Lord's anointed. Specifically, "anointed" in the Old Testament refers to kings and priests and in the New Testament to true Christians. All true believers possess the Holy Spirit and are referred to as anointed (1 John 2:27).

We also are often put off when we hear, "Well, they teach the essentials." That is exactly what Jesus faced with the Pharisees: essentials buried under a pile of tradition. It was Paul who used the word "manure" in writing to the Philippians (3:8) as he spoke of his

past and his being mired in Pharisaic traditions. It is a problem when the cult or aberrant teacher thinks the non-essentials are essential.

Many books and articles written by proclaimed evangelical authors must have obligatory quotes from Catholic mystics without a single warning or disclaimer. Given the fact that some otherwise sound teachers tip their hats to these mystics, one may wonder if some of these have been added by editors. Perennial favorites seem to be Teresa of Avila and Madame Guyon. The quotes are often benign, but they just have to be there in the interest of ecumenism and no doubt a wider marketing base and bigger sales. Philip Yancey is a prime example of one who frequently does this indiscriminate quoting. When asked why Moody Press continues to publish the writings of Madame Guyon, a representative said, "It sells."

It does not seem to matter how much error or false teaching is spawned by the medieval mystics. Quoting them is just the "in thing" to do. It is tragic because it promotes so much confusion and doctrinal ambiguity. Certainly there must be safer and better authors who could be cited. But it is one of the weaknesses of our time as we try to make everyone happy. The theme song of megachurch pastor and author Joel Osteen seems to be Bobby McFerrin's 1988 number one pop hit, "Don't Worry Be Happy." Yet, happiness must not be our main priority. It can be a byproduct, but not a pursuit. Just seeking happiness is one of the signposts which points to a gross lack of discernment; a horrible failure in discernment. Holiness, not happiness, is God's primary goal for us. Getting there is sometimes a hard, difficult road. James 4:9 says we have to mourn and weep at times to make real progress. Hebrew 12 says we may have to endure chastisement to really enjoy the fruit of righteousness.

### GETTING TO THE ROOT

The word "heresy" (Gr: *hairesis*) means to look away from truth and choose something else. Maybe that

something else is happiness at the expense of truth, or peace at the expense of truth. Second Peter 2:1 says that looking away from sound doctrine about Jesus to something else is destructive.

In *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* it is clearly admitted that what is called the Charismatic movement 'has always been strong on faith-affirmation and short on critical reflection. ... But while the need for discernment is widely recognized, charismatic discernment is mostly intuitive and generally lacks an adequate underlying theology ... intelligent faith challenges the naiveté and simplistic identifications of unusual phenomena with the divine or the demonic.'<sup>12</sup>

### THE "MAD" MAGAZINE OF THE CHRISTIAN WORLD

Then, thanks to *Charisma* magazine and its book publishing division, we have books like Bill Wiese's *23 Minutes in Hell*, a piece of fiction borrowed from Mary K. Baxter's *Divine Revelation of Hell*. Hell used to be eternal, now it is a place one can apparently just visit for — more or less — 23 minutes. Today, visits to heaven and hell are a dime a dozen and these books all contradict one another. *Charisma* magazine also advertises other titles such as *Angels in our Lives* and *Dream Language: The Prophetic Power of Dreams*, as well as publishes articles to help us do violent warfare prayers. One may wonder if, when looking through a *Charisma* magazine, they are reading a Christian publication or something produced by the SyFy Channel.

### THE FAILURE OF THE "PROFESSIONAL" DISCERNERS

What is really disconcerting is when the professional discerners are not discerning. There can be, at times, an abysmal lack of discernment even among apologists. They give accolades to people they have not even researched. This creates even more confusion. When the issue is brought up, they reply, "Well, I don't agree

with everything they say." Many times, when pressed on what they don't agree with, one will find they have never read those they have quoted, but only taken something from a quote book because of the popularity of the cited author.

In November 1947, Israel received a 33-13 affirmative vote from the United Nations to form a State. However, truth is not up for vote. Even the most popular apologists should not get a "pass" because they write more books or have more listeners. The size of one's following cannot determine truth. If that was so, Islam would have Christianity beat hands down.

It is frustrating to have an organization like the Christian Research Institute (CRI) "baptize" the Worldwide Church of God, declaring it a first-rate, fully orthodox Christian organization when its leaders have yet to disavow Herbert Armstrong or label him the heretic, false teacher, and false prophet he was. Armstrong's church was also given the seal of approval in the late 1990s by both disgraced pastor Ted Haggard's school and Fuller Theological Seminary.

In 2009, Worldwide Church of God leaders changed the organization's name to Grace Communion International. On its Web site its history is published and Herbert Armstrong is presented as one who accepted Christ, and became a true Christian, but was a bit off on some of his interpretations and a bit misled. They admit he taught "unusual" doctrines and had "unusual" conclusions, but never call them heretical or wrong, just "unusual." So there is faint admission that many of his doctrines were a bit off the mark. However, the word "unusual" merely neutralizes outright heresy. Armstrong himself taught that God spoke to him and as he listened he wrote these words down in his articles. These teachings were given by direct revelation, or so Armstrong said. If so, then his errors must be God-given. The best that the Grace Communion International will do is say that he made some interpretive mistakes.

What is further troubling is that on Grace Communion International's Web site they also have available, both in their library and online, over a dozen of Herbert Armstrong's books with no disclaimers.

### TOMORROW IS THE DAY OF SALVATION

In addition, Grace Communion International still openly teaches post-mortem salvation, that one can be saved after death. In a type of quasi-universalism, GCI teaches that everyone will have a chance to hear the Gospel and respond after death. PFO sent a letter to GCI regarding the group's continued adherence to this belief. The response included a variety of spurious reasons for believing and teaching this. Their Web site includes an interpretation of John 3:16 that makes it a future event:

"The verse says nothing about that belief having to come prior to physical death. In fact, it says that believers will not perish, and since even believers die, it should be obvious that 'perish' and 'die' are not the same thing. Belief keeps people from perishing, but it does not keep them from dying."<sup>13</sup>

Also posted on GCI's Web site is an article that states:

"To summarize, it is the position of the church that God will make fair and just provision for people who do not appear to have received the gospel in this life. That was the main point of what we used to teach. But we do not teach any dogmatic *timing* or program — the when or how — regarding the receiving of the grace to salvation by those who seem to be among the unevangelized."<sup>14</sup>

This same article declares:

"The church's statement on 'Eternal Judgment' in its *Statement of Beliefs* says the following on this important matter: At the end of the age, God will gather all the living and the dead before the heavenly throne of Christ for judgment. The righteous will re-

ceive eternal glory, and the wicked will be condemned to the lake of fire. In Christ the Lord makes gracious and just provision for all, even for those who at death appear not to have believed the gospel."<sup>15</sup>

So the erstwhile followers of Armstrong provide a weak argument to prove postmortem salvation, using distorted verses, while ignoring others such as Hebrews 9:27, which says, "It is appointed unto men once to die and after that the judgment."

Likewise excluded is 2 Corinthians 6:2, "Today is the day of salvation." Nowhere in Scripture will one find a "you can wait until you die" soteriology.

More than a decade ago, PFO dealt with this issue in an extensive article written by a former member of the Worldwide Church of God.<sup>16</sup> In that article Peter Ditzel wrote:

"This teaching — often called postmortem evangelization — is certainly not the teaching of historic, orthodox Christianity. [WCG official J. Michael] Fezell himself verifies this by labeling the orthodox doctrine, 'the strange but common belief among many Christians that all people who do not accept the Gospel before they die are eternally lost and without hope.' This labeling of orthodox teaching as 'strange' is sadly reminiscent of Herbert W. Armstrong's invectives against the Christian Church. It is also paradoxical at best for the WCG, which has claimed for several years that it is completely orthodox in its teachings."<sup>17</sup>

### GETTING HELL OUT OF THE BIBLE

Grace Communion International also makes the claim on its Web site that hell is "Not a Core Doctrine":

"Hell is a doctrine about which there is no clear and dogmatic teaching in Scripture. ... The doctrine of hell evolved long after the core doctrines of the historic Christian faith were established.

The views of the early Church fathers about hell were far from unanimous. It took the Christian community hundreds of years to come up with a consensus on the issue. The majority view — that hell is a place of eternal fiery torment — emerged only after a long debate within the Church."<sup>18</sup>

Yet the serious Bible student would argue that hell is "core." It is used more than 50 times in the Bible. Further, it was especially "core" and important to Jesus because He taught so much about it — and no words of Jesus can ever be minimized or dismissed. This setting aside of hell impinges on the entire doctrine of salvation and the Gospel. Jesus came to earth to deliver us from eternal punishment. That was His reason for coming. Eternal separation from God is not peripheral in the teachings of Jesus — rather it is central to His entire mission. It is what drives evangelism. It is through this created knothole that GCI has smuggled in the concept of postmortem salvation. For GCI, hell is not all that important and not a "core" issue because there will be a post-death opportunity to be saved anyway.

### KREEFT CRAFTING HERESY

In his book, *Resurrection - The Capstone in the Arch of Christianity*, CRI president Hank Hanegraaff repeatedly quotes Roman Catholic philosopher Peter Kreeft. Kreeft is far removed from Orthodoxy. Hanegraaff offers more than a dozen quotes by Kreeft favorable to his position.<sup>19</sup> It is sad and misleading. It gives Kreeft credibility. Unfortunately, Hanegraaff only provides within an endnote in the back of his book, a brief disclaimer alluding to Kreeft's unorthodoxy.<sup>20</sup>

Kreeft, in his book *Ecumenical Jihad*, says very clearly, "We worship the Eucharist because it is Christ."<sup>21</sup> True to his Roman Catholic foundation, Kreeft instructs believers to worship a "consecrated" piece of bread.

Kreeft also tells his readers that while writing that book he had an out-of-body experience and that he was "commanded" to tell them about

what happened to him. He alleges, "Woe is me if I do not preach this gospel."<sup>22</sup> Then, concerning his experience, he offers:

"Whether it was real or unreal, objective truth or subjective fantasy, I cannot say. All I can say is that it was certainly truer, incomparably truer, than the chapter I was planning to write. That's why I threw the old one away."<sup>23</sup>

Nevertheless, we are to believe the revision will be truer than his first draft. Additionally, we would logically think that we are going to hear the Gospel. His "gospel" message tells of his out-of-body vision in which he was soul surfing on a heavenly beach in a tunnel of light.<sup>24</sup> Here, in heaven, he encountered Confucius (also on a surf board) and explains that Confucius taught him some things about wisdom, virtue, and social justice.

Next Buddha shows up leading Kreeft to conclude that Buddha had received a theological crash course in heaven. So now we have both Confucius and Buddha in heaven. Buddha actually affirmed the truth of "doing by not doing" and teaching Kreeft interior silence, detachment, and meditation. He then realized that Buddha's words were "God's words." God confirmed to him that Buddha's words were indeed God's words.

Then God told Kreeft another man would show up to teach him wisdom. That man was Mohammed. Kreeft says he took out his rosary and Mohammed fell on his knees worshipping Jesus and Mary. Not to be completely removed from Scripture, Kreeft encounters yet another — this one a man with the appearance of a New York Jew with an obvious lower east side New York accent: Moses.

Kreeft's out-of-body experience is a cross between mockery and insanity.

### FULLY EMBRACING DISCERNMENT

In the biblical world, and up until recent times, people thought in terms of contrasts. There was good and evil, light and darkness, God and Satan,

hope and despair, morality and immorality, black and white.

Logic and the Bible both tell us that this is the proper way to understand life and reality. It's built into the fabric of creation, "God divided the light from the darkness" (Genesis 1:3). Discernment is necessary to see all the differences that are in the world.

### **HARDENING OF THE CATEGORIES**

It appears that many no longer see light and darkness, good and evil as contrasts. The mind-set today is that everything is relative. Thus we can see why our culture is in such deep trouble. Yet there is still visceral dislike for child abuse and molestation, as well as murder. The same goes for rape. No one argues that these are acceptable for some, although that argument may not be far off. The dividing line for some seems to be that if it hurts another person it is not permissible. God has defined for us what is hurtful. And even though we may one day try to redefine hurt and decide that the person being sinned against must be more accepting of these behaviors, God's Word still stands. God help us to have a revival of the gift of discernment and understand life through biblical contrasts.

So without discernment we would not know right from wrong. It is obvious that the Fall has dulled and distorted that God-given ability, so it must be sharpened by God's Word.

There can be extremes in discernment. No one needs to be excessively critical, but neither are believers to go to the other extreme and be naive and afraid to evaluate anything. We are not to be judgmental Pharisees, but neither are we to be like the Athenians (in Acts 17:19-32) who spent their time hearing and telling something new. Remember, as has been stated, discernment is first and foremost a gift from God. We can exercise that gift in a God-pleasing manner.

Another word that courses through the Bible is "understanding." Proverbs 1:2 says we are to "perceive the

words of understanding." Proverbs tells its readers to gain understanding by knowing and applying the wisdom found therein. "Understanding" is a word that is distinct from feeling and means to perceive with the mind. We are starting down the wrong road when we separate mind and heart or mind and feelings, setting them up as enemies or exclusive of one another. Discernment is a light for both our mind and our emotions, lest they both go out of control and head down the wrong road.

### **SLIPPING, SLIDING, AND AVOIDING**

We often hear what can be referred to as "discernment evasions." The diversion goes like this: "Well you know you can denounce false teaching, but you should never name names." However, in 3 John 9-10 the Apostle John says, "I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the pre-eminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words." That word "prating" means that Diotrephes talks nonsense. John named names.

Throughout the book of Acts false teachers are named. Paul in his Epistles names names. He speaks of babblings that lead to ungodliness and "their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort" (2 Timothy 2:17).

In 2 Timothy 3:8, Paul wrote, "Janenes and Jambres resisted Moses." A chapter later he wrote, "Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world" (2 Timothy 4:10). Then a few verses later he wrote, "Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works" (v. 14). Paul was even bold enough to denounce Peter for his allegiance to the circumcision group (Galatians 2:11-14).

Some individuals and organizations, mostly within Charismatic and Pentecostal camps, make claims of apostolic succession, meaning some type of hierarchal passing down of power and authority to them. Acts 2:42,

however, indicates it happens another way. Luke wrote that "they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine." Continuance in the apostles' doctrine is the only way to insure a vital connection to the truth that the apostles conveyed. F.F. Bruce says it well:

"... those are most truly in the apostolic succession who receive this apostolic teaching, along with the rest of Holy Writ, as their rule of faith and practice."<sup>25</sup>

Proverbs 2:3-5 teaches, "Yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God." It is clear that we should pray to be more discerning.

Recall Philippians 1:9-10: "And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ."

### **EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY**

Jesus, in Matthew 7:15, instructs us to "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves." Paul charges the believers in Thessalonica to "Test all things; hold fast what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). The Apostle John adds, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). Some act like those verses are not even there. Jude said he wrote "exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).

"Earnestly" means "diligently." Dallas Seminary theology professor Robert P. Lightner, during his plenary lecture at one of PFO's discernment conferences, challenged believers to contend for the faith without being contentious.<sup>26</sup> To that we could add that you cannot contend without being earnest.

It is essential that we read and consider Acts 20:26-32. In those verses Paul warns that false teachers would infiltrate the Ephesian church — both from outside and inside. The heretical teachers would mislead and speak perverse things, divide the flock, and carry off misguided followers. By extension, leaders in the Church are commanded to really be on guard. All of this demands discernment. It is not a “do it if you feel like it” exercise.

Ponder the imperative of discernment — its facts — its failures — and your responsibility to fully embrace it.

### Endnotes:

1. Roy Laurin, *Philippians - Where Life Advances*. Findlay, Ohio: Dunham Publishing, 1954, pg. 31.
2. K. Neill Foster, *The Discerning Christian*. Harrisburg, Pa.: Christian Publications, Inc., 1981, pg. 11.
3. Richard J. Mouw, “Mormonism: Not a cult, not a problem,” Op-Ed in *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 20, 2011. Document accessed at: [www.latimes.com/news/opinion/commentary/la-oe-mouw-mormons-20111120,0,699207.story](http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/commentary/la-oe-mouw-mormons-20111120,0,699207.story).
4. F.F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1955, pg. 347.

5. John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992, pg. 30.
6. *Ibid.*, pg. 31.
7. *Ibid.*, pg. 30 and William M. Alnor, *Heaven Can't Wait*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1996, pg. 47. Alnor provides a good critique of Eby's book, *Caught Up into Paradise*, on pages 46-50.
8. *Charismatic Chaos*, op. cit., pp. 31-32.
9. Kenneth E. Hagin, “The Glory of God,” *The Word of Faith* magazine, October 1986, pg. 17. This two-part article was later (in 1987) printed in booklet form.
10. For additional information on the claims of Hagin, see J. Greg Sheryl with M. Kurt Goedelman, “The Visions and Voices of Kenneth E. Hagin,” *The Quarterly Journal*, January-March 2005, pp. 1, 18-24.
11. Sergio Luzzatto, *Padre Pio*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2010, pg. 30.
12. P.D. Hocken in Stanley M. Burgess, Editor, *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002, pg. 517.
13. “The Gospel Really Is Good News,” Grace Communion International Web site. Document accessed at: [www.gci.org/gospel/reallyis](http://www.gci.org/gospel/reallyis).
14. “Are There Three Resurrections?,” Grace Communion International Web site, italic in original. Document accessed at: [www.gci.org/bible/rev/3resurrec](http://www.gci.org/bible/rev/3resurrec).

15. *Ibid.*, italics in original.
16. Peter Ditzel, “Being Saved After Death is Still Alive in the Worldwide Church of God,” *The Quarterly Journal*, October-December 2001, pp. 1, 11-20.
17. *Ibid.*, pg. 1.
18. “The Battle Over Hell,” Grace Communion International Web site. Document accessed at: [www.gci.org/prophesy/hell](http://www.gci.org/prophesy/hell).
19. Hank Hanegraaff, *Resurrection - The Capstone in the Arch of Christianity*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000, pp. 66, 70, 72, 116, 117, 121, 122, 139, 140, 141, 142, 238.
20. In his endnote, Hanegraaff concedes: “While I have significant theological differences with both [C.S.] Lewis and Kreeft, I greatly admire their writing prowess, mental acumen, and philosophical sophistication” (*ibid.*, pg. 251).
21. Peter Kreeft, *Ecumenical Jihad*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996, pg. 162, italics in original.
22. *Ibid.*, pg. 85.
23. *Ibid.*, pg. 86.
24. *Ibid.*, the description of Kreeft's out-of-body experience is found in chapter six, pp. 85-111.
25. *Commentary on the Book of Acts*, op. cit., pg. 418.
26. Robert P. Lightner, “Contending for the Faith Without Being Contentious,” 2010 Saint Louis Conference on Biblical Discernment, CD-1007.



## THE SOCIAL GOSPEL

(continued from page 1)

An article by John R.W. Stott, an early architect of the two-pronged approach, was posthumously published in *Christianity Today*. It stated:

“We are convinced of the power of the gospel in evangelism — that it brings salvation and redemption to those who respond and believe in Jesus. But it isn't only the gospel that is powerful. All God's truth is powerful.”<sup>1</sup>

Such a statement, on its face, is not debatable. But Christians should take heed of where it leads. Stott has endorsed, if not created, the vision statement of The Lausanne Movement: “The whole church taking the whole gospel to the whole world.” While this makes for a catchy slogan, almost every word has to be examined.

Given the high emphasis on ecumenical unity at all three of the Lausanne conferences on world evangelization, including the latest in Cape Town in 2010, it appears that the “whole church” includes virtually all branches and traditions within Christendom, including Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and mainline denominations. The “whole gospel” will be defined by what is meant by the “whole world.” According to The Lausanne Movement, “the whole world” is framed around six major themes, including “The World of Violence” and “The World of Poverty and Injustice.”<sup>2</sup> The “whole gospel” by default includes not only the good news that Jesus Christ has died to provide salvation, but also addresses the social injustices found in our world today. As further evidence of this, we turn to positional papers flowing from Cape Town 2010. One such document from the conference reads:

“Cape Town 2010 must call evangelicals to recognise afresh the biblical affirmation of God's redemptive purpose for *creation* itself. Integral mission means discerning, proclaiming, and living out, the biblical truth that the gospel is God's good news, through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, for persons, *and* for society, *and* for creation. All three are broken and suffering because of sin; all three are included in the redeeming love and mission of God; all three must be part of the comprehensive mission of God's people. ... Christians who are working in environmental biology and creation care have a valid missional calling which needs to be recognised, encouraged and resourced by the church, for they model how to integrate the care of creation into what it means to proclaim Jesus as Lord. Caring

for creation is an act of fidelity to the whole biblical gospel and the mission that flows from it. ... Our missional calling demands more careful and critical consumption, creative production, prophetic denunciation, advocacy for and mobilization of the victims of world injustice. While we stand with the Micah Challenge in holding our governments accountable to their commitments to 'make poverty history', we also dedicate ourselves to 'making greed history' in our own lives, churches, communities, countries and world."<sup>3</sup>

It becomes clear from such statements that Lausanne, which represents much of mainstream evangelicalism, is co-mingling a form of the social gospel with the biblical Gospel. The Lausanne leadership does try to give evangelism pre-eminence, stating:

"Although reconciliation with other people is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation, *nevertheless we affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty.* For both are necessary expressions of our doctrines of God and man, our love for our neighbour and our obedience to Jesus Christ. The message of salvation implies also a message of judgment upon every form of alienation, oppression and discrimination, and we should not be afraid to denounce evil and injustice wherever they exist."<sup>4</sup>

This statement goes to the heart of the issue. The question is not whether Christians should play a responsible role in society, or whether we should denounce evil and injustice, but whether "evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty," and if so, to what extent?

This concern is widespread and contagious. Some of the most popular Christian leaders and authors stress the social agenda. Francis Chan, in his book *Crazy Love*, wants Christians to live as simply as possible in order to



# The Social Gospel of the Past

by Gary E. Gilley

Evangelicalism changed radically in the 19th century. The effects of the Great Awakening in the 1730s-1740s in America and the Evangelical Revival in England were a memory. Many longed for something similar but seemed willing to settle for the outward emotionalism<sup>1</sup> instead of the content-oriented approach of their fathers. Thus, when the so-called Second Great Awakening began in Cane Ridge, Ky., in 1800 and spread throughout much of New England and parts of the American South, it differed greatly from the previous century's revival.

Jonathan Edwards believed the Great Awakening was a true revival, but he also knew that there were excesses, pretenders, and "false spirits" mingled in. While there were undoubtedly true conversions and fervor for the Lord in the 19th century revivals, much of it was fleshly passion. A good speaker, such as Charles Finney, could draw huge crowds. Churches would be packed during "revivals," but after the evangelists had moved on, life returned to its pre-revival state.

Many pastors decided to offer revival-style services. One critic of the Finney-style revivals wrote that in 1858: "Singing, shouting, jumping, talking, praying, all at the same time ... in a crowded house, filled to suffocation," according to a more sober Congregational missionary, led to people having fits and giving in their names as converts but, as soon as the excitement was over, falling away."<sup>2</sup>

This cycle became so common that certain sections of New England and

the state of New York became known as the "Burnt-over District" where the fire of revival meetings had swept so often through some areas that people ultimately had grown resistant to the things of God. To this day, these regions remain perhaps the most spiritually hardened parts of the American landscape. It is interesting, however, that in the mid-1800s many of the standard cults that are prominent today emerged from this same area.

By the mid-1800s, some saw a need to establish criteria by which a true Evangelical could be identified. In 1846, "the Evangelical Alliance was formed to bring together the Protestants all over the world who were the heirs of the awakening of the previous century."<sup>3</sup> The Evangelical Alliance confirmed the standard doctrines of the faith and offered four hallmarks of an Evangelical:

- Belief in the inspiration, authority, and sufficiency of Scripture.
- Acknowledgement of the centrality of the cross, upon which Jesus' sacrifice provided the way of salvation for men.
- Affirmation of the need for conversion in which by repentance and faith a sinner becomes a new creature in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Activism in which the child of God is busy presenting the Gospel and ministering to those in need.<sup>4</sup>

Those who rejected the doctrinal orthodoxy of the World Evangelical Alliance, as it was also called, tried

to infiltrate it with liberal theology. When that failed, they withdrew in 1894 to form their own organization, The Open Church League, which later was renamed the National Federation of Churches and Christian Workers in 1900. By 1950 the National Federation was reorganized as the National Council of Churches.<sup>5</sup> This breaking away by the liberal factions and the forming of their own organization led to the demise of the World Evangelical Alliance.

The liberal theologians (known as “modernists” in the late 1800s) were bringing German rationalism into English-speaking churches, especially in America. Many in these churches had abandoned the careful study and teaching of Scripture, making these churches fertile ground for heresy.

Added to this was a move from the precise thinking of the Enlightenment to Romanticism and emphasis on feeling and experience over theology and Scripture.<sup>6</sup> Together all of these threads were combined during the second half of the 19th century to produce a radical makeover in Christianity. Doctrines held dear by Evangelicals were abandoned. And with the denial of essential biblical truth came a shift in the focus and purpose of the Church. If the incarnation was in doubt, and the Scriptures suspect, and theology itself under attack, then that left social action as the mission of the Church. And thus the “social gospel” was born.

Church historian David Bebbington wrote:

“The most characteristic doctrine of the social gospelers, that the kingdom of God was to be realized by social improvement, was derived primarily from the German liberal theologian Albrecht Ritschl.”<sup>7</sup>

However, it is important to realize that the social gospel did not overwhelm the Gospel of spiritual salvation all at once. For some time,

“There was much agreement in America that the gospel was primarily a matter of spiritual salvation, but that under modern conditions it was also necessary to strive for social reform. In its origins the social gospel movement was in large part a broadening expression of evangelicalism.”<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps doctrine took a back seat to social action because of pressure by people such as George Eliot who taught that “salvation of the individual soul was not sufficient. Society must be saved as well as Christians.”<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, evangelical forces held their ground during most of the latter half of the century, but the front lines began to crumble by the last decade and the war was essentially lost by 1900. And with that loss not only had the great truths of Scripture been undermined, but the purpose of the Church had been shifted from fulfillment of the Great Commission with its emphasis on evangelism and discipleship to the social gospel and saving society from itself. Probably no one has described the social gospel better than H. Richard Niebuhr who wrote, “A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.”<sup>10</sup>

By the early 1900s, most theological liberals had made social concerns central to their understanding of the Gospel. Historian George Marsden wrote:

“While not necessarily denying the value of the traditional evangelical approach of starting with evangelism, social gospel spokesmen subordinated such themes, often suggesting that stress on evangelism had made American evangelicalism too otherworldly ... and individualistic ... Such themes fit well with the emerging liberal theology of the day.”<sup>11</sup>

(continues on page 21)

give more toward the alleviation of “suffering in the world and change the reputation of His bride in America.”<sup>5</sup> One of the reasons Chan’s book has been received with such enthusiasm is that he is not telling people anything that our culture is not already saying. When Bill Gates and Warren Buffett pledged much of their vast fortunes toward the same agenda, the world applauded, just as it has for Chan.

Chan is concerned about the reputation of the Church in America, and not without reason. However, the true Church doing the true work of God (calling people to Christ) will never win the world’s approval. The Church’s message is offensive (1 Corinthians 1:18-25) and we are far more likely to be vilified and persecuted than cheered — as Jesus promised (Matthew 5:11-12). We should find it a source of concern, not a reason for rejoicing, when the world likes us.

A similar voice is David Platt’s and his book *Radical*. Platt offers better balance than Chan but still propagates a two-pronged gospel: the Gospel of redemption and the social gospel. While Platt is careful to elevate the true Gospel, the social gospel of feeding the hungry and giving to the poor is the primary focus of the book and accounts for its popularity.<sup>6</sup> He writes, “as we meet needs on earth, we are proclaiming a gospel that transforms lives for eternity.”<sup>7</sup> The author does not advocate the social agenda as opposed to true evangelism, but he does say that caring for the poor is evidence of salvation. He writes, “rich people who neglect the poor are not the people of God.”<sup>8</sup>

However, when we turn to the New Testament, we find that while Christians are to be loving and generous to all people, they are never told to try to alleviate the consequences of the sin of unbelieving humanity through social action. Instead, they are told to supply the needs of brothers and sisters in Christ, something Platt admits in a footnote.<sup>9</sup> In fact, the Church is never commissioned to rectify injustices by dealing with the symptoms of sin, but to “radically” uproot sin

itself through the Gospel. Kevin DeYoung and Gregory Gilbert wrote, "If you are looking for a picture of the early church giving itself to creation care, plans for societal renewal, and strategies to serve the community in Jesus' name, you won't find them in Acts. But if you are looking for preaching, teaching, and the centrality of the Word, this is your book."<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, evangelical leader Timothy Keller offers a different message. In his book *The Reason for God*, Keller promotes the two-pronged gospel. Drawing from N.T. Wright and the "missional" understanding of Christianity, Keller infuses a social dimension into his gospel definition. Keller's gospel is more than the good news that Christ has come to reconcile us to God; it is also solving the world's problems of injustice, poverty, and healing the troubles of this earth. He quotes Wright, not Scripture, to support his view:

"The message of the resurrection is that this world matters! That the injustices and pains of this present world must now be addressed with the news that healing, justice, and love have won ... But if Jesus Christ is truly risen from the dead, Christianity becomes good news for the whole world ... Easter means that in a world where injustice, violence and degradation are endemic, God is not prepared to tolerate such things — and that we will work and plan, with all the energy of God, to implement victory of Jesus over them all."<sup>11</sup>

Later Keller makes clear what he means:

"The purpose of Jesus's coming is to put the whole world right, to renew and restore the creation, not to escape it. It is not just to bring personal forgiveness and peace, but also justice and *shalom* to the world. ... The work of the Spirit of God is not only to save souls but also to care and cultivate the face of the earth, the material world."<sup>12</sup>

Nowhere in the New Testament is such a commission given to the

people of God. One will, however, find a similar message in the emergent church, Wright's "New Perspective on Paul," and those reviving the old "social gospel" agenda.

With this in mind, we turn to Wright himself. In his *What Saint Paul Really Said*, he writes that, "The gospel' is supposed to be a description of how people get saved," or how "Christ takes our sin and we his righteousness," or something along that order.<sup>13</sup> To Wright this is not what Paul meant by the Gospel. The Gospel instead is "the narrative proclamation of King Jesus;"<sup>14</sup> and Paul "is announcing that ... Jesus is the king, not only of Israel but of all the world."<sup>15</sup> Said with greater clarity, "The gospel is the announcement that Jesus is Lord — Lord of the world, Lord of the cosmos, Lord of the earth, of the ozone layer, of whales and waterfalls, of trees and tortoises."<sup>16</sup>

While no thinking Christian would deny the lordship of Christ over all things, when the Gospel itself becomes the message of lordship rather than the message of redemption and justification, a seismic shift in the understanding of Jesus' mission is necessary. Wright leaves no doubt where he is headed: "As soon as we get this right we destroy at a stroke the disastrous dichotomy that has existed in people's minds between 'preaching the gospel' on the one hand and what used to be called loosely 'social action' or 'social justice' on the other. Preaching the gospel means announcing Jesus as Lord of the world; and ... we cannot make that announcement without seeking to bring that lordship to bear over every aspect of the world. ... It is bringing the whole world under the lordship of Christ."<sup>17</sup>

Add to all this Rick Warren's PEACE plan. After the success of his book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, Warren developed a plan for changing the world. PEACE is an acronym for "Promote Reconciliation," "Equip Servant Leaders," "Assist the Poor," "Care for the Sick," and "Educate the Next Generation." Originally, the first letter of the acronym PEACE stood for "Plant Churches" and, as such,

would be the only thing distinguishing the plan from any other well-meaning secular program. The initial idea was to motivate and coordinate churches to solve the four social problems identified in the rest of the acronym (E-A-C-E). Warren's logic is that the Church is already present throughout the world and where churches were lacking, more could be planted to meet these social needs. But as Warren's focus changed and he wanted to enlarge his influence, he changed what the "P" stood for and has removed any Christian distinctiveness from the plan.

What is unfolding before us is what emergent church leader Brian McLaren calls "missional." Missional, McLaren tells us, is "a generous third way" between the conservative personal Savior gospel and the liberal version of it.<sup>18</sup> McLaren explains his missional calling as "blessed in this life to be a blessing to everyone on earth. ... my mission isn't to figure out who is already blessed, or not blessed, or unblessable. My calling is to be blessed so I can bless everyone."<sup>19</sup> He continues, "From this understanding we place less emphasis on whose lineage, rites, doctrines, structures, and terminology are *right* and more emphasis on whose actions, service, outreach, kindness, and effectiveness are *good*. ... [In order] to help our world get back on the road to being truly and wholly good again, the way God created it to be."<sup>20</sup>

Rob Bell adds:

"For Jesus, the question wasn't, how do I get into heaven? but how do I bring heaven here? ... The goal isn't escaping this world but making this world the kind of place God can come to. And God is remaking us into the kind of people who can do this kind of work."<sup>21</sup>

McLaren's and Bell's rationale is an echo of the founders of liberalism.

## IN SEARCH OF THE MESSAGE

The original social gospel movement began as an appendage to the emerging liberalism that started in Germany and ultimately swept

through the Western Church. As the liberal movement matured, it left behind most doctrinal distinctives held by earlier Protestants and came to be defined by social action. Today, a new wave of social involvement, as a major tenet of Church ministry, is flowing through evangelical churches, changing the very nature of Church dynamics and outreach. The issue is not whether Christians should be involved with their culture, but whether trying to solve problems of the culture is the mission of the Church.

Liberalism would almost exclusively emphasize social causes. For example, the National Council of Churches states, "*the central moral imperative* of our time is the care for Earth as God's creation."<sup>22</sup> Postmodern liberalism, as found in the emergent movement, would agree. McLaren believes that "Jesus and his message have everything to do with poverty, slavery, and a 'social agenda'"<sup>23</sup> — it is not about justification from sin.

## SUPPORT FOR A TWO-PRONGED MANDATE

Those who back the concept that the Church has been called to both disciple men and women for Christ and improve social conditions cite three primary arguments:

**1. Old Testament Israel.** When trying to provide a biblical foundation for social involvement of the Church, supporters most often turn to Old Testament teaching directed at Israel. There are numerous commands and admonitions that have social implications. For example, we find God's concern for:

• **Justice.** "Woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees, who write misfortune, which they have prescribed to rob the needy of justice" (Isaiah 10:1-2a, emphasis added). The Lord made provision for fair and impartial courts of law, not just for the poor but for all: "You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor" (Leviticus 19:15).

• **The poor.** "He who mocks the poor reproaches his Maker; he who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished" (Proverbs 17:5, emphasis added).

The Lord provided several means to help the poor in Israel. One method was to provide the Jewish people with a "kinsman-redeemer," a close relative designated to alleviate the relative's troubles, including poverty. The book of Ruth supplies the best illustration of how this system worked, but in Leviticus 25:25 we read, "If one of your brethren becomes poor, and has sold some of his possession, and if his redeeming relative comes to redeem it, then he may redeem what his brother sold." In Deuteronomy 15:11 the Lord tells Israel, "For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.'"

• **Widows and orphans.** Again in Isaiah 10:1-2 the Lord tells His people, "Woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees, who write misfortune, which they have prescribed to rob the needy of justice, and to take what is right from the poor of My people, that widows may be their prey, and that they may rob the fatherless" (emphasis added). There is a special place in the heart of God for orphans and widows.

• **The hungry.** One of the characteristics the Lord gives of the fool is "to keep the hungry unsatisfied, and he will cause the drink of the thirsty to fail" (Isaiah 32:6). Proverbs calls for the Jews to feed even their enemies: "If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink" (25:21). And the Lord gives this promise, "If you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday" (Isaiah 58:10). Regarding the hungry, the Lord made unique provisions demanding the farmers to leave a bit of their harvest in the fields for the poor to glean: "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field when you reap, nor shall you gather any gleaning from your harvest. You

shall leave them for the poor and for the stranger: I am the LORD your God" (Leviticus 23:22).

These concerns for the needy, which express the heart of God, must be taken seriously, and many are contemplating such instructions anew. For example, Chan sees Jesus' words at the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 25 as a continuation or application of the Old Testament teachings. Chan believes the actions we take toward the poor have been set by our Lord as the paradigm to determine the validity of our faith. He bases his understanding on verses 34-40 which read: "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'"

Chan writes, "Jesus is saying that we show tangible love for God in how we care for the poor and those who are suffering. He expects us to treat the poor and the desperate as if they were Christ Himself."<sup>24</sup> By way of application Chan continues, "Much of their [the poor] daily hardship and suffering could be relieved with access to food, clean water, clothing, adequate shelter, or basic medical attention. I believe that God wants His people, His church, to meet these needs."<sup>25</sup>

**2. Jesus' Salt and Light Metaphors.** In Matthew 5:13-16, Jesus tells His disciples that they are the salt and light of the world. Stott represents how many people interpret these verses when he writes:

“[Jesus] emphasizes the influences Christians ought to have on the non-Christian environment. The distinction between the two is clear. The world, he says, is like rotting meat. But you are to be the world’s salt. The world is like a dark night, but you are to be the world’s light. ... Then he goes on from the distinction to the influence. Like salt in putrefying meat, Christians are to hinder social decay. Like light in the prevailing darkness, Christians are to illumine society and show it a better way.”<sup>26</sup>

Chan writes:

“Non-churchgoers tend to see Christians as takers rather than givers. When Christians sacrifice and give wildly to the poor, that is truly a light that glimmers. The Bible teaches that the church is to be that light, that sign of hope, in an increasingly dark and hopeless world. Matthew 5:16 says, ‘Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.’”<sup>27</sup>

The means by which believers are fulfilling Jesus’ teaching to be salt and light in the world is increasingly seen by Evangelicals as being through social and political involvement. As we mobilize the Church to meet the needs of the hungry, sick and poor, and as we protect the environment and become active in political reform, we are seen by many as living out our salt and light obligations.

**3. The Cultural Mandate.** Recently Evangelicals have been turning to what they call the “Cultural Mandate” to provide a biblical base for social action. The idea is that the Lord has actually given the Church two interrelated callings: The Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) in which believers are to go into the whole world and make disciples for Christ, and the Cultural Mandate in which the Church is authorized to be directly involved in physical and social issues related to the planet. No true Evangelical questions the Great Commission, but the Cultural Mandate is

not so clear. The biblical teaching for the Cultural Mandate is drawn from Genesis 1:26, 28:

“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ ... Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’”

From this pre-Fall text has come the belief that the Church retains the mandate given to Adam in the Garden to subdue and rule over the earth. Michael Goheen and Craig Bartholomew, authors of *Living at the Crossroads*, write:

“If redemption is, as the Bible teaches, the restoration of the whole of creation, then our mission is to embody this good news: every part of creational life, including the public life of our culture, is being restored. The good news will be evident in our care for the environment, in our approach to international relations, economic justice, business, media, scholarship, family, journalism, industry, and law. But if redemption were merely about an otherworldly salvation (as, for example, Moody believed), then our mission would be reduced to the sort of evangelism that tries to get people into heaven.”<sup>28</sup>

Nancy Pearcey writes in her book *Total Truth*, “Christians are to redeem entire cultures, not just individuals.”<sup>29</sup>

Pearcey speaks often of the Cultural Mandate:

“Our calling is not just to ‘get to heaven’ but also to cultivate the earth, not just to ‘save souls’ but also to serve God through our work. For God Himself is engaged not only in the work of salvation (special grace) but also

in the work of preserving and developing His creation (common grace). When we obey the Cultural Mandate, we participate in the work of God Himself, as agents of His common grace. This is the rich content that should come to mind when we hear the word *Redemption*. The term does not refer only to a one-time conversion event. It means entering upon a lifelong quest to devote our skills and talents to building things that are beautiful and useful, while fighting the forces of evil and sin that oppress and distort the creation.”<sup>30</sup>

Pearcey and company are not content with influencing culture or trying to mitigate injustices. They want to *create* culture. In one section Pearcey mentions the social efforts of some Christians who minister to “the poor, the homeless, the addicted” but laments that “none of them attempt to transform social or cultural systems, but merely [minister] to alleviate some of the harm caused by the existing system.”<sup>31</sup>

It becomes apparent that many leading Evangelicals see the Cultural Mandate as fully in force as it was when first given to Adam and Eve. Christians then have a charge to change culture, transform culture, create culture, and subdue creation. This is seen as a duty on par with making disciples, and thus the Great Commission and the Cultural Mandate are equal parts of fulfilling the Church’s mission on earth.

### BIBLICAL EXAMINATION OF THE TWO-PRONGED MANDATE

In critiquing the three arguments for this mandate we can first ask, “How should God’s commands to Israel be viewed for this age?” And we could break that question down into two questions: “Are Jewish civil laws applicable to the New Testament Church, and if so, how would they function in the Church age?”

The authors of the New Testament express the same concerns as we find

in the Old Testament. James 1:27 tells us that, "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world." The early Church made provisions to feed orphans and widows in Acts 6:1-6 and later, as the Church became more established, widows without other means of support or resources were placed on a list to be given special care (1 Timothy 5:11-16).

One of the primary reasons for Paul's third missionary journey was to collect from the western churches a relief offering to help the poor believers in Jerusalem, "For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem" (Romans 15:26).

And James calls for justice for the poor: "My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality" (James 2:1ff). Without question, the social concerns of God in the Old Testament remain the same in the Church age.

However, it is often overlooked that God's commands concerning social issues in the Old Testament were given almost exclusively to Israel, and dealt almost entirely with the needs of those living within the boundaries of geographical Israel and under direct authority of the Mosaic Law. Charles Ryrie notes that the Old Testament "does not command the establishment of justice in the world, nor the care of all the poor and oppressed in the world. It is more 'isolationist' than the New Testament. But it does show God's love for justice and holiness in personal living."<sup>32</sup>

Drawing strictly from the Old Testament Scriptures yields a picture of a loving, concerned, caring God who nevertheless focused attention, with almost no exceptions, on the poor and needy living in Israel under the theocratic kingdom and the Mosaic Law. In the Old Testament no provision was made for the destitute living throughout the world. No social outreach to surrounding nations can be found. Therefore, to press into service

the social program found in the Old Testament as a pattern for today's global outreach to the needy is to go beyond what the Old Testament teaches. As Israel cared for the needs of her own poor, it was every poor person who was helped. Kevin DeYoung and Gregory Gilbert encourage us to "remember that the 'poor' in Scripture are usually the pious poor. They are the righteous poor ... the poor whom God favors are not the slothful poor (Prov. 6:6-11; 2 Thess. 3:6-12) or the disobedient poor (Prov. 30:9), but the humble poor who wait on God (Matt. 5:3; 6:33)."<sup>33</sup>

### THE MEANING OF JESUS' SALT AND LIGHT METAPHORS

Jesus' identification of His disciples as salt and light in the world is straightforward and has been the source of much contemplation throughout the years concerning what the followers of the Lord are to be like. Interpreting what Jesus said in Matthew 5:13-16 in general is not difficult. Most would agree with New Testament scholar William Hendriksen who writes:

"Salt, then, has *especially* a *negative* function. It combats deterioration. Similarly Christians, by showing themselves to be Christians indeed, are constantly combating moral and spiritual decay. ... Light, on the other hand, has a *positive* function and shines *openly*, publicly."<sup>34</sup>

The specific application is where things get sticky. As noted above, many are interpreting this text to mean that believers are to engage culture through political involvement and social action. Most commentators, who are addressing the text with no agenda to push, do not agree. Hendriksen writes:

"Now since it is the business of the church to shine for Jesus, it should not permit itself to be thrown off its course. It is not the task of the church to specialize in and deliver all kinds of pronouncements concerning economic, social, and political prob-

lems. ... But the *primary* duty of the church remains the spreading forth of the message of salvation, that the lost may be found (Luke 15:4; I Cor. 9:16, 22; 10:33), those found may be strengthened in the faith (Eph. 4:15; I Thess. 3:11-13; I Peter 2:2; II Peter 3:18), and God may be glorified (John 17:4; I Cor. 10:31)."<sup>35</sup>

Respected preacher Martyn Lloyd-Jones states:

"The great hope for society today is an increasing number of individual Christians. Let the Church of God concentrate on that and not waste her time and energy on matters outside her province."<sup>36</sup>

A.W. Pink agrees:

"Spiritually the world is in darkness (II Peter i, 19) and sits in the shadow of death (Matt. iv, 16) ... By their [the believers'] preaching ignorance is to be exposed, that their hearers may be 'turned from darkness to light' (Acts xxvi, 18)."<sup>37</sup>

Commentator R.T. France adds:

"It is only as this distinctive lifestyle is visible to others that it can have its desired effect. But that effect is also now spelled out not as the improvement and enlightenment of society as such, but rather as the glorifying of God by those outside the disciple community. The subject of this discourse, and the aim of the discipleship which it promotes, is not so much the betterment of life on earth as the implementation of the reign of God. The goal of disciples' witness is not that others emulate their way of life, or applaud their probity, but that they recognize the source of their distinctive lifestyle in 'your Father in heaven.'"<sup>38</sup>

In the salt and light metaphors Jesus is not calling on His disciples to change society through good deeds but to live in such a way as to glorify God (Matthew 5:16). Such a lifestyle will have a beneficial effect on society in many cases, but the goal is to

magnify Jesus and draw people to Him.

To help us understand this better, it would be good to observe what Jesus did while on earth. He often healed the sick, fed crowds, and ministered to the poor and despised of society. Jesus had compassion on the hurting and rejected, and spent time with sinners. But it should also be observed that Jesus spent much time with wealthy people, such as Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. He ate in the homes of well-to-do tax collectors such as Zacchaeus and powerful Pharisees. He spent time with sinners and with religious leaders such as Nicodemus. He ministered to everyone who would listen and challenged (and often condemned) those who would not. In short, Jesus was the perfect embodiment of the command found in Leviticus: "You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor" (19:15).

It is also instructive to note what *Jesus did not do*. He healed some sick, but not all. He established no hospitals or clinics, nor did He eradicate sickness in Israel, or on earth, although it was in His power to do so. He did not start a soup kitchen or a breadline. He paid special attention to the poor but He did not relieve their debt or set them up in small businesses or give them loans. Jesus loved widows and orphans but did not establish a home for either. Whether Christian agencies should be established for these concerns today is another matter, but it would be going beyond both the instruction of Scripture and the example of Christ (or His apostles later in the New Testament history) to claim that we are to do so today because of what Jesus did while on earth. Jesus neither commanded us to do such things nor did He do them Himself.

### IS THE CULTURAL MANDATE STILL IN EFFECT?

The Cultural Mandate is not in effect today for two reasons. First, it was only given once in Scripture and

that before the Fall of man. In Genesis 1:28 the Lord commanded Adam and Eve, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

At this stage in human history, mankind was in harmony with creation. Following the Fall, however, both humans and creation were cursed and harmony between man and the physical universe was lost. Never again were humans told to subdue the earth or rule over the animal kingdom, for they were no longer capable of doing so. While man is still the chief of God's creations and able to control and tame much of the animal kingdom (James 3:7), he is no longer able, due to sin and the curse, to either subdue the earth or rule over the animals.

The closest thing to the Cultural Mandate in the remainder of Scripture is following the Flood when God commissioned Noah and his family. In Genesis 9:1 a portion of the original Mandate is given for Noah's family to "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (see also verse 7). But rather than repeat the command to subdue and rule, the Lord says, "the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, ... Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs" (9:2-3). Man is no longer living in harmony with the animal kingdom; rather animals will fear man and man will consume animals.

When we examine the New Testament for God's directives to the Church, we do not find anything resembling the instructions given to Adam and Eve. Instead we find the Great Commission.

A second reason to reject the Cultural Mandate today is in the details of the Mandate itself. Adam and Eve are called to "subdue" something. The Hebrew word for "subdue" requires an object. To subdue implies that something needed to be conquered or put in its place. The question in Genesis 1:28 is what needed to be subdued prior to the Fall, because

sin had not yet corrupted the human race or any of physical creation. The only possibility seems to be Satan and the fallen angels, who were at war with God and apparently desired to rule the earth.

If this is the case, then part of man's mission was to win the struggle for the earth over demonic creatures. When Adam failed because he chose to sin, Satan temporarily won the battle and was promoted to "god of this age" (2 Corinthians 4:4). Man, in his fallen state, has no ability to subdue either demonic forces or the earth, both of which will be subdued by the New Adam. The day will come when Christ will create a new heaven and earth (2 Peter 3:13). Until then, creation groans under the curse of sin (Romans 8:22). The Lord will ultimately subdue and conquer the devil and his followers (Revelation 20:10). Until that time man is no longer called to subdue demons (he is told to resist — James 4:7) or rule over the animal kingdom. We are called to be salt and light in the world (Matthew 5:13-16) and to fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20).

### THE CHURCH AND SOCIAL ACTION

The general drift in evangelicalism, as we have seen, is toward adding the social action agenda to the Great Commission as the two-prong mission of the Church. N.T. Wright is certain:

"The call of the gospel is for the church to *implement* the victory of God in the world *through suffering love*. ... God's ultimate purpose, which is to rid the world of evil altogether and to establish his new creation of justice, beauty and peace. And it's clear from the start that this was not intended simply as a distant goal for which one was compelled to wait in passive expectation. God's future has already broken into the present in Jesus, and the church's task consisted not least of *implementing* that achievement and thus *anticipating* that future."<sup>39</sup>

Yet some of the best thinkers within conservative Christianity disagree.

D.A. Carson writes:

"It is hard to ignore the many injunctions of Scripture to do good, to show mercy, to care for the poor, to be concerned with matters of justice. If all such responsibilities belong to the church *as a church*, to the church *as an institution*, then surely the leaders of the church ... should take responsibility for them and direct them. But what we find in the New Testament is that the initial leaders, the apostles, were careful to carve out for themselves the primacy of teaching the Word of God and prayer (Acts 6:2)."<sup>40</sup>

Michael Horton writes:

"Terrorism, global warming, and AIDS are problems that we need to address as responsible human beings together with non-Christians in our common life together. ... However, the Great Commission is not the Great Cultural Mandate. ... If we could resolve our top ten crises in the world today, we would still have the devil on our back, sin mastering our heart, and everlasting death as the penalty for our mutiny."<sup>41</sup>

David Wells agrees:

"Churches that actually do influence the culture — here is the paradox — distance themselves from it in their internal life. They do not offer what can already be had on secular terms in the culture. They are an alternative to it."<sup>42</sup>

Wells calls for the Church to be *sola Scriptura* as opposed to *sola cultura*.<sup>43</sup>

Charles Ryrie writes:

"The Christian's primary responsibilities are evangelism and godly living. Through witnessing he changes people; through godly living he does affect society; and through private and public obedience he honors God."<sup>44</sup>

Kevin DeYoung and Gregory Gilbert, in their book *What Is the Mission*

*of the Church?*, express concern "that in all our passion for renewing the city or tackling social problems, we run the risk of marginalizing the one thing that makes Christian mission Christian: namely, making disciples of Jesus Christ."<sup>45</sup> They maintain that the mission of the Church is found in the Great Commission passages: "We believe the church is sent into the world to witness to Jesus by proclaiming the gospel and making disciples of all nations. This is our task. This is our unique and central calling."<sup>46</sup>

And Jesse Johnson adds:

"When people look to the church to end poverty, halt human trafficking, bring drinking water to Africa, or cure AIDS, they are looking in the wrong place. The church is not commissioned to do any of these tasks."<sup>47</sup>

### THE NEW TESTAMENT INSTRUCTIONS TO THE INDIVIDUAL CHRISTIAN

Jesus' general description of the role of His disciples in the world is to be salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16). The debate surrounds the details of how to accomplish this task. In response, Jesus' example is important and often misunderstood. Jesus healed people primarily as a sign pointing to who He was (Matthew 9:6; John 20:30). Later when Jesus commissioned His disciples, He did not send them forth to solve the world's problems but to make disciples and to teach people to obey God (Matthew 28:20). But this raises the question as to what commandments the disciples were to obey and teach. The best approach to discovering these commandments is to examine the examples of the early Christians, especially as found in the book of Acts, and through study of the direct teachings primarily found in the Epistles.

In the book of Acts we find the believers coming together for instruction in the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer, and scattering to evangelize (Acts 2:41-42). A major task of the early Christians was to establish churches (13:1-3), but there are no examples of

early Christians attempting to transform or create culture, or influence the political system in a direct way. Nor do we find them organizing programs to feed the hungry of the world or to right social injustices. Almost all of their attention was on evangelizing the lost as well as the spiritual life and physical needs of the believing community.

The teachings drawn from the Epistles focus on establishing truth, combating error, correcting false living, and leading Christians into godliness. The subject of society is seldom addressed, but when it is, the emphasis is on being excellent representatives of Christ to the world (salt and light) (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:11-15; Titus 3:1). Specifically, Christians were taught to take care of their (Christians') poor (Acts 6:1-7; 1 Timothy 5:3-16; 1 John 3:17; James 2:15-17), handle their own legal differences (1 Corinthians 6:1-8), and discipline their rebellious people (1 Corinthians 5). But they were not instructed to take care of society's poor, handle its legal issues, or discipline its sinners. In addition they were to treat their employees fairly (James 5:1-4). Passages such as 1 John 3:17 and James 2:15-17 could have implications for the treatment of unbelievers, but because the rest of the New Testament instruction is directed almost exclusively toward treatment of believers, it seems best to apply these verses primarily to Christians as well.

### INSTRUCTIONS TO THE CORPORATE BODY — THE CHURCH

In the New Testament we find the Church as a body coming together to worship God, receive the instruction of the Word (2 Timothy 3:16-17) and the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:17-34), and participate in "body" life (1 Corinthians 12). The Scriptures are clear that God's people must do good, show mercy, care for the poor, and be concerned with matters of justice in every aspect of society. But there is never any indication that the Church as an institution is to see this as its task. If it were to do so, then surely the leaders of the church (elders/deacons) should take respon-

sibility for them and direct them. "But," as Carson notes, "what we find in the New Testament is that the initial leaders, the apostles, were careful to carve out for themselves the primacy of teaching the Word of God and prayer (Acts 6:2). Even matters of justice *within the congregation* were in some measure handed over to other spirit-filled men (6:1-7). When the distinctive duties of pastors/elders/bishops are canvassed, the priority of the ministry of the Word and prayer is paramount,"<sup>48</sup> not organizing community and social outreaches.

The Church, as the Church, was never given the task of transforming or creating culture. Its sole biblical mandate to the world is to make disciples. Christians as individuals are to be salt and light in our world. Individual believers may very well be involved, alongside the unbeliever and within biblical parameters, in politics, social action, and protecting God's creation. Much variety on the cultural level is allowed by our Lord. But it must not be minimized that the New Testament example and precept is that followers of Christ are to disciple people for Him which includes evangelism and training in obedience.

When we draw our marching orders from the New Testament rather than the culture, it becomes clear that the task of the Church is to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth, making disciples of all who come to Christ (Matthew 28:18-20), and caring for the needy who become part of the body of Christ (1 Timothy 5:16; Galatians 2:10). Broader social action is not prohibited, but it should not be equated with these two essential obligations.

It has proven almost impossible for the Church to keep the biblical command of the Great Commission in balance with the Cultural Mandate, once such a mandate is accepted as part of the mission of the Church. Those following this philosophy would abandon the Christ-given mission of making disciples for the task of improving society. Those churches and Christians who saw the error of the social gospel continued to center

their lives and ministries on the Great Commission. It is the descendants of these very churches and believers who are now being influenced to widen their understanding of the calling of Christ to include a social improving agenda. Unless there is a return to the biblical mandate given in the New Testament, the evangelical Church is in danger of repeating the same error of the 19th and 20th century Church with predictable results.

#### Endnotes:

1. John R.W. Stott, "Salt & Light, Four Ways Christians Can Influence the World," *Christianity Today*, October 2011, pg. 41.
2. "The Whole Church Taking the Whole Gospel to the Whole World (Condensed)," The Lausanne Movement Web site. Document accessed at: [www.lausanne.org/ru/component/content/article.html?id=1194](http://www.lausanne.org/ru/component/content/article.html?id=1194).
3. *Ibid.*, italics in original.
4. "The Lausanne Covenant," The Lausanne Movement Web site, emphasis added. Document accessed at: [www.lausanne.org/en/documents/lausanne-covenant.html](http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/lausanne-covenant.html).
5. Francis Chan, *Crazy Love*. Colorado Springs, Colo.: David C. Cook, 2008, pg. 21.
6. David Platt, *Radical*. Colorado Springs, Colo.: Multnomah Books, 2010, pp. 13-17, 19-21, 76-82, 108-140.
7. *Ibid.*, pg. 135.
8. *Ibid.*, pg. 115.
9. *Ibid.*, pg. 225.
10. Kevin DeYoung and Gregory D. Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?* Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2011, pg. 49.
11. N.T. Wright cited in Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God*. New York: Dutton, Penguin Group, 2008, pg. 212, quotation rendered in italics in original.
12. *Ibid.*, pg. 223, italic in original.
13. N.T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997, pg. 41.
14. *Ibid.*, pg. 45.
15. *Ibid.*, pg. 53.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 153-154.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 154, 155.
18. Brian D. McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2004, pg. 105.
19. *Ibid.*, pg. 113.
20. *Ibid.*, pg. 223, italics in original.
21. Rob Bell, *Velvet Elvis*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2005, pp. 147, 150.
22. "God's Earth is Sacred: An Open Letter to Church and Society in the United States," February 14, 2005, National Council of Churches Web site, italics in original.

Document accessed at: [www.nccusa.org/news/godsearthissacred.html](http://www.nccusa.org/news/godsearthissacred.html).

23. Brian D. McLaren, *A New Kind of Christianity*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2010, pg. 135.
24. *Crazy Love*, op. cit., pg. 119.
25. *Ibid.*, pg. 140.
26. "Salt & Light, Four Ways Christians Can Influence the World," op. cit., pp. 40, 41.
27. *Crazy Love*, op. cit., pg. 140.
28. Michael W. Goheen and Craig G. Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2008, pg. 66.
29. Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2004, pg. 17.
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 48-49, italic in original.
31. *Ibid.*, pg. 73.
32. Charles Ryrie, *The Christian & Social Responsibility*. Fort Worth: Tyndale Seminary Press, 2008, pg. 38.
33. *What Is the Mission of the Church?*, op. cit., pg. 175.
34. William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary, Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1977, pp. 282, 284, italics in original.
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 284, 285, italic in original.
36. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991, Vol. 1, pg. 158.
37. Arthur W. Pink, *An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1953, pg. 46.
38. R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007, pg. 177.
39. N.T. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2006, pp. 98, 102, italics in original.
40. D.A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008, pg. 151, italics in original.
41. Michael Horton, *The Gospel-Driven Life*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009, pg. 164.
42. David Wells, *The Courage to be Protestant*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008, pg. 224.
43. *Ibid.*, pg. 4.
44. *The Christian & Social Responsibility*, op. cit., pg. 69.
45. *What Is the Mission of the Church?*, op. cit., pg. 22.
46. *Ibid.*, pg. 26.
47. Jesse Johnson in John MacArthur, *Right Thinking in a World Gone Wrong*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 2009, pg. 213.
48. *Christ and Culture Revisited*, op. cit., pg. 151, italics in original.



The theology of the day was increasing acceptance of Darwinian theories, higher critical attacks on the Bible, and Freudian redefining of human nature. In light of these modern challenges to the Bible and conservative evangelical thought, liberal theologians believed Christianity needed to change to survive.

That which was unacceptable to modern man, such as the incarnation, the atonement, creationism, inspiration and authority of Scripture, etc., had to be rejected. That which was acceptable and appreciated by the culture was to be retained and emphasized. Western societies had little problem with the social agenda and as time moved forward the Church accommodated such thinking.

The test of orthodoxy had shifted from what one believed to how one lived. As Marsden stated, "The key test of Christianity was life, not doctrine."<sup>12</sup> Drawing from Freidrich Schleiermacher, the father of Christian liberalism, what increasingly mattered was experience and not truth. Renald Showers observed:

"Liberal Protestant advocates of the social gospel declared that the church should be concerned primarily with this world. It should divert its efforts from the salvation of individuals to the salvation of society. The church should bring in the kingdom of God on earth instead of teaching about a future, theocratic kingdom to be established in Person by Jesus Christ. ... The church was to save the world, not be saved out of it."<sup>13</sup>

Conservatives fought back with booklets such as *The Fundamentals* and the writings of such men as Princeton professor J. Gresham Machen. Machen, in his book *Christianity and Liberalism*, called liberalism a different religion altogether. He warned, "What is to-day matter of academic speculation begins tomorrow to move armies and pull down empires."<sup>14</sup> But neither Machen nor others were able

to rescue the denominations and schools, as Princeton itself officially rejected its doctrinal roots and adopted liberalism in 1929. It was left to the conservatives to either stay within their systems and work to redeem them or separate and start new denominations, schools, churches, and ministries. Many took this latter route, with Machen himself starting Westminster Theological Seminary in 1929 and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1936.

Many others from all denominations would follow suit including the founding of the Independent Fundamental Churches of America, the Conservative Baptists, and the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches. According to Marsden, 26 schools from Bob Jones to Wheaton College were founded during the Great Depression.<sup>15</sup> Seminaries such as Dallas Theological Seminary, mission agencies, and parachurch organizations would soon follow.

The conservatives focused on evangelism, theological training, and discipleship, while the liberals were increasingly defined by the social gospel accompanied by their view of the kingdom. To the liberals the "kingdom was not future or otherworldly, but 'here and now.' It was not external, but an internal ethical and religious force based on the ideals of Jesus."<sup>16</sup>

By the 1940s the question of cultural and social engagement arose within fundamentalism. The original Fundamentalists often pushed away from any form of social action. In time, some believed that they had gone too far. This led to a split within the conservative camp in which the Fundamentalists would take a separatist view. That is, they would separate from any who taught false doctrines and, rather than try to infiltrate society, they would live as lights of the Gospel calling men to Christ. On the other hand, the opposing position would be termed new (or neo) evangelical.

Neo-evangelicals believed that the Church had the mandate not only to win and disciple the lost, but also to

engage the culture and make the world a better place to live by changing social structures that cause grief and suffering. Many see 1957 as the official rupture between Fundamentalists and Neo-evangelicals, for it was that year that the two groups divided over Billy Graham accepting an invitation to conduct a crusade in New York City sponsored by a consortium of conservative and liberal churches. The Fundamentalists virtually excommunicated Graham while Neo-evangelicals made him the face of their movement.<sup>17</sup>

Since that time Neo-evangelicals have become better organized and wealthier. Evangelicals, however, have not been without their problems. The movement has continued to broaden theologically to the point that Conservatives, Pentecostals, prosperity gospel proponents, and even Roman Catholics claim the title "Evangelical."

Liberalism today has lost most of its steam. Evangelicals make most of the waves today, but have had to increasingly widen their views and doctrines to include those they would have deemed heretical 60 years ago. They seem to be united mostly over social action rather than the Great Commission. Without question, Fundamentalists have safeguarded the Gospel and the Scriptures even as they have lost influence in society. As one student of the Church has observed, "Fundamentalism feared losing its soul and so did not engage the culture; evangelicalism fears being different from the culture and is in danger of losing its soul."<sup>18</sup>

#### Endnotes:

1. Revivalism could be defined as an attempt to orchestrate a spiritual awakening through man-made techniques and manipulation in contrast to revival which is often defined as a genuine movement of God.
2. David W. Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism, The Age of Spurgeon and Moody*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2005, pg. 106, ellipsis in original.
3. *Ibid.*, pg. 21.
4. See *ibid.*, pp. 22-40.
5. Robert P. Lightner, *Church Union, A Layman's Guide*. Des Plaines, Ill.: Regular Baptist Press, 1971, pp. 31-32.
6. See *The Dominance of Evangelicalism*, op.

cit., pg. 166.  
 7. Ibid., pg. 247.  
 8. Ibid., pg. 248.  
 9. Ibid., pg. 250.  
 10. H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America*. New York: Harper and Row, 1959, pg. 193. This statement is also cited in "H. Richard Niebuhr" on Wikipedia. Document accessed at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/H.\\_Richard\\_Niebuhr](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/H._Richard_Niebuhr).  
 11. George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991, pg. 29.  
 12. Ibid., pg. 34.  
 13. Renald E. Showers, *What on Earth Is God Doing?* Bellmawr, N.J.: Friends of Israel, 2003, pp. 79, 80.  
 14. Machen cited in George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1980, pg. 137.  
 15. Ibid., pg. 194.  
 16. Ibid., pg. 50.

17. *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, op. cit., pg. 73.  
 18. David F. Wells, "The Word in the World." Document accessed at: [www.the-highway.com/wordworld\\_Wells.html](http://www.the-highway.com/wordworld_Wells.html). This online article originally appeared in John H. Armstrong, General Editor, *The Compromised Church: The Present Evangelical Crisis*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1998. The quotation is on page 27 of the book.



## EDITORIALS

(continued from page 2)

- There, too, may be within the seeker a deep dissatisfaction with life in general or in one's own life that creates great feelings of vulnerability.
- There also may be a desire for spiritual meaning and direction.
- Many have a desire for a cause to live for.
- Added to that, there may be a total ignorance of group manipulation.
- There often is also a desire to be accepted and loved. This is usually encountered in the cult's courtship phase (called "love-bombing"), but not sustained by the group over the long haul. Once in, it is all work and no play.
- The cult leader can also push our greed button with the aforementioned promises of hundredfold (or even a thousandfold) in return for our investment. It is sometimes called "sowing your seed." The old nature loves to gamble. This is one of the crafty schemes that has been working for many years. The cult leader gets the "seed" and we are left with an empty plot.

Now we can understand at least a little bit of the tricks men play and how they prey. Memorize Ephesians 4:14. Be aware of the "cunning and craftiness of men." We have been warned.

—GRF

## NEWS UPDATES

(continued from page 3)

Despite his believing that people have turned to the Bible because of his erroneous and, as he admits, sinful predictions, Camping fails to see how much damage his false predictions have done, including causing an unbelieving world to scoff at the idea that Jesus will return again, as He promised to do. Christians and the Bible are mocked and ridiculed because of Camping's failed predictions.

—JGS/MKG

## A RIVER OF RED INK

More than a decade following the last service of the famed "Pensacola Revival," the church staff and membership of the Brownsville Assembly of God are still feeling reverberations from this so-called spiritual outpouring. The meetings reportedly drew 5,500 people four nights a week and lasted six years. Yet the results — or more correctly, the aftermath — of the revival left the church on the brink of financial collapse; a fact little known outside the church family according to a recent Associated Press report.

By the time the revival, called "A River is Flowing," dried up, it had amassed \$11.5 million in debt. That figure has been reduced to \$6.5 million after the sale of property and expense reduction. The Rev. Evon Horton, the church's current pastor, hopes to wipe out the remaining debt through a donation campaign which he claims God gave to him in a dream. "We can be debt-free if just 7,000 of the millions of people who attended the revival help out" by giving \$1,000 each toward the debt removal, Horton said.

The AP article indicated that the "paid staff is down to six from around 50." Also it said Sunday attendance at the church's two services was between 800 and 1,000, and that "most pews go empty in the 2,200-seat sanctuary."

At the height of the revival services, it was more than Holy Ghost power that was flowing at Brownsville — large amounts of cash were flowing as well. Following months of investigative work, the *Pensacola News Journal* published a series of articles which included the financial benefits acquired by the revival's leadership. The newspaper estimated that for 1997, "the total revival revenue was between \$4.3 million and \$5.4 million for that one year." It reported that the offerings from the Friday evening services — said to be a weekly amount of \$20,000 — were given directly to the revival's evangelist Stephen Hill. The church's pastor, James Kilpatrick, as well as the revival's "theologian," Michael Brown, were also harvesting their own fiscal fortunes, purchasing homes and property in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. The church itself began buying homes adjacent to its campus, then razing them for parking. Horton told the AP "he's still unsure what happened to all the money."

Kilpatrick resigned as Brownsville's pastor in 2003, eventually moving 50 miles west of Pensacola to Daphne, Ala., where in 2006 he founded the Church of His Presence.

From the start of the revival, PFO was critical of both the doctrine and practice of the leadership. Brown, in confronting the revival's critics, asked, "Are you totally and absolutely sure that you are right in attacking the current revival? Are you willing to wager your salvation on the fact that you are correct?"

—MKG

## SCHULLER OFF BOARD, AGAIN

The Rev. Robert H. Schuller, along with his wife, Arvella, announced in March that they were resigning from the board of directors of the Crystal Cathedral. The Schullers' resignations were the latest setback for the preacher of positive thinking and the Southern California church he founded more than 50 years ago.

In July 2011, Schuller was removed as a voting member of the board, but was quickly reinstated and the two members of the board responsible for stripping the founding pastor of his authority were ousted.

The resignations, according to the Schullers' daughter, Carol Schuller Milner, were a result of "an inability to agree on a deal for housing benefits and fees for using

the pastor's intellectual property, such as writings and sermons," according to the online publication, *onenewsnow.com*.

Immediately following the announcement that the Schullers were stepping down, the erstwhile pastor posted a four-minute video to his Facebook page in which he said that his "financial future may be at risk" because of the church's financial troubles which ended in bankruptcy. On the video Schuller said: "My family and I would never receive royalties on the revenue that my materials brought into the church; materials that were created on our own personal time. Then, when I stepped out of active management of the ministry in 2005, in exchange for continuing to use my materials, the ministry granted my wife and me retirement pay that was intended to provide for us the rest of our lives."

A breach of contract suit was filed by the Schullers along with their daughter Carol and son-in-law Timothy Milner. It is seeking "immediate cash payments in excess of \$5.5 million," according to a report in *The Orange County Register*. The battle between the Schullers and the church's board is said to be preventing payment of millions of dollars owed to a number of vendors who supplied the church with various services and merchandise — some of whom have been waiting for years to be paid.

In February, the church's campus was sold to the Roman Catholic Diocese of Orange for \$57.5 million as part of a bankruptcy deal.

—MKG

### PERSONAL FREEDOM OUTREACH — STATEMENT OF BELIEF

- I. THE BIBLE AS THE DIVINELY INSPIRED, INERRANT WORD OF GOD: IT IS IN ITS ENTIRETY THE SOLE AUTHORITY FOR ALL MATTERS OF CHRISTIAN BELIEF AND PRACTICE.
- II. THE ONE TRUE GOD. IN THE ONE TRUE GOD THERE EXIST THREE PERSONS, BEING: THE FATHER, THE SON JESUS CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT.
- III. JESUS CHRIST: HIS DEITY, HUMANITY, VIRGIN BIRTH, SINLESSNESS, DEATH AND BODILY RESURRECTION; WHO WILL PERSONALLY AND VISIBLY RETURN AGAIN TO EARTH.
- IV. THE PERSONALITY AND DEITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.
- V. THE EXISTENCE AND PERSONALITY OF SATAN, HIS TOTAL OPPOSITION TO GOD, AND HIS POWER OVER THE UNREGENERATE.
- VI. THE COMPLETE AND TOTAL DEPRAVITY OF ALL MEN WHICH MAKES THEM HOPELESSLY LOST WITHOUT THE NEW BIRTH OBTAINABLE THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST.
- VII. THE FINAL ESTATE OF MAN: FOR THE SAVED, EVERLASTING LIFE IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD AND FOR THE UNSAVED, EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT BECAUSE OF THEIR UNBELIEF.
- VIII. THE GOSPEL BY WHICH WE ARE SAVED BEING SUMMED IN THE DEATH, BURIAL AND RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.
- IX. THE CHURCH BEING THE BODY OF CHRIST, UNITED IN THE HOLY SPIRIT, CONSISTING OF THOSE WHO HAVE RECEIVED JESUS CHRIST AS SAVIOR. A LOCAL CHURCH IS AN ORGANIZED ASSEMBLY OF BELIEVERS UNITED FOR THE PURPOSE OF CARRYING OUT THE GREAT COMMISSION OF CHRIST.
- X. THE GREAT COMMISSION OF CHRIST BEING TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO ALL MEN, BAPTIZING AND DISCIPLING THOSE WHO HAVE BELIEVED.



# Books in Review

## WHY GOD GAVE US A BOOK

by Gene Edward Veith

P&R Publishing, 44 pages, \$4.99

Very few Christians would dispute the fact that God communicates with believers. The disagreement among Christians, however, arises over how He communicates.

As Gene Edward Veith points out, “Many people expect God to inspire them directly. They cultivate a God within who gives them the right emotions, puts ideas into their heads, and communicates to them in a sort of nonverbal ESP” (pg. 5). Moreover, Veith points out that “many Christians are uneasy about the Reformation insistence on *sola Scriptura*, ‘Scripture alone,’ the notion that the Word of God is sufficient for us, the only revelation we actually need” (pg. 6). It is this latter premise which he successfully argues for in *Why God Gave Us a Book*.

The “how” of God speaking is a critical issue because, as Veith tells us, without a commitment to a sufficient Scripture, “many try to supplement the Bible with human reason, scientific scholarship, sociological research, or the findings of modern psychology. Still others try to supplement the Bible with mystical experiences, inner convictions, and personal revelations” (ibid.). We live in a time when far too many believers are “listening” for God in all the wrong ways and by doing so miss the reality of God revealing Himself to His people.

The author speaks to the power of God’s Word as he offers a testimonial of how reading the Bible brought him from a liberal theology to biblical faith.

Veith addresses other methods that exploit the Word of God: “People are trying to use the Bible as the ultimate self-help book. Some are trying to abstract principles from its teachings that will supposedly give us happier lives. We are told that if we follow the management principles of Jesus, our businesses will prosper, or that if we follow biblical principles about how we handle money, eat, or conduct our family lives we will be wealthy and healthy, eliminate our problems, and live happily ever after” (pg. 18).

In the discussion of the authority of the Bible, Veith describes a variety of assaults from academia, including higher criticism and The Jesus Seminar. Here, we are told, “What higher criticism represents is the larger phenomenon of placing some human authority over the authority of God” (pg. 27). And Veith cautions, “One does not have to be a liberal to practice liberal theology either. Churchmen who look to culture rather than to God’s Word to determine what they should teach, how they should live, and how they should worship are liberal theologians, even though the culture they are imitating may be conservative” (pg. 28). This is a sobering warning for Christians to consider against the onslaught of contextual theologians and Church leaders dotting the landscape. The authority section also contains brief overviews on the inerrancy of Scripture and its proper interpretation.

In the next section, Veith describes why the Bible is sufficient. Here, those who add to Scripture by various means are spotlighted: “Roman Catholics supplement the Bible with the teaching magisterium of the Church” (pg. 35). And lest one think Protestants are free of blame, we are told: “Among Protestants, many evangelicals, including the whole charismatic tradition, believe that the Holy Spirit inspires individuals with supernatural powers and knowledge. They consider themselves to be guided by intuitions, visions, dreams, and inner voices that they take to be from the Holy Spirit himself” (ibid.). It all tells us how far we have drifted from a belief in the sufficiency of Scripture which is the root system of the Church.

In his conclusion, Veith explains, “We live in a time of spiritual starvation. People own Bibles and even claim to believe in them, but Bible reading and Bible literacy are at all-time lows. Many churches have stopped, or radically cut back, the reading of the Scriptures in their services to make more time for pop music. Pastors are preaching from their own creative imaginations rather than preaching God’s Word. To be sure, quite a few churches are growing, attracting numbers through the application of sociological principles and marketing devices” (pg. 41). This is why we need to be reminded with the information and challenges of this small, but insightful book.

*Why God Gave Us a Book* can be easily read and comprehended in a single session and will help you develop a strong apologetic on the sufficiency of Scripture.

—MKG

**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 \$2.50 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.