

The Discerner

"Hereby know of truth and the
we the spirit spirit of error"

Volume 22, Number 4

October • November • December 2002

AN INTERDENOMINATIONAL HERESY-EXPOSING QUARTERLY

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EDITORIAL

By William A. BeVier

Our issue this time features only two articles, but I believe you will find both of them of current interest. The first is the completion of the article started in the last issue of THE DISCERNER.

As indicated in our last issue, Pastor Gary Gilley's articles are based on his book, This Little Church Went to Market. You can obtain the complete book from RAS for \$10.00 (plus P&H). The subject is the "market-driven" or "seeker-friendly" movement.

In our second article we welcome back to the pages of THE DISCERNER Dr. Roy E. Knuteson. In his article he presents reasons why no Bible-believing Christian should accept the Apocrypha as part of God's inspired and authoritative Word.

We also wanted to include in this issue an article by James Sundquist contrasting Jesus as presented in the Bible and how He is presented in the Muslim Koran. However, the limit on space precluded it for this issue. We are saving this article for the next issue.

We conclude this issue with a brief review of a book by John Ankerberg and John Weldon. It is a general overview of several major cults by notable authors who have studied in this field for many years.

For many of you, your subscription to THE DISCERNER expires with this issue. If your address label or inside page reads: XXII-4 or Vol. 22, Nr. 4, your subscription runs out with this issue. We hope you will renew. The cost is \$5.00 a year in the US (unfortunately, overseas subscriptions are more because of extra postage).

As we come to the close of a calendar year, we trust that you will consider an extra gift to Religion Analysis Service. Many of you faithfully support this ministry on a regular basis, for which we are grateful. We could not continue without this support.

The Market-Driven Church: A Look Behind the Scenes

By Gary E. Gilley
Second of Two Parts

Part III – I Feel a Need Coming On We Are Driven

Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Valley Community Church in Orange County, California, has written the definitive book promoting the market-driven concept of evangelism and church growth. The Purpose-Driven Church, which admittedly has a considerable amount of practical and helpful advice, nevertheless is laced with a felt-need philosophy that undermines, in my opinion, the value of the whole book. It is Warren's view that in order to reach the lost we must begin with their felt needs (p. 197ff). He writes, "[For] anybody can be won to Christ if you discover the key to his or her heart" (p. 219). In order to discover the felt needs of the Saddleback Valley citizens, he orchestrated a community survey of the unchurched (p. 139). Once those needs were discovered, a program was implemented to reach the community by offering Jesus Christ, the gospel, and the church as a means of fulfilling those needs. Warren is so committed to this approach that written into the bylaws of Saddleback is this sentence, "This church exists to benefit the residents of the Saddleback Valley by providing for their spiritual, physical, emotional, intellectual and social needs" (p. 220).

In support of this philosophy, Warren does a couple of things. First, he offers Jesus' example as a model for reaching the lost through the felt needs porthole (see pp. 197ff). Unfortunately for Warren's position, the passages he uses are misunderstood, misapplied,

and do not teach that Jesus reached the lost through felt needs. Quite the contrary, in Jesus' evangelism He always quickly got to the heart of the real need of His audience — their sin which separated them from God (e.g., John 3; 4; Mark 10:17-31) (in contrast to loneliness, poor self-esteem, lack of fulfillment, etc.). Next, Warren defends himself by stating, "Beginning a message with people's felt needs is more than a marketing tool! It is based on the theological fact that God chooses to reveal himself to man according to *our* needs"(p. 295). Warren offers no theological proof for this assertion of course, for there is none. The apostles would be absolutely dumbfounded to find their "God-centered" teachings twisted to make them so "man-centered."

This needs-centered approach to the Christian life is so prevalent within the seeker-sensitive camp that the little jingle, "Find a need and meet it, find a hurt and heal it" has become the unofficial motto. Os Guinness observes:

Few would disagree that church-growth teaching represents a shift from the vertical dimension to the horizontal, from the theological to the practical, from the prophetic to the seeker-friendly, from the timeless to the relevant and contemporary, from the primacy of worship to the primacy of evangelism, from the priority of Christian discipleship in all of life to the priority of spiritual ministries within the church. But what happens when the much-heralded new emphases are seen from the standpoint of the Scriptures to be quite simply wrong? And what happens if tomorrow's "need" is for what is overlooked today (*Dining with the Devil*, p. 84).

Continuing with Guinness' line of questions, we might ask: What is the new paradigm churches really offering that is attracting great throngs of people? Is this offering the same old message (the Biblical message) in new wrapping, or is it a mutation of the real

thing? And if it proves to be a mutation, what effect is it having, and will it have on the modern church?

The New Message

A. W. Tozer warned decades ago of a new wind spanning across the fields of the evangelical church:

If I see aright, the cross of popular evangelicalism is not the cross of the New Testament. It is, rather a new bright ornament upon the bosom of a self-assured and carnal Christianity. The old cross slew men; the new cross entertains them. The old cross condemned; the new cross amuses. The old cross destroyed confidence in the flesh; the new cross encourages it.

In Part IV of the report we will examine the gospel message itself. We now want to look at the corollary and overlapping issue of mankind's need(s). What has happened, I believe, is this: the evangelical church has become a reflector of our times rather than a revealer. "The problem is not that Christians have disappeared, but that Christian faith has become so deformed. Under the influence of modernity, we modern Christians are literally capable of winning the world while losing our own souls" (Guinness, p. 43).

A Personal Tale

How has this happened? What has changed our message from a force to a farce? A large part of the answer lies in the almost wholesale embracing of psychology by the Christian community. Following is Gary Gilley's experience.

My first encounter with the encroachment of psychology upon the church was my senior year of Bible college in 1972. As I prepared for the pastorate at Moody Bible Institute, I had been immersed in the study of Scripture and theology. As a senior I was required to take a course in "pastoral counseling," which proved to be almost identical to a course in psy-

chology that I had taken at the University of Virginia. That same year I was asked along with several others, to be an RA [Resident Assistant] in the dorm. As part of our preparation we were given training in the latest rage of pop-psychology, which by the way has since been relegated to the psychological junk heap. At the time I remember my wide-eyed amazement that all my studies in Scripture apparently did not equip me to deal with the real problems what would face me in my future ministry. Bible study and knowledge were great for salvation and sanctification, but there apparently existed a set of problems and needs “out there” that needed more than the “simplistic” solutions as found in God’s Word. Scripture, after all the dust had cleared, needed help from Freud.

Unable and ill equipped to deal with my newfound knowledge, I tucked it away for safekeeping. Later, in the early days of pastoring, I decided to pursue a master’s degree in psychology in order to help people with their “real” problems. But it soon became abundantly clear that something was seriously wrong. Virtually everything that I learned in my psychology courses contradicted the Scriptures. So, I ended my illustrious career as a would-be pastor/psychologist and went back to the study of Scripture, which has proven itself more than adequate throughout the years for every need and concern that has come my way. Meanwhile, immersed in my own ministry and the study of Scripture, I was somehow oblivious to psychology’s hijacking of the evangelical church during the 1970’s and 1980’s. One day I awoke, sort of a Rip Van Winkle experience, to find that my world, the world of the church, had changed, and I had been left behind. Where had everyone gone? Most churches were now talking about dysfunctional families, poor self-images, co-dependency, additions, 12-step programs, and needs – lots and lots of needs that the church was supposed to meet. More “Christians” were obtaining their phi-

losophy for living from Oprah and Sally Jesse than from Jesus and Paul.

When “Christian” leaders saw this metamorphosis of God’s people, a metamorphosis that they had helped create, they could either pull in the reins, denounce this caricature of the Christian faith and repent of their part in its birth, or they could jump on the float and join the parade. Most, recognizing that this is what the people now wanted, what they expected, what they had been trained to “need,” chose the float approach. Give Christians the need-oriented pop-psychology that they had grown to love, they decided, just alter it a bit with a little Scripture and some references to Jesus – they would never catch on that what they were swallowing was not Biblical Christianity at all, but an almost unrecognizable perversion. Whether this approach was calculated or naively taken matters little, the result is the same: a psychologized Christian community which no longer recognizes the difference between the teachings of Scripture and the teachings of Carl Rogers, and no longer cares.

Since the Christian was now indistinguishable in philosophy from the world, both having fallen in love with psychobabble, the offense of the cross became far less offensive. It was only a short step for someone (Robert Schuller is a worthy candidate as we will see) to develop a psychologized church for the already psychologized Unchurched Harry (as the Willow Creekers call him). This would be a church that would offer the same things to Harry that secular society offered, only better, since Jesus was better than a Carl Rogers, Oprah, and Freud combined. And so it was – “The new paradigm churches, then, appear to be succeeding, not because they are offering an alternative to our modern culture, but because they are speaking with it voice, mimicking its moves” (Losing Our Virtue, David Wells, p. 32).

A Little History

The church growth movement owes much to Robert Schuller, who claims to be its founder, at least in this country, by being the first to launch the marketing approach in Christianity. “The secret of winning Unchurched people into the church,” Schuller said, “is really quite simple. Find out what would impress the non-churched in your community” then give it to them (as quoted in *Willow Creek Seeker Services*, by G. S. Pritchard, p. 51). Believing that expository preaching is a waste of time, and borrowing the philosophy of his mentor Norman Vincent Peale, Schuller “began to communicate a message of Christianity that focused on meeting the emotional and psychological needs of people” (Pritchard, p.53). Schuller laid out his philosophy of ministry in his 1982 book Self Esteem: The New Reformation, in which he called for a radical shift in the church’s focus from God to human needs. The most important issue before Schuller was to determine through some means what was the deepest human need upon which the church could focus. He decided that mankind’s deepest need was self-esteem, a “need,” by the way, nowhere mentioned, alluded to, or even hinted at in the Scriptures. He then went on to wrap his theology and church growth strategy around this all-important need. Originally, Schuller’s church growth philosophy met with scorn and denunciation by conservative Christians everywhere. But while Christian leaders held the theological front against need-oriented Christianity they were out-flanked by pragmatism. It just so happened that Schuller’s methodology worked, and those who employed it were seeing exponential numerical growth in their churches. In most arenas, truth doesn’t stand a chance against success; this proved to be the case in the church growth wars.

If Robert Schuller was the architect of the user-friendly church, then Bill Hybels, pastor of Willow

Creek Community church, became the contractor. Working from the premise that, “The most effective messages for seekers are those that address their felt need” (*Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry and Mary*, Lee Strobel, pp. 214, 215) it remained for Hybels and company to determine which felt needs most needed attention.

Leading the pack, Hybels decided it was not self-esteem, although he did not reject it, but rather personal fulfillment (or the pursuit of happiness) followed by identity, companionship, marriage, family, relief of stress, meaning and morality (ibid., pp. 70-73). To Hybels, fulfillment was the felt need that encompassed and defined all others.

Since, to the founders of the new paradigm church, felt needs are the driving force behind the actions and attitudes of people, and since Christianity, Hybels would argue, is the best means to solve problems and satisfy the desire for fulfillment (ibid., p. 143), he developed the gospel of personal fulfillment. According to the research book *Willow Creek Seeker Services* by G. A. Pritchard, the canon within the canon at Willow Creek is that human beings can be fulfilled. Fulfillment permeates every venue at Willow Creek, even leading to a redefinition of sin. “Instead of only portraying sin as selfishness and a rebellion against God, Hybels also describes it as a flawed strategy to gain fulfillment” (ibid., p. 177).

It should be noted that while this felt need strategy is not derived from Scripture, coming clearly from secular psychology, it nevertheless would become the foundation of the new paradigm church.

The Repercussions

The result of psychology’s invasion of our culture has been, as R. Albert Mohler, Jr. noticed, that “Americans are now fanatic devotees of the cult of self-

fulfillment and personal autonomy” (*The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, edited by John H. Armstrong, “Evangelical: What’s in a Name?” by R. Albert Mohler, Jr., p. 40). The role of the church has been to challenge the spirit of the age, for as Wells points out, “The church is in the business of truth, not profit” (*God in the Wasteland*, p. 76). Unfortunately, “the healers of our time – psychotherapists and advertisers – have extended their long reach into the life of the church as well. Our secular healers have populated the Church with their close cousins” (*Losing Our Virtue*, p. 197). Even “the language of theology has been replaced by the vocabulary of the therapeutic” (Mohler). Note: If you don’t believe it, check Focus on the Family.

These new cousins have affected every aspect of church life. Take worship for example – New paradigm pastor Wes Dubin goes on the offensive when his entertainment oriented worship services are challenged. “It (worship) is not all gloom and doom,” he states, “and all of us take our Bibles and just bore each other; let’s show them that we can also have fun” (*In the Name of God*, video with Peter Jennings). There is a time for fun in the church but surely, “the purpose of worship is clearly to express the greatness of God and not simply to find release or, still less, amusement. Worship is theological rather than psychological” (*Losing Our Virtue*, p. 40).

And then there is the issue of sin. In a psychological world, sin is reduced to sickness and addiction. The sinner is not seen as depraved, but as a victim. What is then lost is our capacity to understand life, and ourselves, as sinful. When the seeker-sensitive church adopts the language and theology of psychology, it then attempts to dispense psychological prescriptions for life’s issues rather than Biblical ones, for after all, it reasons, the world now thinks within the framework of psychology and we must be relevant. Rather than challenge and confront the world’s wisdom, the

modern church is seeking to sanctify it. The result, as the prophet Jeremiah warned in his day, “They have healed the brokenness of My people superficially” (Jeremiah 6:14).

The emphasis on psychology is also changing the focus of the church. Pritchard is right when he says, “Instead of looking at God’s face, this teaching suggests that individuals look in the distorted mirror of modern psychology” (p. 233). Pritchard claims that when he attended the church (ibid., pp. 227, 235), the majority of the books sold in Willow Creek’s bookstore were psychological and self-help books, with the decidedly anti-Christian *Codependent No More* by Melody Beattie the top seller. This accentuation on psychology,

... instead of encouraging Creekers to know and love God, encourages them to know and accept themselves and develop a strong self-esteem. The goals and means of one’s ethics change from a God-centered to a human-centered orientation....

Willow Creek Christians have accepted the psychological framework as foundation to their self-understanding and as a trustworthy guide for daily living (Pritchard, p. 234).

Pritchard’s assessment of the psychological influence at Willow Creek is lethal.

Ironically, while Hybels is evangelizing those in the world toward Christianity, he is also evangelizing Christians toward the world. As the Unchurched Harrys in the audience (10 percent) move closer to Christianity, the Christians in the audience (90 percent) are often becoming more psychological and worldly.... In the effort to become relevant Willow Creek ironically is in danger of becoming irrelevant (Pritchard, p. 238-239 – Percentages of Christians and non-Christians attending Willow Creek are estimates based upon the author’s research).

Pritchard’s critique of the need-oriented approach to

“doing church” is worthy of quoting extensively:

The unintended consequences of this approach are that Hybels incorporates large chunks of the American psychological worldview into his basic teaching and teaches that fulfillment is a consequence of the Christian life. There is a lack of critical evaluation to Willow Creek’s approach to relevance. This felt-need approach to relevance ultimately distorts their Christianity.

A more biblical approach to the current American fixation with fulfillment is to call it the *idolatry* that it is. Jesus does not guarantee that to follow Him will make one fulfilled. In fact, at several points, the direct opposite is communicated: “I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you” (John 15:19). “I did not come to bring peace but a sword” (Matthew 10:34); “If they persecuted me they will persecute you also” (John 15:20). The temptation to say that Christianity will meet all one’s needs and provide fulfillment is not true to biblical Christianity (Pritchard, p. 200 – emphasis mine).

Willow Creek’s unintended failures result from an uncritical use of various cultural tools and ideas (marketing, psychology, media). In particular, their mistakes are rooted in a superficial understanding of the American culture and an inadequate grasp of Christian theology (Pritchard, p. 207).

The seeker sensitive experts would defend marketing as a tool they use to attract more Unchurched Harrys to hear the gospel. Methods change, the message stays the same, is the cliché. What they naively do not seem to understand is that the message will ultimately be shaped by the method. This is especially true of marketing, since it “shapes how one views the world. People become ‘consumers’ and ‘target audiences.’ These consumers have ‘felt needs,’ which ‘research’ discovers in order to modify the ‘product’ to

meet these needs” (Pritchard, p. 244).

There exists a subtle yet important difference between the New Testament church and the new paradigm church. The church, the New Testament teaches, is to glorify God and instruct people on how to please Him. In the process, needs may very well be met, but the purpose of the church is not to meet people’s needs (except for the need for godliness). In the modern church, needs reign; God exists to meet Harry’s needs. Harry comes to Christ, not to glorify Him, but to find the promised fulfillment and happiness in this life. When Harry is attracted through a felt-need philosophy, he will not be retained when that approach is no longer used. In other words, if Harry is drawn to the church in order to *get*, in order to satisfy his flesh, he is not likely to stay around when and if he discovers that Christ calls for him to lose his life for Christ’s sake (Matthew 16:25). The result is that churches, which have been built on the quagmire of the superficial, must remain superficial if they hope to retain their Harrys and Marys.

Summary

David Wells asked the right question of these seeker-sensitive churches, “Does the Church have the courage to become relevant by becoming biblical? Is it willing to break with the cultural habits of the time and propose something quite absurd, like recovering both the word and the meaning of sin?” (*Losing Our Virtue*, p. 199). “I fear that the seeds of a full-blown liberalism have now been sown, and in the next generation they will surely come to maturity” (ibid., p. 205). I agree with the closing sentence in *Losing Our Virtue*, “We need the faith of the ages, not the reconstruction of a therapeutically driven or commercially inspired faith. And we need it, not least, because without it our postmodern world will become starved for the Word of God” (ibid., p. 209).

Part IV – The New Gospel

Counterfeit money is recognized by those who know how to identify the real thing. Before we examine the gospel message found in the new paradigm churches, it would be best to examine the Gospel message found in the Bible. The Gospel message in a nutshell is this: Harry (to use Willow Creek's name for the unsaved) is a sinner, in full-blown rebellion against God (Rom. 3:23; 5:1-12). While some Harrys are outwardly religious and some even desire the gifts and benefits that God can supply, no Harrys truly seek after God or desire Him (Rom. 3:10-18). As a result of Harry's sinfulness, he is under the wrath of God (Rom. 1:18), faces future judgment (Heb. 9:27), will die both physically and spiritually (Rom. 6:23), and will spend eternity in the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:11-15).

It is because of Harry's hopeless plight, and the fact that he can do nothing to redeem himself in God's eyes (Titus 3:5), that Jesus Christ (through grace alone, not because of Harry's value and worth, Eph. 2:8) became a man, died on the cross (Rom. 5:8) (thus taking Harry's sin upon Himself and satisfying the wrath of God, Heb. 2:17), and was resurrected from the dead in order that Harry could be saved from his sin and have the righteousness of Christ imputed to him (Rom. 4). While all of this is a gift from God, Harry obtains that gift through the exercise of faith (Eph. 2:8-9) – purely taking God at His word, trusting that God will save him if only he truly believes.

While many within the seeker-sensitive stable would ascribe to most of the above definition for the Gospel, in reality, this is not how the gospel is being presented to Harry. Rather, Harry is being told that precisely because he is so valuable to God that He sent His Son to die for him (a denial of grace, cf. Hebrews 12, which lays out the case for God's grace through the unique method of showing that Christ did not die for

angels who are of greater value than man, but He died for man – by grace alone). Harry is being told that if he will come to Christ, Christ will meet all of his felt needs and that will lead to personal fulfillment. Harry is then being asked to trust in Christ, the great “Needs-Meeter,” who will end his search for a life of happiness and fulfillment.

This, I suggest, is not the Gospel at all, but the “Gospel of Me,” the “Gospel of Self-Fulfillment,” the “New Gospel.” “We must never confuse our desire for people to accept the Gospel,” Oswald Chambers warned long ago,

...with creating a Gospel that is acceptable to people. How we define the problem will define will define our gospel. If the “big problem” in the universe is my lack of self-esteem, the gospel will be “finding the neat person inside of yourself.” If the great question is “How can we fix society?” the gospel will be a set of moral agendas complete with a list of approved candidates. But how often do we discuss the “big problem” as defined by Scripture? That problem is the wrath of God (*The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, edited by John Armstrong, “Recovering the Plumb Line,” p. 256).

Harry Would Come to Church But...

The reason Unchurched Harry is Unchurched is, to the market-driven proponents, a matter of Harry being a fallen creature who has rejected God and has little, if any, attraction toward the things of God. Right? No, not at all. Rather Harry would love to come to church, and ultimately receive Christ, if only the church would learn to market and present its product better. Lee Strobel, former teaching pastor at Willow Creek, now with Saddleback Community, assures us that marketing studies have shown that “Harry has rejected church, but that doesn’t necessarily mean he has rejected God” (*Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry and Mary*, p. 45). Yet, the Scriptures are very clear

that mankind does reject God (Rom. 3:10-18; 5:1-12; I Cor. 1:18ff). What surveys show is that people have not rejected the gods of their own creation and imagination – but they do not seek the true God.

Actually what we learn from marketing studies is that the real reason Harry doesn't come to church is because church is boring, predictable, irrelevant, money hungry (ibid., p. 80), and does not meet his needs (ibid., p. 58). The new paradigm church operates under the credo that Harry is:

Hostile to the church, friendly to Jesus Christ (ibid., p. 47). They have the misconception that to win the world to Christ we must first win the world's favor. If we can get the world to like us, they will embrace our Savior. The expressed design of the user-friendly philosophy is to make unconverted sinners feel comfortable with the Christian message (*Reckless Faith*, p. 52).

Reaching Harry with the Gospel

It is clear, when one studies Scripture rather than marketing surveys, that the seeker-sensitive church's gospel message is flawed at its roots. – it has a faulty anthropology. It views Harry as attracted, even friendly with God, but turned off by the out-dated methods of the church. Once that premise is accepted, the methodologies of the user-friendly church are logical. All that remains is to discover what Harry wants in a church, and in a God, and give it to him in an attractive package. In other words, make him an offer he can't refuse. On the negative side, we must understand that "Unchurched Harry doesn't respond well to someone who predicates a command on "This sayeth the Lord"" (*Reckless Faith*, p. 50). Nor is the way to Harry's heart through the porthole of truth. For, you see, Harry is a pragmatist, his question is: does Christianity work (ibid., p. 56)? Harry is also an existentialist: "Experience – not – evidence is their mode of

discovery” (ibid., p. 59).

Now that we know that Harry is not motivated by the commands of God, nor is he all that interested in truth, we can abandon the direct approach. And since he is looking for something that will help him reach his goals in life and to feel good in the process, we are ready to package the gospel to draw his attention. The new paradigm church does this by focusing on the gospel of felt need. “The Church’s problem today is simply that it does not believe that, without tinkering, the Gospel will be that interesting to modern people” (*Losing Our Virtue*, p. 207). And so tinker it must.

The Gospel of Felt Need

From psychology, the seeker-sensitive church has discovered that both baby boomers and busters have:

Learned to expect that their needs should be met, jobs would be provided, money would be available, and problems would be solved. The result is a generation of young adults who want and expect everything right away. Life is to be lived for the present. There is little awareness of a philosophy that says we should make long-range plans, or work hard today so things will be better tomorrow. This is a “now” generation that has little interest in any religion that talks about sacrifice, heaven, or the “sweet by-and-by.” They want to hear about a faith that works now and brings immediate results (Strobel, p. 57).

If this is true, how are we to proclaim the gospel to a pampered, self-centered generation that demands society meet their every whim? Previous generations, including Biblical ones, would use these traits to point to evidence of sin in Harry’s life. They would call Harry to repentance from such a lifestyle, and to faith in Christ for forgiveness of such sins. Then they would challenge new-believer Larry to abandon his self-centeredness, call for a life of self-sacrifice, humbly allow-

ing the Spirit of Christ to transform him into Christlikeness.

But the modern church sees it differently. Strobel writes: “Our challenge, then, is to help this new generation of Unchurched Harrys understand that Christianity does work, that is, that the God of the Bible offers us supernatural wisdom and assistance in our struggles, difficulties, and recovery from past hurts”(ibid.). Strobel is suggesting that “this new generation” is unlike the past generations, and therefore must be reached differently than the past. What worked at one time simply does not speak to today’s Harry. Wells has nailed down the prevailing attitude when he writes:

What our culture suggests is that all of the greatest treasures of life are at hand, quite simply, in the self. Religious man was born to be saved, but psychological man was born to be pleased. “I believe” has been replaced by “I feel.” The problem is that we have not been feeling so well recently (*Losing Our Virtue*, p. 107).

There is just enough truth in Strobel’s statement to throw most of us off guard. Does Christianity work? Does God offer wisdom and help during times of struggle? Certainly, but is this the Gospel? Is the good news that Christ died for our sins in order to free us from the wrath of God and impute to us the righteousness of Christ; or is the good news that Christ died in order that we might feel better about ourselves and have our felt needs met? These are two separate gospels.

A few more quotations from Strobel’s book will help identify exactly what the new paradigm church is offering the unbeliever. “We baby boomers aren’t coming to church to become members,” said one pastor, himself a boomer. “We are coming to *experience* something. Yes, even to *get* something” (Strobel, p. 71 –

emphasis in the original). What is it that Harry wants to experience? Strobel supplies some examples. “If you discover that Unchurched Harry suffers from a sagging self-esteem... you can tell him how your own self-esteem has soared ever since you learned how much you matter to God” (ibid., p. 92). Never mind that the concept of self-esteem is foreign to Scripture, even anti-Scriptural; never mind that the real issue that Harry struggles with, according to the Bible, is pride, not low self-esteem; the gospel is now gift-wrapped to offer Harry what he has been conditioned to believe he needs.

Not everybody is in need of an ego boost however, some are looking for thrills, excitement, and adventure. Fortunately for the quick-minded evangelist, the gospel resembles a chameleon, taking whatever shade is needed. Strobel assures such thrill-seekers that he “learned that there is nothing more exciting, more challenging, and more adventure-packed than living as a devoted follower of Jesus Christ. What I found is that there’s a big difference, between *thrills* and *thrills that fulfill*” (ibid., p. 124 – emphasis in the original).

So now Jesus Christ can be offered as the big thrill, the ultimate in excitement. Not only is that a misrepresentation of Christ, but it just does not square with the facts. I wonder how thrilled the saints described in Hebrews 11:36-38 were as they were mocked, beaten, put to death, became homeless, and lived in holes in the ground. The new paradigm church is offering a purely Americanized, yuppie brand of Christianity found nowhere in the New Testament. “Much of the Gospel presented today befits less the God of the ages than a fairy Godmother – offering people by God’s hand what they’ve been unable to achieve for themselves: wealth, fame, comfort, and security” (Wayne Jacobsen as quoted from *Leadership*, Vol. IV, #1, p. 50).

The Gospel of Fulfillment

G. A. Pritchard after spending a year studying the ministry at Willow Creek, eventually came to the conclusion that:

Hybels' believes that Harry's most important concern is for his personal fulfillment.... Hybels teaches that Christianity will satisfy Harry's felt needs and provide fulfillment.... Hybels and the other speakers do not condemn the search for fulfillment. Rather they argue that Harry has not searched in the right place. The question remains the same, but the answer has been changed. Harry asks, "How can I be happy?" "Accept Jesus, answers Hybels" (*Willow Creek Seeker Services*, p. 250).

Pritchard's analysis is on the money.

Is Willow Creek correct in their teaching that a relationship with Christ will provide a life of fulfillment? In a word, no. Personal fulfillment is the dominant goal of the vast majority of Americans. In this context it is a great temptation for American evangelicals to argue that Christianity is a means to fulfillment and the church becomes another place that promises to satisfy emotional desires. To argue for Christianity primarily by pointing to its usefulness in satisfying felt needs is to ultimately undercut it. To teach Christianity as a means eventually teaches that it is superfluous. If someone is able to satisfy his or her felt needs without Christ, the message of Christianity can be discarded. The bottom line why individuals should repent and worship God is because God deserves it. Fulfillment theology does not reflect the teaching of the Bible. We find in Scripture vast evidence that Christianity is often not "fulfilling," Jesus promises His disciples that "in this world you will have trouble." The Lord did not promise fulfillment, or even relief, in this world, but only in the next. Fulfillment is not a spiritual birthright of Christians.

The goal of a Christian's life is faithfulness, not fulfillment. (taken from Pritchard, pp. 254-256).

Sociologist Robert Wuthnow, attempting to examine modern Christianity,

...suggests that in contemporary America, God has been molded to satisfy people's needs.... God is relevant to contemporary Americans mainly because the sense of God's presence is subjectively comforting; that is, religion solves personal problems rather than addressing broader questions (Pritchard, p. 260).

Hybels has caught this wave and presents a sanguine portrayal of God to Unchurched Harry that could be summarized, "God loves you and will meet you where you are, forgive you, and meet your felt needs and make you fulfilled" (Pritchard, p. 260).

Marketing savvy demands that the offense of the cross must be downplayed. Salesmanship requires that negative subjects like divine wrath be avoided. Consumer satisfaction means that the standard of righteousness cannot be raised too high. The seeds of a watered-down gospel are thus sown in the very philosophy that drives many ministries today (*Ashamed of the Gospel*, p. 24).

Summary

In response to those who object to the new gospel, Strobel counters that "these objections generally relate to the method that's used to communicate the Gospel, not the message itself, and consequently we're free to use our God-given creativity to present Christ's message in new ways that our target audience will connect with" (Strobel, p. 168). This is simply not the case. While some of the methods may disturb us, it is their message that is a real concern. The new paradigm church would loudly proclaim that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. But

they have redefined salvation. Salvation is not simply, under the new gospel, the forgiveness of sin and the imputation of righteousness. It is not a deliverance from the wrath of God upon a deserving and rebellious people.

The new gospel is a liberation from low self-esteem, a freedom from emptiness and loneliness, a means of fulfillment and excitement, a way to receive your heart's desires, a means of meeting our needs. The old gospel was about God; the new gospel is about us. The old gospel was about sin; the new gospel is about needs. The old gospel was about our need for righteousness; the new gospel is about our need for fulfillment. The old gospel is foolishness to those who are perishing; the new gospel is attractive. Many are flocking to the new gospel, but it is altogether questionable how many are actually being saved. In a moment of reflection on the validity of the methods used at Willow Creek, Hybels himself asked the audience, "How many of us have been vaccinated with a mild case of Christianity? How many among us have the real disease?" (As quoted by Pritchard, p. 316).

Nothing in Scripture indicates the church should lure people to Christ by presenting Christianity as an attractive option.... The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing (I Cor. 1:18). There is no way to make it otherwise and be faithful to the message.... The gospel itself is disagreeable, unattractive, repulsive, and alarming to the world. It exposes sin, condemns pride, convicts the unbelieving heart, and shows human righteousness – even the best, most appealing aspects of human nature – to be worthless, defiled, filthy rags (cf. Isa. 64:6) (*Ashamed of the Gospel*, pp. 72, 111, 128).

Spurgeon warned in his day that,

When the old faith is gone, and enthusiasm for the gospel is extinct, it is no wonder that people seek

something else in the way of delight. Lacking bread, they feed on ashes; rejecting the way of the Lord, they run greedily in the path of folly” (As quoted in *Ashamed of the Gospel*, p. 67).

We are forced to ask, as in the thought-provoking video, *In the Name of God*: “As these churches try to attract sell-out crowds are they in danger of selling out the gospel?” Worthy question. Rather than winning the lost for Christ, the truth is closer to Well’s assessment, “The church is losing its voice. It should be speaking powerfully to the brokenness of life in this postmodern world, and applying the balm of truth to wounds that are fresh and open, but it is not. It is adrift” (*Losing Our Virtue*, p. 207).

[These articles were excerpted from Pastor Gary Gilley’s June-September, 2000, *Think on These Things*.]

WHY WE REJECT THE APOCRYPHA

By Roy E. Knuteson, Ph.D.

If you have ever examined a Roman Catholic Bible, you will have discovered, even through a simple reading of the index, that the Roman Catholic Church has an additional thirteen books which are not found in most Protestant versions of the Holy Scriptures. These thirteen books are called the Apocrypha, which in Greek means, “hidden, or concealed.” The term now refers, by Roman Catholic definition, to these books, which were written long after the Old Testament Canon of Scriptures was closed in 424 B.C.

The Books of the Apocrypha

The catalogue of the Old Testament Apocrypha includes the books of 1 and 2 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, The Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, 1 and 2 Maccabees, with the following books as appendages to certain Old Testament books: The Song of the Three Holy Children, The History of Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, and The History of Esther. These writings include religious history, folklore, legend, poetic lyrics, and wisdom and apocalyptic literature.

Which Books Are Inspired?

For centuries various individuals and councils debated the question of which books belonged to the recognized body of Holy Scripture. This was important and necessary because many so-called “holy books” were appearing, all claiming divine inspiration. How was anyone to know which books were canonical and which ones were not? A similar problem exists today relative to the recognition of the Book of Mormon, the Koran, the writings of Mary Baker Eddy,

or the Indian Vedas, and a host of other religious books as being from God.

The Inclusion of the Apocrypha

It is interesting to note that for centuries these thirteen books were widely accepted as having equal authority with the Bible. The Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek (250-150 B.C.) included a number of these Apocryphal books. Some of the so-called "Church Fathers," such as Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Cyprian of the third and fourth centuries sometimes quoted the Apocrypha as Scripture. Others, such as Cyril of Jerusalem and Jerome denied the canonicity of the Apocrypha. However, the Roman Catholic Church at the Council of Trent in 1548 approved these disputed writings as "sacred and canonical." At this pivotal council, the gathered bishops also pronounced an anathema upon anyone who dared dispute this ecclesiastical decision. In 1820 The Vatican Council reaffirmed these Apocryphal books as Scripture.

The Greek Orthodox Church also approved the acceptance of the Apocrypha in the canon of Scripture. However, the Reformers of the 16th Century repudiated the Apocrypha as being unworthy of the title: "Holy Scripture." Curiously, Martin Luther included the Apocryphal books as an appendix to his translation of the German Bible in 1534. The Coverdale and the Geneva Bibles, both published before 1629, included the Apocrypha but set them apart from the already recognized books of the Bible. It is only since 1827 that Protestant English Bibles have been issued without the Apocrypha because on that date the British and Foreign Bible Society banished these thirteen books. Soon after, The American Bible Society followed suit and today the only Protestant denomination that makes any use of the Apocrypha is the Anglican Church of Great Britain.

These disputed books were all written between 200 B.C. and A.D. 100 in a partial attempt to fill in the apparent lack of divine revelation from the days of Malachi in 425 B.C. until John the Baptist. During the so-called “four hundred silent years” of the inter-testamental period, many books appeared which were rightly called “pseudepigraphal,” or “false writings,” the Apocrypha being prominent among them. Why, if as Luther said, “They are profitable and good to read” do we reject these outright as false writings unworthy of recognition in the canon of the Word of God? The answer is fourfold.

The Reasons for Rejection

First, the Jews universally denied any acceptance of these writings as being inspired of God. Not a single book even found its way into the Hebrew canon of Scripture. By contrast, they uniformly accepted the 24 books of the Hebrew Bible from Genesis to Malachi right from the initial writing of the individual books. This testimony of God’s chosen people cannot be overlooked or discounted when considering this question of paramount importance. They unitedly refused to alter or enlarge the already accepted Holy Scriptures.

Second, neither Jesus, nor any of the writers of the New Testament ever quoted from the Apocrypha. This is significant since these books for the most part were in circulation and already were found in the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament of Jesus’ day. There are a few statements in the Apocrypha that seem to parallel New Testament teaching, but they are not identical nor are they direct quotations, but mere allusions. This matter of New Testament quotation is crucial to the consideration of which books do belong in the canon. For example, Jesus’ endorsement of Daniel as a prophet and a direct quotation from his book in Matthew 2:15 certainly validates the prophecy of Daniel as being authoritative and divinely inspired.

There are dozens of similar quotations by our Lord and the New Testament writers, which helps settle the matter of which books are inspired and which ones are not.

Third, it will be granted that a couple of the Apocryphal books contain accurate history, especially 1st Maccabees with its account of the wars of the inter-testamental period of Jewish history. However, elsewhere they abound in historical, geographic, and chronological errors. Many of them, such as the books of Tobit, Judith, and Bel and the Dragon, are pure fiction without any factual support whatsoever. For example, the book of Tobit is a short story which gives directions for casting out a demon by the burning of the heart and liver of a fish from the Euphrates River. It also includes an account of how Tobit regained her eyesight by applying the gall of the fish to her eyes. Bel and the Dragon is another fictitious story of how wicked priests were consuming food offered to the idol called Bel and how Daniel exposed their deceit which resulted in the destruction of the idol and its many priests. It also records how Daniel killed the “great dragon” that was worshiped in Babylon by feeding it balls made of pitch, fat and hair, which caused it to explode internally. Obviously such myths cannot be put on a par with the writings of Scripture and therefore must be rejected.

False names, such as “Betomesthaim” for Samaria is found in Judith 4:6. Baruch contains false historical statements such as the statement that the sacred vessels of the temple were returned to Jerusalem in the days of Jeremiah, when in reality they were not returned until after the Babylonian Captivity according to Ezra 1:7. A careful reading of these thirteen books will reveal many such errors and a spiritual tone that is far below that of the canonical Scriptures.

Fourth, the books in the Apocrypha endorse many

false doctrines that are totally at variance with the clear teaching of the Word of God. Suicide is justified in 2 Maccabees 14:41-46. Prayers to the dead are encouraged in chapter 12, verses 41-45. Almsgiving is considered efficacious for the forgiveness of sins according to Tobit 12:9. The Book of Wisdom teaches the heresy of the pre-existence of souls in 8:19-20. The Book of Judith portrays her as using deception, guile and outright lying with the apparent approval of God (9:10-13). It is in these books that the Roman Catholic doctrine of Purgatory is found along with many other unscriptural concepts. The internal evidence is totally against the acceptance of these so-called “hidden and concealed” books as being a part of God’s holy and “breathed-out” Word. (See 2 Timothy 3:16). Isaiah 8:20 sums up the proper attitude of all Bible-believing Christians regarding these spurious books. “To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”

[Editorial note: Jerome, referred to by Dr. Knuteson, translated the Latin Vulgate (ca. 383-405). In his first edition he omitted the Apocrypha. At the behest of the Bishop of Rome, Jerome added several books of the current Apocrypha. Jerome did not believe they should be in the canon in a letter to the Bishop of Rome for the same reasons Dr. Knuteson cites.]

BOOK REVIEW

Cult Watch

By John Ankerberg and John Weldon

Published 1991, 378 pages

Reviewed by William A. BeVier

The subtitle for this book by these noted authors is: "What You Need to Know About Spiritual Deception." Content useful for our day.

There are eight parts to this book. They are Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, The Masonic Lodge, The New Age Movement, Spirit Guides, Astrology, The Occult, and False Teaching in the Church, also termed "Positive Confession."

In their Forward the authors state not only the reasons for writing this book (in addition to the many others they have written), but their definition of what makes a cult a cult and the cultic the cultic, and that they firmly believe that the Bible is the Word of God and only absolute standard by which we can evaluate spiritual truth.

In each part of their book they clearly state and document the history, theological beliefs as compared with Scripture, and an analysis and critique.

The book is concluded with four Appendices, four pages of Recommended Reading including each of the groups presented, 33 pages of documentation (which would have been more helpful if included within the text), four pages of fine print listing names associated with each group, a Subject Index of four pages, and finally a one-page

introduction of the authors. This is a wealth of current information.

The book is available from R.A.S. for \$14.99 (plus P&H). It is listed as G1-48 in our new titles addition to our Catalog.

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