
Editorials

WHAT IN THE WORLD IS GOING ON?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

—GRF

NEWS UPDATES

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that," the Fort Worth newspaper stated.

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

—MKG

UTAH RANKS FIRST IN ANTIDEPRESSANT USE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

—MKG

HARE KRISHNAS FILE CHAPTER 11

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

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

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

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

—MKG

BOOKS IN REVIEW

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

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

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

—MKG