

The Discerner

the voice of... **Religion Analysis Service**

A QUARTERLY EXPOSING
UNBIBLICAL TEACHING & MOVEMENTS

Volume 26, Number 2

April • May • June 2006

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Confucianism

Hare Krishna

Freemasons

Jehovah's Witnesses

Humanism

Jainism

Judaism

Neopaganism

MOONIES

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Wicca

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Exposed!

MORMONS

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*"Hereby know we the spirit of truth
and the spirit of error" 1John4:6*

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TRIBUTE TO REV. ERVIN INGEBRETSON

With a degree of regret, the Religion Analysis Service Board announces the retirement of Rev. (ret. Naval Chaplain) Ervin Ingebretson from the Board. Erv has served since 1991 as part-time office worker, vice-president, writer of book reviews and has been a source of spiritual insight and strength to all of us through times of blessings and trials. We have depended on him, and he has been faithful. We pray God's blessings on him and Carol. We note with gratitude, however, that Erv has agreed to continue providing book reviews on an intermittent basis for The Discerner. We look forward to his discerning insight into the crucial spiritual issues of our day.

Ronald E. McRoberts
President, Religion Analysis Service

DEAR READER

Perhaps you have noticed that The Discerner has a new title graphic. The RAS Board decided several months ago that a format change is due that is a bit more up-to-date and hopefully more appealing to a younger generation. We are indebted to my son, Kurt, who fashioned the graphic for us at no cost. With this new graphic we want to inject some new elements into the body of The Discerner as well. We begin with a Tiny Quiz on the Cults p. 30.

RAS' central and focused task remains that of analysis and discernment, or in biblical language "testing the spirits" - Greek:"diakrisis". In this issue Dr. David Larsen, one of our esteemed Board of Reference members, gives us clear and poignant guidelines as to patterns of deception and delusion in the religious scene today. We are astounded by the depth and breadth of his philosophical, literary, and theological statements. This is a strong and impassionate attack against the vague, confusing and pernicious teachings in much of modern religious thinking.

We are thankful for Dr. Roy Knuteson's encouraging update on Armstrongism. It is so good to hear how God has brought many Armstrongists lately to repentance and to orthodox biblical faith. All of this might cause their arrogant founder, Herbert W. Armstrong, to turn over in his grave were he aware of what has happened to his Worldwide Church of God. We hope that this example of repentance and change will cause other groups to consider their errant ways and return to the biblical faith and practice as well.

Two devotionals from internet and now radio/television evangelist, Bill Keller, are also included in this issue. Two years ago I received my first devotional from Keller on my computer. I was immediately arrested by the vigorous style and forthrightness of Keller's message. He dares to take on all comers (celebrities, politicians, liberal theologians, abortionists, homosexuals, adulterers, and cultists) in the battle for the truth of God's Word. I believe that you will find his comments pungent and powerful as he challenges the purveyors of the

“Prosperity Gospel” and the admirers of “Oprah’s Church”.

Board member, Steve Lagoon, adds the final touch with his helpful selection of good background materials on the DaVinci Code that seems to be the rage of all who seek an alternative Gospel.

God bless you as you inwardly dialogue with these texts.

Laurence J. Sutherland, Editor

A PERNICIOUS PATTERN OF DELUSION

*David L. Larsen, Professor Emeritus of Preaching
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School*

*“But he who is spiritual discerns all things”
— 1 Corinthians 2:15*

*“But solid food belongs to those who are mature, even those
who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern good
from evil..”—Hebrews 5:14*

*“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but test the spirits..”
—I John 4:1a*

Discerning believers need to keep abreast of what is happening in false religious systems like Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy (which seems to have appeal to some Evangelicals today but has never had a Reformation). The cults present a bewildering array of false teaching noted and analyzed in *The Discerner*. In my forty three years of association with Religion Analysis Service I have greatly appreciated the attention given to the content of these erring movements, but I have never seen a focus on some of the more subtle patterns of deception and delusion.

One of these I call the peril of false dichotomies or false adversatives. To be sure there are Biblical dichotomies and adversatives: we are either for Christ or against Him. We serve God or Mammon. There are only two paths and two destinies (Matthew 7:13-14, Psalm 1). In these critical issues it is an either/or, not a both/and. So Joshua, Elijah and our Blessed Lord called for making choices and decisions. To make no decision is in fact to make a decision. To live is to choose. We cannot hesitate and equivocate. We must go one way or another, and Christ is the only way.

But there are currently some areas in which a pendulum effect is to be observed. These are areas in which it is not either/or but in fact, both/and. I should like to submit some examples and you may think of others.

It is not the individual or the community - it is both

Fidelity to Scripture requires a recognition of the importance of both the individual and the community. Sometimes we harbor among us an exaggerated or Emersonian individualism which has no sensitivity to the Body of Christ. John Wesley was right in saying that “Jesus Christ alone saves but He never saves anyone alone.” As part of coming to Christ we are incorporated into the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). We now belong to the “forever family of God.”

Still we come to Christ as individuals. There is no such thing as mass conversions or group conversions. Receiving Christ, as our Savior and Lord is intensely personal. The operation of vicarious faith is not possible. Sometimes we are in danger of being swallowed up in the collectivisms of our time in what the late William Whyte saw as the danger of *The Organization Man*. Karl Barth argues that everyone is elected in Christ and N.T. Wright (good as he is on the bodily resurrection of our Lord) sees justification as corporate.

Individualism is not a naughty word and must be seen as an important part of what has made America great with opportunity for initiative and risk-taking. Perhaps we in the West have been overly preoccupied with individualism and we have seen individualism run amok in our churches.

But surely the “emergent church” is in serious error when it leans on Walter Wink’s disparagement of “the atonement as a highly individual transaction between the believer and God” (in Brian McLaren’s very arrogant book, *The Secret Message of Jesus*). Galatians 3 presents the beautiful and complementary balance between individual faith in Christ (3:10-12) and the glory and richness of the Christian community (3:26-29). This is not an either/or but a both/and.

Conversion is not a point in time or a process - it is both. Supernatural new birth according to the New Testament is an event, a moment in time-space when we cross the line from being in Adam to being in Christ. Not everyone is able to identify that exact point but there has to be a point of transfer from “darkness to light” (1 Peter 2:9). We do not ooze into salvation, we choose into salvation.

But some in their perception of an extended process are tending to depreciate the importance of immediate conversion. Here our doctrine of prevenient grace is vital - “The Hound of

Heaven” is in pursuit of the sinner over many years, in some cases since childhood. The Holy Spirit makes a move and there is response, positive or negative. C.S. Lewis heard the pursuing steps behind him over a period of time and while riding in a side-car on his way to Whipsnade Zoo, he finally made his commitment. How much sowing and watering come before the harvest?

The Apostle Paul is prima-facie evidence of the balance: how long was it that he kicked against the goads of God? The Holy Spirit was at work as Paul held the coats of those who stoned Stephen. It is not really the final blow of the hammer that shatters the rock. Many preliminary/successive blows are required, and we never know how close we are to the implosion. It is not an either/or in this instance. We need both in a congenial and cogent balance.

It is not the personal or the propositional - it is both

So great is the antipathy of some to propositional revelation that they seek to demolish the cognitive altogether. Rationalism is a danger, but rationality is necessary for communication. Linear reasoning is used even by its opponents to attack it. The classic case of this confusion was the untimely article by William Willimon in *Christianity Today* (March 4, 1996) in which he advanced the foolishness that we need to jettison objective, propositional truth about Jesus and move to the personal.

This is to make a false disjunction. If we do not have objective facts about Jesus as set forth in Scripture we have no reality check on pure subjectivity. “Encounter theology” was the signature of neo-orthodoxy but without objective criteria from Scripture, how can one be sure that one is not encountering the Devil himself? Yet many today are so enamored with “feeling” and “experience” that they trash objective truth and factuality and bring only disaster upon themselves and their hearers. The objective fact of our legal marriage and its documentation fifty years ago does not deprive my marriage with the wife of my youth of one smidgeon of its personal and affective delight. The personal and the propositional are not mutually exclusive. We need both.

It is not doctrine or experience - it is both

Many in our times seem to have an allergy to doctrine. So the Apostle Paul predicted: “For the time will come when men

will not endure sound doctrine..." (2 Timothy 4:3). Of course, we shall have doctrine whether we want it or not - the question will be whether or not it is sound doctrine. No doctrine is a doctrine. Some advise: "Don't preach doctrine, just preach Jesus." But anything we say about Jesus is doctrinal. "Tell stories, don't preach doctrine" others urge. A Biblical narrative which does not illustrate a doctrine taught in the didactic or epistolary sections of Scripture is just entertainment. Application must be "obeying from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered" to us (Romans 6:17). There is such a thing as "the apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42).

While some traditions treasure doctrine but lean toward "dead orthodoxy," the tilt in our times is to seek experience. "I don't preach doctrine," Aimee Semple McPherson used to boast. Pietists have sought "the burning heart" as a concomitant of sound doctrine but their tendency has been to lose the doctrine. "New Age" religion is experience heavy but Biblically vapid. Demotion of the Scriptural text is lethal. "Feeling is believing" is the credo of some in our age. Downplaying the historicity of Biblical events is increasingly common. The truthfulness and facticity of the Scriptural record are "the launching pad from which the rocket of experience is launched". Can we have regeneration without John 3? Can we have justification by faith without Romans 3? What do we know about the Holy Spirit that is not communicated in the Word of God? Doctrine and experience are the "gold-dust twins," They are not contradictory but complementary.

It is **not internally oriented or externally oriented - it is both.**

Some have tended to introversion and some tend to extroversion and probably the most of us are ambiverts. We are in some balance between the two. In fact, we cannot surrender to either extreme - the inner directed person of David Reisman's description in *The Lonely Crowd* needs the balance of counsel and advice from a responsibility group or relationship. Jesus said: "By their fruits you shall know them" (Matthew 7:20). Faith is the inward and works are the outward, and James well argues that it cannot be the one without the other. Spiritual health requires balance.

The more contemplative and meditative person needs a push toward more effective articulation and expression. The "doer" must beware of theologically rootless activism which

becomes shallow and thin. The preacher needs to be the scholar/saint” but must not barricade himself in his study lest he be like the minister of whom it was said, “He was invisible during the week and incomprehensible on the Lord’s Day.”

Succumbing to a false dichotomy can leave one’s ministry in a shambles. Ministry itself can become a hiding place from the Lord. He calls us to the vital cultivation of the internal as well as to the rigorous expression of the external. This must not be an either/or. I have noted just five false adversatives and there are many more. Which others come to your mind? With due recognition of the true adversatives(Christ vs the world, for instance, as in Romans 12:2), we must beware of the false dichotomies which cripple and maim balanced Christian experience and ministry. We are in fact complete in Christ (Colossians 2:10). He makes us full-orbed and lacking in no good thing. May our thinking and living reflect this kind of balance and wholeness which is Christ’s purpose in salvation that he brings to us (John 10:10).

ARMSTRONGISM: YESTERDAY AND TODAY

By Roy E. Knuteson, Ph.D

Many readers of The Discerner Magazine will recognize the name of Herbert W. Armstrong, the founder of the “Radio Church of God” and “The Plain Truth” magazine. Over the years I have written three articles in this magazine exposing this fraudulent minister and his heretical doctrines. An update is due now.

Background

In 1934, Armstrong began broadcasting his distinctive doctrines over a very small radio station in Oregon and began publishing his magazine called “The Plain Truth”. Response was encouraging and then he founded the “Radio Church of God” which in 1968 was named “The Worldwide Church of God” to reflect his worldwide audience which now numbered in the millions. In the late 1980’s his magazine circulation topped 8 million free copies per month, much larger than most major news magazines. The income to the national headquarters in Pasadena, California neared 200 million dollars annually. Membership in the Worldwide Church of God numbered 120 thousand persons. Membership was determined by counting those who gave 20-30 percent of their income to the ministry of Armstrong.

Churches were established in rented quarters across America, Canada, England, Australia, and New Zealand. Local Pastors were appointed and salaried from headquarters in Seventh Day Adventist fashion. Armstrong considered himself the “Pastor General” who controlled all matters of doctrine, organization, and practice. In order to staff all of these churches, Armstrong founded three colleges, one in England, another in Big Sandy, Texas, and the flagship school: Ambassador College in Pasadena.

Apostasy

From all outward appearances The Worldwide Church of God seemed monolithic. There was a gradual fallout as magazine subscribers and radio listeners detected the heresy that

was being propagated. However, the growth far outnumbered the losses, so the cult continued to prosper. The first major split occurred in 1978 when Garner Ted, the fourth son of Herbert W., who for years was the national broadcaster for the radio and television programs, was expelled on charges of immorality and drunkenness. He immediately moved to Tyler, Texas where he founded “The International Church of God” along with a magazine and a television program called “The Armor of God”, both of which continued to propagate the strange doctrines of his father. Garner Ted was finally ousted from his church over his continued immorality and charges of money mismanagement. Not to be stopped, he, in 2003, founded “The Intercontinental Church of God”, along with a magazine and television broadcast. Garner Ted died of pneumonia in 2005. His church continues to function although on a much smaller and dwindling basis.

The next major player to go was Roderick Meredith, a close confidant of Herbert W. and the editor of the Plain Truth Magazine. A power struggle ensued, and he left in 1992 and founded “The Global Church of God” in San Diego, California. Shortly afterward, Meredith was fired, and so he moved to Charlotte, North Carolina where he established “The Living Church of God” and the headquarters for his association of churches. It was in one his branch churches near Milwaukee, Wisconsin where, in 2005, Terry Ratzmann gunned down the Pastor and seven others including himself, which received national attention. The primary reason for this killing was Ratzmann’s conflict with the Pastor and the dictatorial teachings of the church, including the ruling that one cannot marry outside of Meredith’s church.

Shortly after the death of Armstrong in 1986, his hand-picked successor Joseph Tkach Sr. began to make some doctrinal and organizational changes which spawned a mass exodus. Tkach lists 104 organizations which have splintered from the Worldwide Church of God.

Mini-denominations

In the succeeding years, literally hundreds of these new groups and individual churches have been formed, and all of them trace their history and doctrinal distinctives to Herbert W. Armstrong and the Worldwide Church. Like their mentor, they all denounce each other as spurious while claiming to be

the only true church on earth today. So the legacy continues. In addition to the conflict over doctrine, there was major concern over who would control the multiplied millions of dollars the Worldwide Church possessed. The properties in Texas and California were worth \$200 million alone, plus additional millions in investments and secret deposits, some in foreign lands. Then too, there was the continued potential for additional millions through the tithes of the remaining constituents.

All of these rival churches and fellowships use the name “Church of God”, believing that this is the only true Bible name based on Acts 20:28. Some of the larger mini-denominations include:

- The United Church of God (org. 1995)
- The Christian Biblical Church of God (org. 1979)
- The Restored Church of God (org. 1998)
- The Living Church of God (org. 1998)
- The Twentieth Century Church of God (org. 1990)

The largest and most influential is the Philadelphia Church of God of Edmund, Oklahoma. founded by Gerald Flurry (72), who was excommunicated from the Worldwide Church in 1989. Today, his mini-denomination openly endorses all of Armstrong’s doctrines and recently entered a lawsuit with the Worldwide Church over the right to publish his many books and pamphlets. The Worldwide Church settled the lawsuit by selling the copyrights to nineteen books for \$3 million.

Flurry’s weekly television program: “The Key of David” is seen on 6 nationwide networks, 180 individual stations, plus 19 satellite broadcasts in Canada, Latin America, The Caribbean, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. Flurry claims to have a potential listening audience of 700 million worldwide. The program can also be viewed on their website: www.keyofdavid.com.

In addition, Flurry publishes a beautiful and impressive news and prophecy magazine called: “The Philadelphia Trumpet” which rivals and surpasses Armstrong’s “Plain Truth” magazine which he is obviously imitating. This magazine is sent free to multiplied thousands of “subscribers” worldwide. In true Armstrong fashion, Flurry uses his magazine articles to propagate his warnings about the end of the world and the return of Jesus Christ to usher in the peaceful

and wonderful “world of tomorrow.”

Heresies

To the uninformed reader and listener, the publications and programs sound evangelical and biblically based. Yet, cleverly and subtly woven into each of the propaganda pieces are the heretical doctrines of Herbert W. Armstrong which include:

1. The failure of Christianity. Armstrong and all of his followers believe that the true gospel was not preached for 1,900 years. It was finally restored when Herbert W. began his first radio broadcast in 1934, and continues today exclusively through Gerald Flurry. Interestingly, all of the splinter groups make the same claim for their particular church or fellowship of churches.

2. God is a family of persons. Flurry continually speaks of “Two Gods”, meaning the Father and the Son, and he therefore denies the Trinity and the personality of the Holy Spirit. It also opens the door to the Mormon doctrine that people can become Gods and belong to the “God family”.

3. Salvation by works. According to Flurry and all the descendents of Armstrong, salvation is a process consisting of repentance, faith, and baptism, which are valid only in their particular church. No one is saved in this life. True believers are “begotten” now. The new birth is realized in the final resurrection. In this sense, even Jesus needed to be born again. So far, Jesus is the only one to have received salvation.

4. Sabbath keeping. All of these cultic groups insist that Saturday is the only proper day of worship. Sunday worship, they claim, was initiated by the Roman Emperor Constantine in 325 A.D. Like Seventh-Day Adventism, they preach that Sunday observance is “the mark of the beast” of Revelation 13. Flurry says that without proper Sabbath-keeping a person will never be saved.

5. Anglo-Israelism. This false doctrine is the centerpiece of their understanding of history and prophecy. They believe that there were “ten lost tribes of Israel” after the Babylonian captivity in the fourth century B.C and that they migrated to Western Europe, the British Isles, and later to the United States. They claim that the tribe of

Ephraim populated the British Isles and the tribe of Manasseh populated what would become the United States. Hence, the Old Testament prophecies are all about these descendents, and they are therefore the recipients of the promises made to David. This, Flurry believes, is the key to understanding Bible prophecy, and this is why he has named his television program: “The Key of David”.

6. Eternal punishment. Flurry, in agreement with his mentor, rejects the idea of eternal punishment for the wicked. Death is the absence of life and no one will be punished in a fictitious hell. The hell of the Bible will eventually burn itself out, he claims.

7. Fulfilled prophecy. Flurry believes that Armstrong fulfilled Jesus’ prophecy in Matthew 24:14: “This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world.” He also believes that the implosion of the Worldwide Church of God and the commissioning of The Philadelphia Church of God was foretold in Revelation 10:11, which says: “You shall prophesy again before many peoples, nations and tongues”. Flurry also preaches what is known as the “Malachi Message”, based on Malachi 2:4. This quote, taken completely out of context, reputedly supports his claim that God gives direct revelation regarding things to come only to him. These are revelations in addition to those previously given to Armstrong. Flurry’s most recent revelation is that “the last half of the last hour” before the coming Great Tribulation began on June 4, 2005 and will culminate on January 16, 2010.

Reformation

Under the leadership of Joseph Tkach Sr, the Worldwide Church began to distance themselves from their founder by withdrawing from publication of all of his books. New biblical studies by Tkach led to a revision of the doctrine of the new birth, the acceptance of the Trinity and the Holy Spirit as a divine person. He also declared that WWC members are no longer under the Old Testament laws, and therefore all dietary restrictions, including the eating of pork were lifted. In addition, he renounced Sabbath-keeping and declared that true Christians are found in other churches beside their own,

Tkach died in 1995 and was succeeded by his son, Joseph Tkach Jr, who continued the reformation of the church. His

major reforms included an outright rejection of “Anglo-Israelism” and the “triple tithe” of personal income to the church. He also lifted the ban on Christmas and Easter celebrations and encouraged voting in governmental elections, military service, and law enforcement employment. In 1997 Tkach Jr, published “Transformed by Truth,” defending the many doctrinal and administrative changes made by himself and his father. Because of these drastic changes, The Worldwide Church of God was welcomed into The National Association of Evangelicals that same year.

Consequences

Up to three-quarters of the church’s 125,000 members have departed and the operational budget has shrunk from its high of \$210 million in 1990 to about \$30 million today. Forced to economize, the church laid off 200 of the 1,200 plus headquarters’ staff and has sold the sprawling Texas College campus to Hobby Lobby, which, in turn, gave it to Bill Gothard’s ministry. Ambassador University was closed and sold to a charismatic church. This included the lavish homes on Colorado Boulevard in Pasadena and the magnificent Ambassador Auditorium.

The Plain Truth Magazine has been severely scaled back and is now offered on a subscription basis only. The headquarters has moved to a new campus in Glendora, California. The church still maintains national offices in many countries. The church claims a membership of 60,000 in 860 churches in 90 nations (as of 2004). The most recent announcement from the Worldwide Church is a name change this year to “Grace International Communion.” Bible believers can rejoice over these dramatic developments.

Out of this major cult has emerged a New Testament church that is impacting our world for Christ.

TV PREACHER AIMS AT THE MULTITUDES

By Alexandra Alter

A new internet/television evangelist has come to prominence in Florida. I am enclosing, first, some biographical and anecdotal information about Mr. Keller and then allowing two devotionals to speak for themselves. RAS will be following this ministry as it embarks on its national TV ventures in July. (Editor)

Excerpted from the Miami Herald, Sunday, May 28, 2006

EARLY YEARS

William H. Keller grew up in Columbus, Ohio, as the oldest son in a devout Methodist family. Keller says he found Jesus when he was 12 and planned to go into seminary to become a Methodist preacher. After his father died when Keller was 16, he worked summers to put himself through Ohio State University.

He was a natural salesman. During his junior year in 1978, when he ran out of money, Keller set up a mail-order company selling computers out of his mother's basement. He tallied \$5 million in sales the first year, quit school and scrapped plans for the seminary.

Keller later sold his company and invested in stocks. After losing everything in the 1987 stock-market crash, he turned to an insider-trading scheme, running illegal deals through an investment firm he started in the Cayman Islands. When the Securities and Exchange Commission filed a criminal suit against Keller in 1989, he told agents, in his words, to "go fly a kite."

"I was obnoxious. I was very arrogant," he said. "I was 30 years old, I'd made a lot of money, I was still living pretty high, living a debauched lifestyle."

Keller eventually served 30 months at a federal prison camp near Pensacola, where he earned a mail-order degree in biblical studies from Jerry Falwell's Liberty University.

After his release in 1992, Keller returned to Chicago and

became an itinerant preacher. He lived on less than \$20,000 a year, he says.

Frustrated that he couldn't reach audiences outside of church, Keller signed on as a consultant to a Christian TV network in Clearwater. But he quickly became disillusioned.

"To be very blunt, it's a hustle," he said.

WEBSITE LAUNCHED

Keller left and launched liveprayer.com in a cramped office in the back of Ace Motors, a St. Petersburg used-car lot run by retired police officer Clyde Walters, a supporter who gave Keller a free car and office.

With about 700 volunteers, most of them retired pastors, Keller responds to about 40,000 prayer requests that come to the website daily. He e-mails a daily devotional to more than two million people.

A couple of times a month, he asks for money. Recently, he has started to solicit donations on his TV show, telling viewers the money is needed to pay off his ministries' \$500,000 debt.

Keller launched his TV show, *Live Prayer with Bill Keller*, three years ago to compete with some secular talk shows in what Keller views as a battle for souls.

"I don't hold back the truth," he said. "I don't have a problem sitting in front of a quarter of a million people every night and telling someone they're going to Hell."

Keller's occasionally caustic style can get him into trouble – he receives up to 30 death threats a month, he said.

Other ministers who have publicly challenged Keller's fundamentalist views have found him aggressive and intractable. The Rev. Phyllis Hunt, pastor of the Metropolitan Community Church of Tampa, joined Keller in a panel discussion on religion and politics. The discussion quickly degenerated into a screaming match over the Bible and homosexuality, Hunt said.

"He was pretty predictable in identifying anyone who said they were gay or lesbian as sinners," Hunt said. "It was about who could shout the loudest."

RECENT TARGETS

Keller can be just as volatile on television. Among his recent targets: Oprah Winfrey, whom Keller derided as a "New

Age witch,” the Mormon Church and Florida Sen. Bill Nelson. When callers challenge him, he can get testy. During a recent live show, a young man named Danny from Boca Raton criticized him for manipulating people. Keller turned on him.

“When you die, what’s going to happen to you, Danny? Keller asked, glaring intently at the camera.

“According to you, I’m probably going to Hell in a handbasket,” Danny said.

“That’s exactly correct, Danny. But you know what? You don’t have to,” Keller said. ‘I’m on [TV] to reach people like you. ‘Cause let me tell you something, the day you die and stand before God, you’re not going to be able to whine and moan and cry and go, ‘Oh, nobody told me.’ You’ve heard the story, you’ve heard the truth. According to God’s word, your blood’s not on my hands anymore, my friend.”

For viewers who take offense at his show, Keller is characteristically blunt: “Last I checked, I didn’t send somebody to your house to duct-tape you to a chair and put toothpicks in your eyelids to force you to watch the program.”

“OPRAH’S CHURCH”

DAILY DEVOTIONAL MONDAY MAY 15, 2006 (Deuteronomy 13:5, Isaiah 9:15)

Rev. Oprah? Why Oprah is so dangerous. For the nearly 7 years Liveprayer has been around, I have continually exposed this New Age false-hope merchant and warned people of how dangerous she is. If Oprah Winfrey was simply another Hollywood entertainer I could care less about her. What makes her so dangerous is that while her program normally deals with the same subject matter the raunchy Jerry Springer program does, Oprah also deals with the very real day-to-day issues of life and uses her nationally-syndicated television program to tell people how to live. The authority she speaks from? Herself, OPRAH WINFREY!

We are living in a time where the better percentage of two full generations don’t go to church. People still hit those difficult places in life and at those moments they are looking for help and for hope. Sadly, the Christian leaders of our day have abandoned the marketplace and secular television for the safety and prosperity of the “Christian trough.” In so doing, they

have left the lost and hurting masses looking for a savior, someone to come along and help them *through* the difficult moments of life, tell them how to live, and give them hope. To *fill this void* in people's spiritual lives, along comes Oprah!

People defend her by saying she is not a theologian or a preacher, she is a talk-show host and entertainer. I agree. However, that is not how she portrays herself or positions herself. She has eagerly cashed in to the tune of over \$1 BILLION DOLLARS on being the spiritual guru to over 49 million people a week! The authority she speaks from is what she has determined truth to be, her views on right and wrong, her values and morals, as opposed to the only Truth and authority there is...God's Word!

Lest you think I have overstated my case and have been wrong all these years, please take a moment to read some quotes from a recent article in the USA Today on the "Divine Miss Winfrey."

"Over the past year, Winfrey, 52, has emerged as a spiritual leader for the new millennium, a moral voice of authority for the nation."

"With her television pulpit and the sheer power of her persona, she has encouraged and steered audiences (mostly women) in all matters, from genocide in Rwanda to suburban spouse swapping to finding the absolute best T-shirt and oatmeal cookie."

"She's a really hip and materialistic Mother Teresa,' says Kathryn Lofton, a professor at Reed College in Portland, Ore., who has written two papers analyzing the religious aspects of Winfrey. 'Oprah has emerged as a symbolic figurehead of spirituality.' "

"She's a moral monitor, using herself as the template against which she measures the decency of a nation,' Lofton says."

"With 49 million viewers each week in the USA and more in the 122 other countries to which the show is distributed, Winfrey reaches more people in a TV day than most preachers can hope to reach in a lifetime of sermons."

"In a November poll conducted at Beliefnet.com, a site that looks at how religions and spirituality intersect with popular culture, 33% of 6,600 respondents said Winfrey has had

“a more profound impact” on their spiritual lives than their clergypersons.”

“Winfrey called her talk show her ‘ministry.’ “

“Marcia Nelson says that it’s not going too far to call her a spiritual leader. ‘I’ve said to a number of people - she’s today’s Billy Graham.’ “

“ ‘Our culture is changing,’ he says, ‘as churches are in decline and the bulk of a new generation is growing up outside of religion. Instead, they’re turning to the Church of Oprah.’ “

“ ‘People who have no religion relate to her,’ Nelson says.”

It is clearly established that Oprah Winfrey views herself as some sort of spiritual leader, and based on the 49 million viewers of her TV program, you can laugh at that notion but can’t ignore the fact she has an incredible amount of influence over tens of millions of lives. Let me be dear. The danger of Oprah Winfrey is that like any cult leader, her version of the truth and her final authority are not from God but from herself! It has been clearly documented from transcripts that Oprah Winfrey may use the name of “God,” and very rarely “Jesus,” and use many “Christian” expressions, but so does the Mormon cult! While she was raised in the Baptist church, she has been a long-time member (though rarely attends) of a very liberal church in Chicago that mixes Christian faith with New Age spirituality.

Because she has never been married, choosing instead of live for decades outside the bonds of God’s Holy Institution with a man who is not her husband, Oprah has a jaundiced view on this most sacred bond between a man and woman. Oprah embraces the New Age philosophy that there are “many roads that lead to God,” a lie from the pits of hell itself. On her program she promotes and endorses cults like Scientology, Kaballah, those who speak to the dead, psychics, and people of ANY “spirituality.” There is only ONE GOD, the God of the Bible, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and to promote the false gods of this world makes Oprah an enemy of God!

As for the social issues, Oprah condones and supports those who choose to engage in the sin of homosexuality. Oprah is on the record supporting a “woman’s right to choose,” code for slaughtering innocent babies. While she gives lip service to

being pro-family, Oprah's definition of the family is whatever men want it to be, not what God says it is! Again, the truth Oprah espouses comes from her own imagination, not from the only authority and source of Truth there is, the Bible. By going against God's Word on the key social issues of our day makes Oprah an enemy of God.

I could go on, but there is no reason to. Simply denying the Bible as the only Truth there is, God as the one and only God there is, and faith in Jesus Christ as the one and ONLY WAY to be saved, makes this woman dangerous and a false prophet in every sense of the word. What makes a person a false prophet is that they lead you AWAY from God, Biblical Truth and Jesus Christ. Sadly, those who follow this false prophet, this merchant of false hope, put their eternal souls in peril. That is why I have warned people for years about her and will continue to.

I love you and care about you so much. I know all the Oprah disciples who spend hundreds of dollars to go hear her preach the "gospel of Oprah" at her seminars, buy her books and magazine, watch her faithfully every day, hang on her every word, will run to her defense by pointing out all the good she does. I don't doubt for a second that Oprah uses some of her billions to help others. That is not the issue. The Mormon cult feeds the hungry, clothes the naked, and visits the prisoners, yet they are still lost and going to hell for rejecting Jesus Christ. The Mafia gives millions to worthwhile causes that help those in need, but that doesn't make them good people. God's Word teaches you can't buy your way into heaven!

So what is the answer to Rev. Oprah? She is locked in. One of the most powerful women in the entertainment business. She is not going away and now that she is at least being honest about her "spiritual guru" status, will become even bolder in trying to position herself as the spiritual leader of the nation. By the way, this is EXACTLY how the anti-Christ will rise to power and the one-world religion will come to be. A charismatic figure who can control the masses and fill their spiritual needs by feeding them a perverse theology that makes them feel good for the moment.

The answer is to take on Oprah just like Elijah took on the prophets of Baal, head-on! In the end, the TRUTH will always

win out over the lie. False hope will always give way to true hope. The false prophet will always be exposed when confronted by a true prophet of God. I have told you many times that what we are dealing with is a battle for the souls of men. This is why I am so passionate about taking the Liveprayer television program nationwide. It will be a beacon of light in the darkness of this world for Biblical Truth and lead people to the only answer there is Jesus Christ!

The reality is, for over 3 years now, night after night I have done on the Liveprayer television program what Oprah does on her program. Deal with the pressing issues of the day, reach out to people who are hurting, and give them answers for their life. The difference? I let them know that I can't help them and I am not their answer, Jesus is! I deal with the issues of the day not from a worldly perspective but a Biblical one! The answers for the hurting I share are not from my imagination but from God's Word! The truth I share is not my truth, it is God's Truth! The hope I give people is not a false hope, but the ONLY hope there is...JESUS CHRIST!

(Sadly, many high profile Christians will go on Oprah's program and rather than confront her and challenge the false theology she espouses, say nothing so they can sell whatever book they are pushing. David had no fear in taking on Goliath on his own turf. David was a shepherd, not a great man of war like Goliath. I have no fear in taking on Oprah on her own turf. I am an evangelist, not a great television and entertainment celebrity like Oprah. David didn't need the fancy armor of Saul, only a few pebbles. I don't need fancy buildings and studios, only a few pebbles and that is why I am asking you at this time to help me. Supply me with the pebbles I need and our God will do the rest!)

The world has always had false prophets, merchants of false hope. Oprah, her creation "Dr. Phil," Monte!, are simply some of the more notable ones of our day. I expose them for who they are, talk about them, because they are leading people AWAY from the only Truth there is and AWAY from the only hope there is. Pray for Oprah today. The fact is, Oprah could become a powerful woman of God if she would humble herself before the Almighty, get on her knees and confess Jesus Christ as Lord, and stop preaching the gospel of Oprah but the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

In his love and service,
Your friend and brother in Christ, Bill Keller
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THE REAL PROSPERITY GOSPEL

DEVOTIONAL SATURDAY JANUARY 14, 2006 (Psalms
37:16, Proverbs 10:22, 13:7, Hebrews 11:26, James 2:5,
Matthew 6:19)

The real prosperity Gospel. How many times have you turned on Christian television and heard a message on “prosperity?” On the screen was a man or woman wearing thousands of dollars worth of clothes, tens of thousands more in jewelry, speaking from a million dollar set or a multi-million dollar building. Their message was about prosperity and how God wants you to have a mansion, drive new luxury automobiles, wear the finest clothes, eat the most sumptuous food, vacation in far-off lands. They tell you from God’s Word that you are the “head and not the tail,” “the lender not the borrower,” that “God owns the cattle on a thousand hills,” “all the gold and silver belongs to Him, and the “wealth of the wicked is laid up for the righteous.”

As you sit there watching, you start to get into their message. They tell you that you are the child of a King and you deserve to live like royalty. Their powerful words encourage you to believe that God will provide you with all of the riches this world has to offer. They tell you that the only thing keeping you from enjoying great prosperity is your faith. You simply need greater faith. They then explain to you how to attain greater faith. You see, according to these prosperity teachers your faith is tied directly to your bank account and how much you are willing to give to them! (Where do you think their prosperity comes from?)

You are then challenged to show how great your faith is by the amount of money you are willing to send to them. Though it is never said in words, It is dearly insinuated that the bigger the check you write, the greater your faith is. The verse in the Bible that these prosperity teachers routinely pervert is Luke 6:38, “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be

poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” Bottom line, even though they never actually say it, they make it very clear that the more you want from God, the more you have to give to THEM. This false prosperity Gospel is based on your GREED and not really on your faith at all.

That is why in over 6 years of Liveprayer, I have never, nor will I ever play games with you and try to manipulate you into giving to God’s work here. I have taken a very strict Biblical approach to giving. I simply share our needs with you, encourage you to give based on your responsibility according to the Scriptures, remind you to give according to your ability to give, and provide you the opportunity to partner with me in bringing the Truth of God’s Word and the hope and love of Christ to millions worldwide each day who are hurting and lost, and trust God to move on your heart. No hype, no games, no manipulation, and no false hopes of wealth just because you give to God’s work here at Liveprayer.

The flourishing of the prosperity Gospel in the past 30 years has coincided with the wealth and excesses of our culture, especially here in the United States. It has played right into the trap of this world that measures success in dollars and cents. It parallels the mindset of Michael Douglas’ character Gordon Gekko in the late 80’s film “Wall Street” when he proclaimed “greed is good.” Sadly, like in how we dress, our music, how we view the issues of our day, instead of the church influencing the world, we have allowed the world to influence the church, especially in regard to this whole issue of prosperity.

I’ll give you the perfect example. How do we judge a successful church? There is only ONE criteria we use, the number of people who show up for service. How do we judge a successful ministry? How many people work there, how big and modern are their buildings, do they have more than one corporate jet, HOW MUCH MONEY DO THEY RAISE? We have allowed the world to influence the church instead of the church influencing the world! God doesn’t judge a successful church by the size of their buildings or the number of people who attend. God judges a successful church by their dedication and service to Him! God doesn’t judge a successful ministry by the value of their assets. God judges a successful ministry by their faithfulness to the work He has called them to and the

lives they are impacting for His Kingdom!

Those who have gone completely in the other direction and say that to be a true follower of Christ you have to live in poverty are equally as wrong. There is NO PLACE in the Bible that supports this false notion that you have to live in poverty to be a real follower of Jesus. There is nothing wrong with having a nice home, nice cars, nice clothes, eating good food, going on nice vacations. Money is not evil, the LOVE OF MONEY is evil. God has richly blessed many of His people with great material possessions and wealth since the beginning. It has been many of these people God has so richly blessed that have been responsible for much of the work of the Kingdom getting done! God blessed Joseph of Arimathea to be able to give his tomb to Jesus. God blessed those who gave to support Paul's missionary trips. Many who God has blessed with great wealth and resources have been faithful to use their blessings to further His work!

Also, God's Word Is TRUE. As a child of God we ARE the head and not the tail. We ARE to be the lender and not the borrower. The wealth of the wicked HAS been laid up for the righteous. God DOES own the cattle on a thousand hills and ALL the gold and silver belongs to Him. Luke 6:38 that tells us to give and it will be given unto us IS true! God DOES bless the faith of His children, often in their giving. But the real prosperity Gospel is not about money or possessions, it is about our relationship with Jesus Christ! The wealth of the child of God is NOT in the things of this temporal world that will one day pass away, it is in our eternal relationship we have with the Lord! The real prosperity Gospel is about what we have in Jesus, not what we have in the bank! -

I love you and care about you too much. Ever wonder why you don't see these prosperity teachers on ABC or major network affiliates? Simple. Only a few would watch meaning nobody would give them money or buy their books and tapes. Ever wonder why they don't preach their prosperity message in India, Africa, or other parts of the world? Same reason. Their message doesn't work on people who have nothing to give them. That is why it is a false gospel. Our prosperity is NOT measured in our earthly treasures but in what we have stored up in heaven. The Bible is very clear that our wealth is not in the temporal things of this world but in the eternal things of God!

Do you want to tell me that a person who loves Jesus, follows Christ daily, serves Him faithfully, yet lives in a small apartment in Siberia and has no material possessions is poor because they have no faith? The reality is God is blessing that person 100x greater than He is blessing someone who is saved and has all this world can offer in terms of material possessions, but is not fully surrendered or living their life for Him. Do you want to tell me God is not richly blessing someone who lives In Dallas, Texas who has a small 2-bedroom home, a mortgage, a 13-year-old car with 120,000 miles on it, basically living paycheck to paycheck but loves Jesus, is in the Word and prays daily, part of a local fellowship, serving the Lord in different ways, and honors Christ each day in how they live?

NEVER FORGET THIS. YOUR BLESSINGS FROM GOD ARE NOT MEASURED IN DOLLARS AND CENTS BUT IN THE CURRENCY OF HEAVEN! YOU CAN HAVE LITTLE ACCORDING TO THE STANDARDS OF THIS WORLD, YET BE RICH BEYOND BELIEF BECAUSE YOU KNOW CHRIST AS YOUR SAVIOR! WHAT PRICE CAN YOU PUT ON HAVING THE ASSURANCE THAT WHEN YOU DIE YOU WILL BE FOREVER WITH JESUS? WHAT PRICE CAN YOU PUT ON THE PEACE THAT PASSES ALL HUMAN UNDERSTANDING? WHAT PRICE CAN YOU PUT ON THE JOY OF THE LORD? DONT LET THE WORLD OR ESPECIALLY THE CHURCH LIE TO YOU THAT YOU ARE NOT BLESSED BECAUSE OF WHAT YOU DONT HAVE IN THIS WORLD, BECAUSE GOD'S WORD SAYS THAT IF YOU KNOW CHRIST YOU ARE RICHER THAN EVEN BILL GATES IN THE THINGS THAT REALLY MATTER!!!

I will be praying for you today. Praying that you will not allow this world or especially those in the church force you to judge how much God is blessing you by your bank account. That is a false prosperity Gospel. The real prosperity Gospel says that if you know Christ as your Savior you have riches greater than anything this world could ever offer. You really are royalty, the child of a King! I pray that you will continue to surrender your life daily to King Jesus and develop an even more intimate relationship with Him through prayer, the Word, fellowshiping with other Believers, and your service. That is how you continue to live with His blessings in your life each day. That my friend is the REAL prosperity Gospel.

In His love and service, Your friend and brother in Christ,
Bill Keller

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ANSWERS TO THE DA VINCI CODE PHENOMENON

By Steve Lagoon

The Da Vinci Code (Dan Brown, Doubleday, 2003) is *everywhere*. The top selling book has produced a cottage industry. Millions have read the book and millions more are seeing the movie starring Tom Hanks. French tourism has also benefited from the Da Vinci effect. A trip to your local bookstore will display a whole range of books jumping on the Da Vinci Code bandwagon and exploring the themes of the book.

Was Jesus married to Mary Magdalene? Did Jesus and Mary Magdalene have a child named Sarah, whose descendants survive to this day, protected by a super-secret society called the Priory of Sion? Has the Christian Church suppressed the truth of the origins of Christianity for 2000 years in order to maintain their power, and suppress women? These questions and many more are raised in the Da Vinci Code.

Should Christians ignore this phenomenon? Some have chosen to do so. Many others have decided to follow the wisdom described by Joseph “You meant evil against me; but God meant it for Good (Genesis 50:20 NKJV). In other words, they have decided to turn this attack on the faith into an opportunity to share the gospel. Along these lines, Christian scholars have produced excellent materials exposing the deceptions of the Da Vinci Code. The following is a partial list of books widely available:

Hank Hanegraaff, Paul Maier, *The Da Vinci Code: Fact or Fiction?*, Tyndale, 2004

Lee Strobel, Garry Poole, *Exploring the Da Vinci Code : Investigating the Issues Raised by the Book and Movie*, Zondervan, 2004

Josh McDowell, *The Da Vinci Code: A Quest for Answers*

Richard Abanes, *The Truth Behind the Da Vinci Code*, Harvest House, 2004

Darrell Bock, *Breaking the Da Vinci Code*, Nelson, 2004

Erwin Lutzer, *The Da Vinci Deception*, Tyndale, 2004

Ben Witherington, *The Gospel Code*, IVP, 2004

These books are written by top scholars and each offers a unique perspective. The allegations against the Christian Church made by Dan Brown in the *Da Vinci Code* (albeit in fictionalized form) are so broad and serious they warrant a comprehensive reaction. Further, even though the *Da Vinci Code* is fiction, it advances ideas that are current among many critics of Christianity.

Many Christian apologetics websites also have excellent information on the *Da Vinci Code*. We recommend Apologetix Index as a great starting point. It provides a wealth of information at the following web address: <http://www.apologeticsindex.org/221-books-about-the-da-vinci-code>

Just as light casts out darkness, so truth casts out error. As Christians, we can answer the deceptions of the *Da Vinci Code* with the light of Truth.

TINY QUIZ ON THE CULTS

1. The headquarters for Christian Science is
 a. Brooklyn, New York
 b. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
 c. Boston, Massachusetts
 d. Salt Lake City, Utah
2. Historically, which happened first?
 a. New Age Movement
 b. Birth of Mormonism
 c. Birth of Jehovah's Witnesses
 d. Great Awakening in America
3. Founder of Theosophy was
 a. David Hubbard
 b. Helena Blavatsky
 c. David Moses Berg
 d. Mary Baker Eddy
4. The Protestant Reformers emphasized the Bible as the Word of God or
 a. Sola gratia
 b. Sole fide
 c. Sola scriptura
 d. Soli deo Gloria
5. The word "occult" means
 a. heretical
 b. sick
 c. hidden
 d. weird
6. Total present number of Mormons in the world are
 a. 12,000,000
 b. 15,000,000
 c. 7,000,000
 d. 4,000,000

7. An example of Freemasonry is

- a. Skinheads
- b. Amish people
- c. Animists
- d. Shriners

8. Founder of the Church of Satan was

- a. Joseph Smith
- b. Anton LaVey
- c. Charles Taze Russell
- d. Sigmund Freud

9. A cult that began in Korea is

- a. Unification Church
- b. Armstrongism
- c. Hare Krishna
- d. Family of God

10. Which is not another name for Satan in the Bible?

- a. Devil
- b. Deceiver
- c. Lucifer
- d. Michael

Answers - 1: c; 2: d; 3: b; 4: c; 5: c; 6: a; 7: d; 8: b; 9: a; 10: d

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