



THE EXPOSITOR

Volume 1

July 2004

Issue 2

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Editor: S. Michael Durham
Assistant Editor: Teresa Crane

Welcome to the *Living Priorities Expositor*. It was the intent of the editors of this publication that *The Expositor* be a newsletter of Oak Grove Baptist Church in Paducah, Kentucky. But from the delightful response received from the first issue we have determined to make *The Expositor* more like a quarterly journal or magazine rather than just a newsletter. Since this is a means of mass communication, we have also brought it under the umbrella of Living Priorities, the media ministry of Oak Grove.

In this issue we want to focus on the theme of the gospel. We also want to promote Living Priorities' first Pastors' and Church Leader's Conference to be held August 31 through September 2, 2004. The theme of the conference will also be about the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. To say the gospel of Jesus Christ has come under attack is somewhat melodramatic as well as inaccurate. The gospel has always been hated and has known attack from its inception. Its message is about our Lord Jesus who was "despised and rejected of men." It should be no surprise then that his gospel would be ill received.

This present generation has heard much about the gospel but has learned very little of it. At best we live in a culture that is gospel-illiterate. Churches and para-church groups are so plentiful in number that we should be the most educated on what is the gospel. But we are not. How can this be? The answer is simple enough, but it is hard to accept. The bitter pill to swallow is that what popular Christianity has accepted as the gospel isn't.

A good number of pastors, evangelical pastors, even fine conservative pastors, who would never for a moment purposely lead anyone to misunderstand the gospel, are doing that very thing. The enclosed article titled, *The Diagnosis of Popular Christianity*, explains that this is a result of a departure from the gospel generations ago. Consequently, most of us, including the clergy, have inherited an inaccurate gospel message.

This fact is the medicine we must take if we are to reverse our spiritual ill-health. Like a mother encouraging a child to hold its nose and swallow big because of the medicine's bad taste, I encourage us to receive the remedy no matter how hard it is. We must do what we must to rid ourselves of this terrible plague that has infected our spirits and injured our churches. That's what most of this issue, as well as our Pastors' Conference, is about.

Let me encourage you to register for this upcoming conference. Inside you will find more information about it, along with a registration form. It will be a wonderful conference, and I believe it will be both challenging and heartening to you. I hope to see you there as we study the foundation that Christ laid, the foundation of the gospel.

A Debtor to Mercy,
S. Michael Durham

To subscribe or receive additional copies, call the office of Oak Grove Baptist Church at 270-898-8496 or write:
Oak Grove Baptist Church
2945 Oaks Road
Paducah, KY 42003.

THE DIAGNOSIS OF POPULAR CHRISTIANITY

BY S. MICHAEL DURHAM

Note: This article is adapted from a chapter in an upcoming book from Michael Durham to be published near the end of this year. The book will deal with what the essential elements of the gospel of Christ are according to the Apostle Paul in Romans chapters one through three.

This seems to be the finest hour for Christianity. In the last 30 years many churches have exploded and have become what we call, mega-churches. Christians now own television networks that can send the gospel light by satellite all over the world. Christian literature abounds as never before. Almost 90% of Americans profess Christianity. But has anyone inspected the foundation that all of this massive building has been built upon? On closer inspection all is not well. Many of American churches are built upon inferior foundations and as a result their houses are in disrepair. Their windows are all broken and the paint has peeled, leaving nothing but gray and weathered timber revealed. The structure leans to one side, and you wonder what keeps it from collapsing.

For centuries the orthodox faith of Christ and the Apostles had served the superstructure of the church well as its cornerstone and foundation. This foundation had withstood the attacks of heresy, liberalism, and religious tyranny during the centuries. But with time the heirs of the dependable house of grace neglected the soundness of the foundation. Intrigued with new ideas and a desire to speak to a more advanced audience, a large number of church leaders cobbled together a new foundation with supposedly significant improvements.

The Apostle Paul warned all who would be tempted to build with less costly materials to take heed how they build on the foundation (1 Corinthians 3:10). But taking heed has not been considered expedient to modern man. Men have built with inferior products and substandard materials that have proven unworthy over time. At first the changes appeared ever so slight and insignificant. But when it comes to building, true precision is a must. To the untrained eye the defect may go unnoticed, but with time the flaw becomes not only noticeable but huge.

As a result of evangelicalism's deviations, modern evangelicals are reaping the problems of shoddy construction. Houses of worship are more amusement parks than places to meet with God. Entertainment has seized the hearts of church-goers. If they are not entertained then they will take their membership elsewhere, and there is no shortage of pastors who will do their best to attract them to their acts. Doctrine, which means teaching, has been replaced with thrilling light shows, contemporary music and humor. Sermons are nothing more than self-help speeches that you could hear at any corporate convention.

How did we get here? A few generations ago we departed from the essence and nature of the gospel of our Lord. Gospel accuracy is not an option. It's a must! We must not be unclear in our understanding of what the gospel of Jesus is. We do not have the luxury to modify or append its precepts. If we fail to accurately proclaim the gospel as Paul preached it, then not only are our hearers in jeopardy but we are also.

The Apostle Paul was entrusted with the gospel of Jesus Christ. He said he did not receive his understanding of it by men. Rather Christ himself taught Paul the gospel. That is why Paul insisted to the Galatians that if anyone preached anything remotely different

from what he preached, they were to mark that man and avoid him. The converts of Galatia had been seduced into believing deviations of the gospel. Deceivers entered their churches claiming they were preaching the same gospel Paul preached, except more in-depth. They insinuated Paul had failed to tell them some key things. Paul rebukes his own converts and castigates the deceivers this way:

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:6-9).

Let me illustrate how important gospel accuracy is. Let's say we want to go from Paducah, Kentucky to Metropolis, Illinois. Since both towns are nestled on the banks of the Ohio River, all we have to do is drive across the river and we are in Metropolis. You don't need a compass just go across I-24 Bridge. Suppose you pulled out your trusty compass and set your course from Paducah to Metropolis but you were off just one degree? You would still make it to Metropolis because the difference in degrees is so minor. With short distances, accuracy is not as critical.

But let us set our traveling sights on Chicago, which is 372 miles north of Paducah. Let's say again our compass is off by only one degree. We would miss Chicago by 6 miles. Suppose I am aiming my compass this time for the North Pole and again I am off by just one degree. I will miss the North Pole by about 42 miles. But that's nothing compared to the moon. Its distance from earth is 240,000,000 miles. One degree of miscalculation and you will miss the moon by 4190 miles, and yet we were only off by just one degree.



THE BEGINNING OF INACCURACY

This applies spiritually and theologically to the professing church in our day. So many churches have missed the destination God has predetermined for a local church. Churches in the United States have terribly missed what a New Testament Church should be right at the most fundamental truth of Christianity—the gospel of Jesus Christ. At first the degree of error that entered during the middle 1800's concerning the identity of God and his glorious salvation appeared to be minuscule, but one hundred and fifty years later we are miles from the target.

The fountainhead of this departure began in Germany in the early to middle nineteenth century. The error began, as it almost always does, as a rethinking of the inerrancy of scripture. The attack on the reliability of the Bible spread over Europe but especially found great acceptance in England. The doctrines of Darwin also sprang up during this time period and his theory of evolution appealed to the intellectual, including many theologians. Eventually, evangelicals began to restate the gospel of Christ in new ways to appeal to the more modern mind.

The truth of the gospel has always been assaulted and always will be. But the middle of the nineteenth century began the assault on evangelicalism that we are still suffering from. So seemingly insignificant was the excursion from truth that, at first, hardly anyone noticed. A few did and made themselves heard, but were considered by the majority as overreactionary. They were marked as the “Chicken Littles” of the church world, accused of being irrelevant to their generation.

Perhaps the greatest evidence of a departure from the gospel occurring during this time period is the Down-grade Controversy in England. Charles H. Spurgeon, a London Baptist pastor and evangelical leader, warned his fellow Baptists as well as all evangelicals that they were already on a downward slope leading to a disintegration of the truth:

Christian ministers, who have entered by stealth into pulpits once occupied by good men and true, and from that vantage-ground are promulgating errors which their predecessors abhorred . . . A scoff made of the inspiration of Holy Scripture by those who are called pastors of Protestant churches, it being meanwhile declared that “The Bible, and the Bible alone, is the religion of Protestants.” This is wretched; but even this, we take it, is less baneful than teaching Scriptural truth and coupling it with a sort of undertone of questioning as to whether a word of it is matter of fact. We have seen the upper current running in an orthodox direction, but have soon perceived underneath a stronger flood rushing towards infidelity. This is despicable.¹

In a series of articles entitled, *The Downgrade Controversy*, Spurgeon argued that many evangelical pastors had departed from the foundation that Christ had built. He predicted that the consequences would be disastrous for Christianity. Spurgeon and others warned the result would be a redefining of the gospel. Unfortunately these warnings went for the most part unheeded. Sadly, this has been prophecy fulfilled. We have men today, who are considered evangelical leaders, thinking they can wed modern and novel ideas to a timeless gospel. But such ideas during the 19th century led down the slippery slope of endless compromises. The same is happening again. We must never forget that the “modern-



Charles Haddon Spurgeon

ists” of Spurgeon’s day did not think they were changing the gospel. They only wanted to appeal to their culture in a more attractive and relevant way. Sound familiar? Such thinking is exactly what men like Spurgeon resisted.

The idea of a progressive gospel seems to have fascinated many. To us that notion is a sort of cross-breed between nonsense and blasphemy. After the gospel has been found effectual in the eternal salvation of untold multitudes, it seems rather late in the day to alter it; and, since it is the revelation of the all-wise and unchanging God, it appears somewhat audacious to attempt its improvement.²

Almost simultaneous to England’s Downgrade Controversy, America was having its own downgrade. A shift was taking place. Seminaries became universities of modernism. Businessmen who could contribute large sums of money replaced ministers on college boards of trustees.

There was also a shift in thinking concerning a literal interpretation of the Bible. Evolution made its way across the Atlantic. Respected conservative theologians such as B. B. Warfield and A. H. Strong opened the possibility to what would become known as a Christian evolutionist position. This was an era when new thinking was hailed as refreshing. Old established truth was viewed with a critical eye and seen as suspect. This type of modern thinking made its way into the churches of this nation. There were those here who also warned of theological and spiritual disaster as Spurgeon had, but for the most part they were discounted as being unsophisticated and irrelevant.

Today, years later, any who would raise their voices to alarm the present generation are accused of the same. They are labeled modern Pharisees, sticklers for detail or legalists. They are viewed as traditionalist, unconcerned about evangelism. And their warnings go unheeded. But today the degree of error is worse than when evangelical Christianity first began to suffer erosion in the late 1800’s. Today the foundation and the house called “modern Christianity” is in complete ruins.

Compound this problem with the fact we really don’t know what the gospel foundation is supposed to look like. I used to grow roses and was a decent rosarian. Due to our daughter’s traumatic birth in the spring of 1999, my wife and I spent two weeks in Louisville, Kentucky’s Kosairs Hospital. When we returned, rose’s enemy number one, Black Spot had conquered my beautiful rose garden. Most of the leaves had been infested and were lying on the ground. They were pitiful. But the odd thing was someone complimented my roses. Now why was it they thought my roses looked wonderful when I knew they were on death’s door and probably would not survive the

winter? Because they did not know what a healthy rose bush was supposed to look like. They saw the beauty of the flower but not the death in the plant.

Today most Christians have no idea of what a healthy church is supposed to look like, much less the doctrinal foundation it is to have. We think we are living in, perhaps, the church's finest hour. But the problem is we have been so long without the biblical paradigm of New Testament Christianity that we have adopted a shameful substitute as the ideal. Like the person who complimented the roses, seeing only the few flowers and ignoring the disease, we are seeing numbers added to churches but not the disease of the church. We have no clue that death is not far behind what we think is success.

Take for example the denomination of which I am a member, the Southern Baptist Convention. In 1997, according to the Sunday School Board's Strategic Information and Planning Department of the Southern Baptists (of the nearly 15.9 million members), only 5.2 million would be found in church on any given Sunday. That works out to about one-third of Southern Baptist church members church regularly. These statistics are only Sunday morning attendance. Sunday night attendance gives a worse picture of the spiritual state of churches. Of the one-third of total membership in church on Sunday morning, only 12.3 % will be in church Sunday evening.

To state the obvious, not much over 10% of the 15.9 million members care deeply about God or his church. The remainder of members are either lukewarm or unregenerate completely. What's more amazing is that these statistics of the Southern Baptist Convention are the best of any major American denomination. Something is definitely wrong with this picture. If only ten-percent of my body worked, I would be on life support and gravely ill. Churches are gravely ill and they don't even know it! And one of the main areas in which they ail the most is the understanding of what it means to be a genuine born again believer.

Jim Ehrhard, in the booklet *The Dangers of the Invitation System*, gives startling evidence of this ignorance concerning salvation and the folly of much of our evangelistic efforts. Ehrhard, quoting a survey that was done after a large crusade in the Pacific Northwest, shows that only 16% of those who came forward for salvation became involved in a local church. Ehrhard also shared his own personal experience with today's modern evangelism. He states,

While pastoring in New England, our church participated in two Graham crusades. We received the names of 10 converts from one crusade and six from the other. In our follow-up, not one was interested in church, the Bible, or even talking about their "new-founded faith in Christ." Other pastors reported the same results.³

Such facts demand that we reevaluate our understanding of true salvation. We need to understand conviction of sin, salvation from sin

and not just hell, and how believers overcome sin, so that we might see churches spared of impending collapse. The inferior foundations of man's weak views have already deteriorated and all that is left is the ruin of the house.

How do you repair a foundation if the mortar has deteriorated and the stones have crumbled? You don't! You can't repair it by using the same broken pieces. If the truth is known, they were never usable or suitable. We abandoned the true foundation for an easier and softer footing that would not demand suffering or ridicule. We opted for a foundation upon which to build a more modern church that would appear more sophisticated.

The time has come again to return to the foundation that Christ and the Apostles gave their lives to build. It is not for us to rebuild our foundation, but to build upon the faithful foundation of New Testament, "for no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ"(1 Corinthians 3:11).

This is the job at hand . . . to start anew on the firm foundation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In this postmodern culture of American society, we must admit the fact that America is also a post-Christian nation. A generation of Americans is being produced that has no knowledge of the holy and an advanced knowledge of the profane. They have no understanding of the God of the Bible. The unbeliever is completely ignorant of what many Christians take for granted as basic truths of Scripture. If we are to reach this generation we must assume they know absolutely nothing of the claims of the Bible or of the God it reveals. How has this nation erupted into blatant paganism when there is a church on every street corner? How can the amoral doctrines of tolerance, pluralism and moral relativism be the tenets of America's convictions when Christian television stations and networks spring up like weeds in my garden?

This country has more access to Christian information than any people anywhere anytime. Yet, it is rapidly becoming an anti-Christian culture having no tolerance for truth in any facet of the marketplace. Why? Because churches have become irrelevant. Their message and methodology cannot answer the deepest questions of America's soul. We have abandoned the gospel and its purity for an impersonation of a slick Madison Avenue ad agency. We have nothing different to offer this generation. People today have bought into our polluted gospel of empty promises of wealth, health and beauty and have felt ripped off. They have fallen for the sting operation of American Christianity, and it has left this nation embittered against the church. It would be much better if they hated us because of our adherence to a narrow gospel than to despise us for a stand-for-nothing mentality.

I refuse to soften my warning's harshness with oratory or dainty tones. For far too long smooth-haired prophets and soft pastors have recognized there's a problem, but have stated the situation with admonitions that lacked urgency. No heart will be aroused and no mind will be alerted with a soft approach. Refined and respectable reproofs have not worked. Christendom continues to race to self-destruction and God's judgment. The terrible calamity demands the voices of militant spirits willing to be considered an enemy if need be in order to save those trapped under the rubble. It must be stated in soul-rending thunder. The trumpet must be blared to awaken the conscience. Listen, church



of America, YOU ARE WRONG! You have been wrong headed and weak hearted for quite some time. You are mistaken either purposely or ignorantly (let God be the judge) in doctrine, in spirit and in practice, especially when it comes to the proclamation of the gospel of Christ.

This is why I say we must start afresh. We must start with exactly what early Christianity started with. We must lay before our churches a new paradigm that isn't really new. This is not a new call. The Bible and church history demonstrate time and time again the need for drifting generations to be awakened and alerted. Jeremiah called his sleeping generation to return to the old paths. "Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls" (Jeremiah 6:16). Drifting, degeneration, defection, and death are always the ways of men. No matter how mighty and miraculous a movement of God begins it will eventually drift into deterioration.

I am encouraged that there are voices crying in the wilderness. There are men who cannot live with themselves in quiet solitude. Their lion-hearts will not cease to roar. There can be no peace within them unless they have sounded the warning that an enemy is upon us. For the love of God's glory they expose the evil of the present popular gospel. Something within will not let them remain silent. They know that everything that appears good isn't. It seems that popular Christianity is massive, rich and advanced. It looks as if much of the church growth of the last 30 years has reaped a golden harvest. But the truth is much of it is a façade covering a great deal of falsehood.

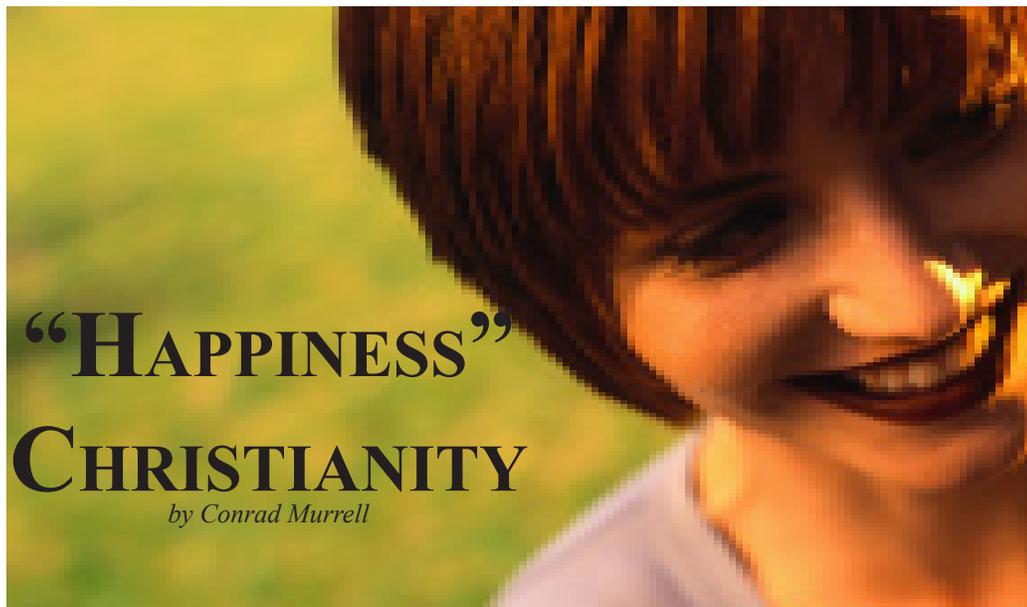
What often appears as reality is not. What you may think is the gospel may not at all be the true gospel. It is imperative we go to the Bible and properly study its teaching on this most important of subjects—the salvation of men by a gracious God. We must not assume our culture knows anything about the gospel; we must act as if this generation is virgin soil. The most basic concepts and doctrines must be taught. As we do, we are building upon a foundation that will endure the erosion of time and heresy. We must establish the truth of the gospel, how we come to know the tender mercies of God, how we are saved, and what is the biblical evidence of true conversion. Men more able than I have sounded this call, but popular Christianity, amid the deafening noise of ministerial success, has not heard. Why should you read this and heed this call? Only that the Lord would be pleased to use my weak and foolish attempt to sound the warning to shame us all who have thought ourselves wise to depart from the living Word of God.

Notes:

1 Charles H. Spurgeon, "Not A Doubt of It, Not a Doubt of It", *Sword and Trowel Magazine*, February, 1884

2 Charles H. Spurgeon, Progressive Theology, *Sword and Trowel Magazine*, April, 1888

3 Jim Ehrhard, *The Dangers of the Invitation System*, Christian Communicators Worldwide, Kansas City, 1999. p.12



A pastor friend and another neighboring pastor were invited to address a group of high school young people on the problem of pre-marital sex. My friend bluntly declared that the one reason worthy of consideration for pre-marital sex purity is that God commands it in the holy scriptures. As would be expected, this reasoning was not too heartily received. The other pastor had a much more appealing argument. Said he, "Surveys show that those who do not indulge in sex until after marriage are much happier than those who lead or who have led promiscuous live."

Recently I was handed a little paper-backed book entitled, *This Is Life*. The book begins totally without religious implications. God is not even mentioned until halfway through the book. The author first sets forth his four definitions of life as follows: 1) Life is being truly human. 2) Life is being rightly related to the environment, to others and to ourselves. 3) Life is health. 4) Life is being in harmony with the unalterable laws of life. Chapter two then concerns itself with some very good prescriptions of pure air, clean water, good food and sunlight as necessary to good health. Chapter three takes up good functioning habits, as posture, exercise, rest and proper hygiene. Then in chapter four, a transition to the pseudo-spiritual is begun by introducing "right mental attitudes." All of this eventually leads to a recommendation of some sort of religious acceptance of God and His laws as a necessary part of "really living."

A survey of best selling religious books in recent years reveals that they almost invariably have one thing in common: the "carrot" of happiness - fulfillment in life is held out as an incentive to religious exercise. Either the sinner is promised "the good life" if he believes in Jesus, or the believer is instructed as to why his Christian life is not delivering the excitement and fun he expected, and what he must do in order to make it come up to his expectations. Two recent titles illustrating this point just came across my desk: *Happiness is a Choice*, and *Taming Tensions*.

This mania for mundane melody has also produced a swarm of quack "Christian" psychologists who are eager to uncover the subtle underlying personality traits (four types of temperaments?), the psychological hang-ups, the childhood traumas (healing of the

memories?) that supposedly lie at the root of their patient's spiritual disorders. Thousands of happiness prospects are thus busily psycho-analyzing themselves and applying the prescribed religious cure.

The present distress and disruption of family life also provides a fertile field for those who profess to hold the answers as to how to make the wife submissive, the husband loving and responsible, the children obedient, and in general, how to have a happy marriage and harmonious home.

The family seminar epidemic of recent years is not confined to evangelical Christians. Roman Catholic Andrew

M. Greeley says in his latest book *Crisis in the Church; A Study in Religion in America* (Thomas Moore Press), that evangelism programs aimed at the alienated and the unchurched should concentrate on the family unit rather than the individual. He says, "the most effective evangelization will be directed at the family unit and must involve techniques for either finding families where marriage satisfaction is high or for increasing the level of marital satisfaction."

The Mormon Church has been riding high on the family life bandwagon for some time. Its theology, centered in a confusion of human-deity reproduction and reincarnation process, was already in the middle of the stream when the current began to flow. All they had to do was turn up the volume and make themselves more visible. This they have done with a vigour. Happy family ads on TV and radio have helped reap for them an enormous increase in baptisms.

Even the dissolute Playboy Enterprises has slanted its pitch to get in on the happy family kick, after a Louis-Harris survey showed that love and family life was top priority among men under 50.

Somehow the impression has come across to people all over the earth that men have a "right to happiness." The American idea that all men have a right to the pursuit of happiness is perhaps the bud of this flower. But the men who made that declaration certainly knew that what must be pursued in hope of attaining cannot be a promised inheritance. Even so, professing Christians, ignorant of the scriptures and the true nature of salvation, have come to believe that what others can only pursue in this present life, believers can claim.

A.W. Tozer wrote over three decades ago of an "Old Cross and a New Cross": The old cross would have no truck with the world. For Adam's proud flesh it meant the end of the journey. It carried into effect the sentence imposed by the law of Sinai. The new cross is not opposed to the human race; rather, it is a friendly pal, and, if understood aright, it is the source of oceans of good clean fun and innocent enjoyment. It lets Adam live

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is health and prosperity. God wants us all to be rich and healthy. Imagined support for this is drawn from 3 John 2. "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth." But we must not suppose that an inspired writer's wishes are also inspired, meaning that his desires are exactly the same as God's desires. If so, then we should have God desiring that all His people were prophets (Numbers 11:29), that everyone spoke with tongues (1 Corinthians 14:5), and that Paul should go to hell to save the Jews (Romans 9:3). It is altogether right and proper that we should wish good health and prosperity for our Christian brothers. Nothing less would be Christian. But that is a long way from saying that it is never God's will for His children to suffer illness or poverty, that the substance of the Christian life is physical health and worldly comforts.

Diligent and industrious application to one's vocation is to be commended. In fact, we are commanded to labour not only to see that our own financial needs are met, but that we will have to give to others. Lazarus indeed died a beggar and went to heaven, but there is nothing in financial indigence to recommend us to the grace of God.

"It is altogether right and proper that we should wish good health and prosperity for our Christian brothers. Nothing less would be Christian. But that is a long way from saying that it is never God's will for His children to suffer illness or poverty, that the substance of the Christian life is physical health and worldly comforts."

make it acceptable to the public."

That believers have a joy and peace which all others pursue vainly is an indisputable fact. But the holy scriptures nowhere recommend this life to be one of carnal happiness and fulfillment. Jesus' declaration that He came that we might have life and life more abundant cannot be qualified in any sense by this world's standards of happiness.

Consider one man's personal account of his sojourn: "... In labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches." (2 Corinthians 11:23-28). The Apostle Paul certainly knew nothing of this new "Happy Christianity" when he wrote, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." "If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die." (1 Corinthians 15:19, 32).

To many, the pot of gold at the foot of the religious rainbow

But on the other hand, the rich man at whose table Lazarus begged had not the grace of God either. James has much to say about the fat cats of this world who imagine their success to be God's approval.

Nor can we fault those who consider the body, the tabernacle of God, something to be cared for in diet, exercise, care and rest. It is indeed a wicked thing to neglect and abuse our health deliberately, especially if we do so to further carnal enjoyments.

But far too many of the health quacks of today are also religionists. They range all the way from the "faith healer" to the extreme forms of chiropody in acupuncture. I am amazed at the Christians taken in by it so much that they cease to preach and teach the gospel of Christ, instead becoming fiery evangelists for their latest health fad. What could be the origin of something that so effectively turns hearts away from the gospel of Jesus Christ? The enemy of our souls is quite willing to have our bodies strong and healthy at the expense of our spiritual welfare. "And he gave them their request; but sent leanness unto their souls" (Psalm 106:15). Whatever form it takes, when God's people become primarily concerned about the cares and comforts of this present life, they become spiritually weak and impotent. It is indeed a spirit that obsesses us with health and prosperity, even a religious spirit, but it is not the Holy Spirit.

But what is the practical outworking of an evangelism that assures you that you can eat your cake now and have no less goodies in the hereafter... if there is one? A gospel that says it is more fun to be a Christian than to be a sinner? That the good life which Jesus promised is exactly what the carnal flesh longs for? Failure on every

Consider the pastor's assertion that people are happier who keep themselves pure. All it will take to blast that theory in the minds of young people is to encounter one pair of free-swingers living together with broad smiles on their faces. It provokes strong suspicion that we are naively ignorant or plain dishonest when we assert that unregenerate people do not enjoy their sinful lives. In either case we destroy the credibility of all the gospel we preach with such nonsense. We should get this fact settled in our minds once for all: The sow's hankering for the wallow will be satisfied in the mud and nowhere else. The sinner has no tastes for the joys of Christianity and is totally unable to relate to them. "That evangelism that draws friendly parallels between the ways of God and the ways of men is false to the Bible and cruel to the souls of its hearers." (Tozer)

Nor do the approaches through "Christian" psychology or "Spirituo-therapy" fare any better. People may be helped to get over a few mental and emotional hang-ups, but if their spiritual lives have never been reborn, if they have not been converted to Christ,

radically and finally, one demonic oppression will simply give way to another. The victim will only be transferred from one form of bondage to another.

Counselors and proponents of this type of evangelism give glowing reports and testimonies where their prescriptions work. Yet for every one that does apparently achieve its desired result, one can be produced that did not.

I probably do as much or more personal counseling than the next preacher, but it has been my experience that when persons come with a "happiness" problem, they get no help from the gospel. If their main concern is a better marriage, better family relations, better financial situation, better social conditions, then they are going to be sorely disappointed with any evangelical truth. The plain truth is that all of that must sink into oblivion, to become the least important things, and one's relationship to God become the one issue. Christ did not die to make men happy, but holy. If a person has a sin problem, then the gospel has a message for him.

Please do not suppose that I am attacking the practice of psychology. It has its place. Nor am I implying that we do not have psychologists who are Christians. But I would hope they would pursue their professions as psychologists, not as a "Christian psychologist." All men including Christians have a psychological aspect. They have mind and emotion. But the gospel of salvation and sanctification with which we have to do is purely spiritual. It involves the mind and emotions, but these are always subject to the spirit. Therefore, the psychologist is no more qualified to minister the gospel through the devices and ploys learned in his training than the dirt farmer who never opened a psychology book, but who knows the gospel of Jesus Christ the Lord.

As for the family emphasis in evangelism, one must search the scriptures vainly to find either precept, precedent or principle

for it. The gospel is by its very nature addressed to individuals. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." "He that believeth on the son hath eternal life." We come to Christ alone; we can neither bring others with us or blame others for our failure to come. The idea that believers cannot persevere without the cooperation of their families and loved ones is as false and black as any lie that ever came out of hell. Have we forgotten, or simply ignored Christ's words: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household." How would that fit into a Family Life Seminar where proverbs and principles are preached assuring a happy, harmonious Christian family?

There is no such thing as Christianity without a deep, heartfelt longing for the salvation of loved ones. The Bible does certainly give principles for the Christian household. But we lie, and set

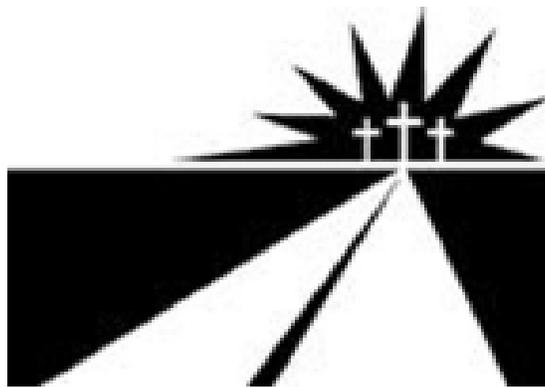
people up for disastrous disillusion by leading them to believe that the Bible promises happiness and tranquility at home.

Tozer succinctly points out how far this type of approach misses the mark: "The philosophy back of this kind of thing may be sincere, but its sincerity does not save it from being false. It is false because it is blind. It misses completely the whole meaning of the cross. The cross is a symbol of death. It stands for the abrupt, violent and started down the road had already said good-bye to his friends. He was

not coming back. He was not going out to have his life redirected; he was going out to have it ended. The cross made no compromise, modified nothing, spared nothing; it slew all the man, completely and for good. It did not try to keep on good terms with its victim. It struck cruel and hard, and when it had finished its work, the man was no more."

But the really treacherous trap about "happiness" and "full life" evangelism is the unspoken, subtle but certain implication that perhaps there isn't any life after this one. Life is related completely to the here and now. The idea of a heaven or a hell is a possibility, but by no means certain, and one should be careful not to put too many eggs in that basket. After all, a bird in hand is better than two in a bush. Any happiness or fulfillment that Christ spoke of must be realized now. Correspondingly, and hell or suffering, punishment or whatever, must be related to the inconveniences and frustrations of this present life.

This is clearly indicated in the little book to which I referred in the second paragraph of this article. Its author is Robert Brinsmead, editor of *Verdict*, a disfellowshipped Seventh Day Adventist, and apparently, still an annihilationist. His concept of life must be related to this present one, since there is no eternal hell in his theology. To him the hell of the Bible is alienation. That is the meaning of the abyss, so he makes clear in chapter six: the terrible separation



THE MAD RUSH TO SEEKER SENSITIVE WORSHIP

By John H. Armstrong



The rush is on. How contemporary can we really be? How in the world will we ever get the unchurched to come when virtually all they know comes through 30 second sound bytes? We all know they will not listen to sustained discourse for more than 15 minutes!

The contemporary plan is plain for all to see—create a worship service (none dare call it liturgy!) that is fast-paced, light on doctrine, and very heavy on music and drama. We are preoccupied, as a friend puts it, with being “trendier-than-thou.”

One local paper advertises, “Church Like You’ve Never Seen It Before!” This is followed by a brief description, all too typical of the trend:

Outstanding Music...No choirs or pipe organs here. Our music is crisp, contemporary, professional, and yes, even hot! World Class Drama...Each week our Drama Team, “Showcase”, presents a dramatic performance specifically designed to enhance the message. Messages...Our pastor...teaches ageless truths tailored for people today.

The Dallas Morning News writes similarly:

Shortly before the benediction at Fellowship of Las Colinas last Sunday, the pastor made a gridiron move. Wearing Troy Aikman’s jersey, some baggy pants and athletic shoes, the Rev. Edwin “Ed” Barry Young deftly threw a football, not across a yard line but a row of seats. Michael Wood caught the flying pigskin. He and his wife, LaWanna, sporting football game duds, were honored for bringing six friends to church. And hours before the Dallas Cowboys whipped the New York Giants, they got their trophy; a football signed by Dallas’ star quarterback.

Other attractive brochures tell me how to have a revival through a popular drama team, with twelve “full scaled revivals” held in the space of twelve months! Conferences and seminars abound on how to market the Gospel through services geared to the felt needs and personal questions of “seekers,” a synonym for those who are not Christians but have become interested enough to listen to a “Christianity 101” presentation of the biblical message. Evangelicals seem to be on a mad pursuit for the perfect contemporary service.

How Shall We Reach the Unchurched?

This embrace of contemporary public worship patterns is deliberately aimed at the unchurched. Everything done is determined by the question, “How will the unchurched respond to this if we do it?” The central issue in this is not contemporaneity per se. American Evangelicalism has no significant theological reason to maintain a serious interest in so-called “traditional” worship patterns, especially if by traditional they mean the sentimental and human centered services patterned on nineteenth century revivalism. Long ago most Evangelicals turned their public worship services in the direction of focusing upon the needs of those who attend.

What I wish to examine is not style at all, though this is not an unimportant matter, but the vast movement of thought and activity that exists behind these “seeker-sensitive” approaches. This thought now permeates almost every denomination and seminary in North America and goes by a number of names, including “Seeker-Sensitive Worship” or “Market Driven Ministry.” All of this is related to the development and use of what has been called “Church Growth” missiology.

An Explanation of the Strategy Itself

The Church Growth movement is traceable to a man and an institution—Donald MacGavran, and The School of World Missions at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California. Church Growth has several characteristics. We will mention only two of them for our purposes:

(1) It deliberately does not find a common basis for mission in doctrine or creed. As long as you believe people are lost without Christ and you believe the church should reach them you affirm the creed! It really is that simple.

(2) The movement has an aggressively strong commitment to the use of the social sciences such as sociology, psychology and anthropology, holding the Bible with one hand and the social sciences with the other, all the time affirming, “All truth is God’s truth!”

An Evaluation With Special Concern For the Public Wor-

The rush is on. How contemporary can we really be? How in the world will we ever get the unchurched to come when virtually all they know comes through 30 second sound bytes? We all know they will not listen to sustained discourse for more than 15 minutes!

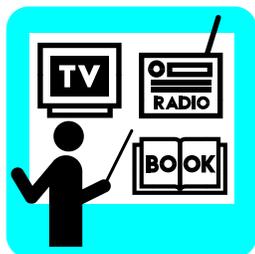
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tive” movement’s causing many to take seriously the planting of new churches throughout the United States. Questions remain regarding the long term health of many of these newer churches, but the desire to plant churches is a generally healthy trend.

Some Negative Contributions



In spite of all the above positive references many negative concerns still trouble me in regard to this whole “seeker-sensitive” preoccupation with attracting the unchurched through contemporary patterns of worship. First, I see a blatant capitulation to consumerism in much of this direction. Many experts in this movement do not hesitate

to call their techniques “marketing methods,” but this approach breeds an unhealthy individualistic consumerism, which is already pervasive throughout the culture, when Christian leaders treat church growth as the primary activity of the Lord’s Day, and the congregational worship service as a virtual business undertaking aimed at getting consumers to “buy the product.” When this is done the implications are both obvious and serious:

(1) We tend to create casual shoppers if we follow this kind of strategy for public worship.

Shoppers will develop a very narrow perception of church life. Why should we “sacrifice” for Christ? If we do not like what this church offers we can go next door, or down the street.

(2) There will tend to be a minimalizing emphasis on truth if we follow



this strategy.

The church is increasingly becoming vulnerable to intellectual dismissal. The consumer has already been reared in a culture that has “closed its mind” as Bloom put it. More mindlessness will only help build a church of unthinking consumers who come and then join for the wrong reasons.

(3) Seeking to build a public service oriented to meeting “felt needs” (in particular) will stoke further needs and never satisfies people with a sense of transcendence which results from biblically informed liturgy and confession. Os Guinness makes the valid point that, “Meeting needs does not always satisfy needs; it often stokes further ones and raises the pressure of eventual disillusionment.”¹

“Need,” adds Os Guinness, “(is) subject to consumer fashion, (and) become shallow, plastic and manipulative.” Indeed, the drive to meet “felt needs” can mask the real need that the truth of the Gospel addresses—alienation from God!

A Move Toward Theological Compromise

At the end of the last century theological liberalism told us that we needed to make Christianity attractive, or acceptable, to its “cultured despisers.” This type of concern was not new. The very tension of “being in the world” but “not of the world” has always been with the church. What was new was the way liberalism decided to advance the church before the world, namely by reinterpreting the message of the cross in the light of the world’s understanding and belief system. The question still is: How close can we get to the world and keep a distinctive message and ministry?

One of the most blatant examples of the compromise which flows out of this can be seen in 1966 World Council of Churches dictum: “The world must set the agenda for the church.” I would suggest that this idea, formulated in the crucible of ecumenical dialogue between light and darkness, is not far from the “seeker-sensitive” approach adopted through the Church Growth ideology of contemporary evangelicals.

My statement is strong for sure. How can I make it? Because of what can be seen in:

(1) The present infatuation with marketing techniques freely used and openly acknowledged supports my conclusion. Consider these nostrums taken from the literature of major “seeker-sensitive” churches in our decade:

“Marketing is essential for a business to operate successfully.”

”The Bible is one of the world’s great marketing texts.”

”The Bible does not warn against the evils of marketing.”

”So it behooves us not to spend time bickering about techniques and process.”

”Think of your church not as a religious meeting place, but as a service agency—an entity that exists to satisfy people’s needs.”

”The marketing plan is the Bible of the marketing game; everything happens in the life of the product because the plan wills it.”

”It is also critical that we keep in mind a fundamental principle

(2) The simple fact that methodology takes precedence over theology in planning public worship demonstrates my point as well.

Elmer Towns, a man who has made a career out of observing growing churches and what causes their numerical success, has written: “Formerly, a doctrinal statement represented the reason for a denomination’s existence. Today, methodology is the glue that holds churches together. A statement of ministry defines them and their denominational existence.”

As a result of this approach Acts 2:42 is no longer the pattern text for what the church should do in its gatherings: namely, teaching the apostles’ doctrine, enjoying fellowship together in the Gospel of grace, breaking the bread of the Lord’s Communion and earnest congregational prayer. Our “new” read on this text would be that we meet in order to attract unbelievers through meeting their “felt needs” and making them feel better about themselves and our message.

The old Acts 2:42 agenda seems lame beside this baby-boomer agenda of drama, music, entertainment and self-help-oriented counsel. (Can we really call what is spoken in such services “preaching”? Helpful talks maybe, but not preaching in the sense we see in the New Testament.)

The sermons preached in these modern settings have interesting titles like:

- How Can I Have a Happier Marriage?
- How Can I Handle My Money?
- How Can I Like My Job?
- How Can I Be a Better Parent?
- How Can I Get More Time for Myself?
- How Can I Feel Better About Myself?
- What Would Jesus Say to Madonna?

One prominent seeker-sensitive preacher counsels, “Limit your preaching to roughly 20 minutes, because boomers don’t have much time to spare. And don’t forget to keep your messages light and informal, liberally sprinkling them with humor and personal anecdotes.” Marketing strategist George Barna states that Jesus and the apostles were market-sensitive and constantly sought to minister to felt needs. The illustrations used to demonstrate this are: Nicodemus and the woman at the well in John 4. Barna never states how these accounts parallel marketing, but simply asserts that they do.

How can one read Acts and the Gospels and equate what one sees there with today’s market-driven messages? Sermons in the New Testament are culturally relevant and personally powerful, but that is not the point. What is the common denominator of New Testament preaching is its entire dependence upon Christ and the apostolic revelation. Douglas Webster is surely correct when he writes:

The reason was its ability to sweep aside superficial felt needs and penetrate to deep-seated spiritual needs. Biblical preaching was God-centered, sin-exposing, self-convicting and life-challenging—the direct opposite of today’s light, informal sermons that Christianize self-help and entertain better than

*they convict.*²

In thinking through this whole matter I was quite surprised to find the counsel of a famous earlier American preacher which parallels this approach:

Preachers who pick out texts from the Bible and then proceed to give their historic settings, their logical meaning in the context, their place in the theology of the writer, with a few practical reflections appended, are grossly misusing the Bible.

Could any procedure be more surely predestined to dullness and futility? Who seriously supposes that, as a matter of fact, one in a hundred of the congregation cares, to start with, what Moses, Isaiah, Paul or John meant in those verses, or came to church deeply concerned about it? Nobody who talks to the public so assumes that the vital interests of the people are located in the meaning of words spoken two thousand years ago.

This same famous preacher ended with the following counsel:

All this is good sense and good psychology...Everybody else is using it from first-class teachers to first-class advertisers. Why should so many preachers continue in such belated fashion to neglect it? Let them not end but start with thinking of the auditors’ vital needs, and then let the whole sermon be organized around their constructive endeavor to meet those needs.”³

Is this the counsel of a modern “seeker-sensitive” spokesperson? Or the defense of methodology often offered up in Christianity Today or Leadership? Not at all. This is the counsel of Harry Emerson Fosdick, the most important liberal preacher of the 1920s and 30s in America.

Fifty years ago a theological liberal counseled his generation in the same way modern evangelicals now use the same accepted theory. Fosdick advocated a complete dismantling of corporate worship and preaching as we had known both for centuries. Modern “seeker-sensitive” worship services do the same.

The Destruction of Congregational Worship

The whole “seeker-sensitive” approach presumes that the Lord’s Day church gathering is principally for recruiting the unchurched, or evangelizing the lost. This idea can be traced to the “revivalism” of 19th century American experience, where the focus during this era was then moved from the church gathering to worship God, to be edified, to receive the sacraments and to enjoy fellowship with Christ and one another, to “drawing the net,” or getting decisions from the lost. This new “seeker-sensitive” approach is just a sharper and more carefully defined (dare we say, “neatly packaged”) version of the same approach. It is clearly not Biblical.

While we try to entice the world to come to church to hear the Gospel, the New Testament proclaims a powerful church worshipping God going out into the world in order to reach lost (cf. The Book of Acts). But a very important question begs to be answered:

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Yes, we must understand the times (1 Chronicles 12:32), but this does not mean we must start with the times, or surrender to the times, or adopt the trends of the times in the place of revealed truth.

A human focused worship service sounds oxymoronic but it is, in reality, a valid description when you carefully listen to the descriptions given by the teachers of the “seeker-sensitive” model. Where does this model begin? We are urged to focus on the target, i.e., the audience, or the human person. Remember the driving question behind all of this approach is: How can we design our service and shape our ministry in worship so it will be inviting to the person we desire to reach?

The distinctives of this approach to worship are:

(1) It produces a different kind of preaching—exposition is “too heavy,” thus we need story-laden anecdotal messages, or “McLite” services, as one has called them.

(2) It thrives on strained attempt to “be relevant.” Anything much more than 20 years old is considered useless. Bill Hybels, pastor of Willow Creek Community Church, has said on several occasions that he will never quote Charles Spurgeon in his public seeker services. Why? He confidently assures fellow ministers that Spurgeon is outdated and will not speak the language of their modern hearers. I for one am concerned that this creates, intended or otherwise, a “reverse elitism”: We are the ones who communicate with our age, but does it not follow from this that Isaiah, Jesus, Paul and John are also irrelevant? They did not have Subarus, after all. The unfortunate result will be a generation that thinks the evangelical movement came from nowhere—with no heritage or roots.

(3) There is, in this movement, evidence of a consistent and radical pragmatism. The audience is “sovereign,” as we have seen. Why are we in this particular place, doing what we are doing on this particular day? For whom do we gather? The new approach seems to answer, “For man!” The result is a corruption of theology at virtually every point. Take doctrines like human depravity, unconditional election and perseverance. What place do these have in making people feel good about their church experience? What is happening in many large and fast growing churches is profoundly troubling. All of this does not bode well for sermons which will be based upon careful biblical study. An example of this was a sermon I heard in a “seeker-sensitive” service where the pastor preached on the question: “Why Did Moses Strike the Rock?” The answer had nothing to do with the text or the context. What he gave as an answer to this question was the result of psychotherapeutic interpretations of Moses’ behavior which were the result of parenting and its influence upon his early childhood years.



Other theological problems abound with the “seeker-sensitive” strategy but I will conclude with mention a few:

1. The whole approach lacks hermeneutical precision. The approach works just as well with non-evangelicals. Recently, a Chicago newspaper noted that a revival was ongoing in the Unity School of religion in Chicago. What was the approach used to foster this revival? The exact same strategy as that used in seeker-sensitive evangelicalism. If the methodological replace the theological in judging revival, the question of truth will be pushed inside by the question of relevance and success. If unity followed the methodology and achieved similar results, is it not as truly a “revival” as it would be considered in any evangelical context?

2. This movement unintentionally seems to elevate evangelism to a place higher than God and his glory. Evangelism, and that defined in a limited, non-theological manner, becomes the highest priority.

3. The Gospel is increasingly lost through contextualization.

4. The model devalues careful, passionate, expository, preaching of the Word of God. The whole movement is not producing the type of preaching that brings conviction or deeply felt brokenness. The Achilles heel of this is seen in its rampant pragmatism. Honest proponents admit that they do it because it “get results.” It works! I experienced a classic display of this when I listened to the minister of drama at a famous seeker-sensitive church say to a room of crowded church leaders, “Don’t ask for me a biblical basis, I don’t need one—It works!”

One might be inclined to reply, “but what about, ‘I have become all things to all men...’” (1 Cor 9:22-23). Paul is speaking here, however, not as a marketing pragmatist, but rather as one concerned about human relationships and their effect upon Gospel communication.

The point of this text is this: This is how Paul lived among unbelievers, in various kinds of contexts. To accommodate Christian teaching, worship, or witness. In 1 Corinthians 1:17 Paul just as plainly says that there are methods he will not use. These, suggests Paul, have the effect of tampering with the message. After all, “It is God who causes the growth” (1 Cor 3:7). Do we have confidence in this truth? Can we, in faith, sow and water with prayer and tears, and then trust God’s Spirit to prosper the seed of the Gospel message and to thereby bring about the harvest? If we are faithful, then we must ultimately leave the results of our preaching and evangelism with God.

Conclusion

At the time of the Protestant Reformation the whole ministry of the church was freshly challenged by the Word of God. Such a challenge is needed in our time. Protestantism is in desperate need of reformation and nowhere is the more apparent than in our public worship.

I know how difficult it is to persuade the world that God disapproves of all modes of worship not expressly sanctioned by His Word. The opposite persuasion which cleaves to them, being seated, as it were, in their very bones and marrow, is, that whatever they do has in itself a sufficient sanction, provided it exhibits some kind of zeal for the honor of God. But since God not only regards as fruitless, but also plainly abominates, whatever we undertake from zeal to His worship, if at variance with His command, what do we gain by a contrary course? The words of God are clear and distinct, ‘Obedience is better than sacrifice.’⁴

Notes

1. Os Guinness, *Dining with Devil* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House).
2. Douglas Webster, *Selling Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press).
3. John MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel*, (West Chester, IL: Crossway), p. 81-82.
4. *Selected Works and Letters of John Calvin, Tracts and Letters*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House), p.128.

John H. Armstrong is founder and director of Reformation and Revival Ministries in Carol Stream, IL. A Baptist minister; he pastored for twenty-one years before becoming a conference speaker and editor of Reformation and Revival Journal, a quarterly publication for church leadership. He was educated at the University of Alabama, Wheaton College and Wheaton Graduate School of Theology, and Luther Rice Seminary.

The Old Cross and the New

by A.W. TOZER

All unannounced and mostly undetected there has come in modern times a new cross into popular evangelical circles. It is like the old cross, but different: the likenesses are superficial; the differences, fundamental.

From this new cross has sprung a new philosophy of the Christian life, and from that new philosophy has come a new evangelical technique, a new type of meeting and a new kind of preaching. This new evangelism employs the same language as the old, but its content is not the same and its emphasis not as before.

The old cross would have no truck with the world. For Adam's proud flesh it meant the end of the journey. It carried into effect the sentence imposed by the law of Sinai. The new cross is not opposed to the human race; rather, it is a friendly pal and, if understood aright, it is the source of oceans of good clean fun and innocent enjoyment. It lets Adam live without interference. His life motivation is unchanged; he still lives for his own pleasure, only now he takes delight in singing choruses and watching religious movies instead of singing bawdy songs and drinking hard liquor. The accent is still on enjoyment, though the fun is now on a higher plane morally if not intellectually.

The new cross encourages a new and entirely different evangelistic approach. The evangelist does not demand abnegation of the old life before a new life can be received. He preaches not contrasts but similarities. He seeks to key into public interest by showing that Christianity makes no unpleasant demands; rather, it offers the same thing the world does, only on a higher level. Whatever the sin-mad world happens to be clamouring after at the moment is cleverly shown to be the very thing the gospel offers, only the religious product is better.

The new cross does not slay the sinner, it redirects him. It gears him into a cleaner and jollier way of living and saves his self-respect. To the self-assertive it says, "Come and assert yourself for Christ." To the egotist it says, "Come and do your boasting in the Lord." To the thrill seeker it says, "Come and enjoy the thrill of Christian fellowship." The Christian message is slanted in the direction of the current vogue in order to make it acceptable to the public.

The philosophy behind this kind of thing may be sincere but its sincerity does not save it from being false. It is false because it is blind. It misses completely the whole meaning of the cross.

The old cross is a symbol of death. It stands for the abrupt, violent end of a human being. The man in Roman times who took up his cross and started down the road had already said goodbye to his friends. He was not coming back. He was going out to have it ended. The cross made no compromise, modified nothing, spared nothing; it slew all of the man, completely and for good. It did not try to keep on good terms with its victim. It struck cruel and hard, and when it had finished its work, the man was no more.

The race of Adam is under a death sentence. There is no one to commute it and no escape. God cannot approve any of the fruits of sin, however innocent they may appear or beautiful to the eyes

of men. God salvages the individual by liquidating him and then raising him again to newness of life.

That evangelism which draws friendly parallels between the ways of God and the ways of men is false to the bible and cruel to the souls of its hearers. The faith of Christ does not parallel the world, it intersects it. In coming to Christ we do not bring our old life up onto a higher plane; we leave it at the cross. The corn of wheat must fall into the ground and die.

We who preach the gospel must not think of ourselves as public relations agents sent to establish good will between Christ and the world. We must not imagine ourselves commissioned to make Christ acceptable to big business, the press, the world of sports or modern education. We are not diplomats but prophets, and our message is not a compromise but an ultimatum.

God offers life, but not an improved old life. The life He offers is life out of death. It stands always on the far side of the cross. Whoever would possess it must pass under the rod. He must repudiate himself and concur in God's just sentence against him.

What does this mean to the individual, the condemned man who would find life in Christ Jesus? How can this theology be translated into life? Simply, he must repent and believe. He must forsake his sins and then go on to forsake himself. Let him cover nothing, defend nothing, excuse nothing. Let him not seek to make terms with God, but let him bow his head before the stroke of God's stern displeasure and acknowledge himself worthy to die.

Having done this let him gaze with simple trust upon the

risen Saviour, and from Him will come life and rebirth and cleansing and power. The cross that ended the earthly life of Jesus now puts an end to the sinner; and the power that raised Christ from the dead now raises him to a new life along with Christ.

To any who may object to this or count it merely a narrow and private view of truth, let me say God has set His hallmark of approval upon this message from Paul's day to the present. Whether stated in these exact words or not, this has been the content of all preaching that has brought life and power to the world through the centuries. The mystics, the reformers, the revivalists have put their emphasis here, and signs and wonders and mighty operations of the Holy Ghost gave witness to God's approval.

Dare we, the heirs of such a legacy of power, tamper with the truth? Dare we with our stubby pencils erase the lines of the blueprint or alter the pattern shown us in the Mount? May God forbid. Let us preach the old cross and we will know the old power.

NOTE: This article first appeared in The Alliance Witness in 1946. It has been printed in virtually every English-speaking country in the world and has been put into tract form by various publishers, including Christian Publications, Inc. It still appears now and then in the religious press. A 20th century prophet they called him, even in his lifetime. Dr. Tozer ministered to hundreds of thousands. Since his death in 1963, that ministry has been further multiplied through his writings. He has left a shelf of books that will be mined for their spiritual wealth until the Lord returns.

From the Heart

by Daniel Record



What comes to mind when you hear the term “missions”? Local ministries? Foreign missions? Do you first think of a well known missionary such as Hudson Taylor or Jim Elliott. Maybe a country for which you pray such as Nigeria, Peru, or Romania comes to mind. What probably didn’t come to mind first was your ministry in the local church. It certainly isn’t the first thing to come to my mind. But all of us should be about the work of missions both abroad and in the local church.

As some of you are reading this, right about now you are probably thinking, “Now wait a minute. Sure, I contribute financially to missions and pray for our missionaries by name, but I would hardly consider myself a “missionary.” Well, in a sense, you are right. We cannot all go to a foreign field and serve. But that does not exclude us all from being active in missions. However, a misunderstanding of the nature of missions can. Let me explain

Many of us support missions much as we would a political candidate. We follow the election process, vote for our candidate in the election, and pray for his or her victory. But that is about as far as our participation goes. Some might even go as far as to contribute money to the campaign. But few of us actually participate in the campaign process by handing out flyers, fund-raising, etc.. If our candidate loses, we shake our heads and pray for better fortune the next election. But apart from disappointment, the candidate’s victory or defeat does little to directly affect our life. Now if we were the campaign manager, it would be a different story. But as a supporter, our participation is on a limited basis and so we have little to gain or lose by the election outcome.

The same is true in missions. For many, our participation is limited to the money we contribute, the prayers we offer for the harvest, and our interaction with the “missionaries” who visit our church. Our personal involvement is small and therefore so is our sense of participation. “After all,” we might reason, “We can’t all be missionaries, right?” WRONG!

In fact, we are all commanded to be missionaries. In the great commission Jesus said, “Go *ye* into all the world and preach the gospel . . . (Mat. 15:16). He didn’t say “Send *them* or send *some missionaries* or *your pastor* into all the world . . . “ Instead, Jesus clearly states, “*go ye*” . . . This means each of us must have a role in missions. Obviously, everyone cannot go to the foreign field. So apart from prayer and financial support, how can we obey the command “*go ye*”?

To answer this question, let us examine the term “*mission*”. The word *mission* comes from *commission* and means “the act of sending”. As Christians we are clearly sent as witnesses to tell others

What is the OGBC Mission Board?

Oak Grove Baptist Church is a member of the Southern Baptist Convention. OGBC regularly supports Southern Baptist missionaries and missions programs. But due to an ever increasing burden for a more active role in fulfilling the Great Commission, Oak Grove formed its own mission board and began to support foreign indigenous missionaries and church planters. These are men who have proven that God has called them to preach the gospel but have little to no financial means to support their ministries. Many of the men that OGBC support had to be bi-vocational and could not fully give their time to the proclamation of the gospel. Now they can devote their full energies to the churches that God begins through their efforts. In a future edition of *The Expositor* a more detailed explanation of our mission’s structure and strategy will be shared.

of Christ’s work in our lives (John 15:8). As we share this good news of the Gospel, we are essentially then “sent” as “missionaries” to the world. But we know that the Gospel’s work is not only evangelization, but also must be completed by being intimately paired with discipleship. The two must go hand in hand. Without evangelization there would be no need for discipleship and without discipleship no one would be mature and able to share their faith, or evangelize. This is the heart of missions and where our work in the church begins.

Paul summed up this mission in II Timothy 2:2-4 when he tells young Timothy, “The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others. . . .” Clearly, Paul realized that the proliferation of the Gospel throughout the ages was dependent upon teaching faithful men, and their teaching other faithful men, and so on throughout the ages. And I think we would all agree that Paul was correct. We as believers are the direct result of the faithfulness of men of God teaching the Gospel throughout the ages.

We at Oak Grove employ this principle in our own mission work in Romania and Moldova. We invest hours in carefully preparing pastors to teach others the truth of God’s Word. Their salvation alone does not fully prepare them to teach others. For this reason we disciple them and stress the importance of doctrinal purity so that the truth might continue on to future generations of believers. This is of great importance if future generations in Romania and Moldova are to hear the truth. But of equal importance is teaching and discipling of Christians in our LOCAL CHURCH.

I firmly believe this is true. The only differences between the work of Christ at Oak Grove and that in foreign missions, such as First Baptist Iasi, are location and length of time the members have been Christians. The essential work is the same. We cannot expect to have strong and mature Christians in our local church or in our mission churches unless we are constantly in the act of discipling one another.

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Many of us support missions much as we would a political candidate. We follow the election process, vote for our candidate in the But aren’t we already doing this at Oak Grove? I am sure to a certain extent we are, but are we actively involved in developing the Christian character of our fellow believers? I fear that often we overestimate the amount of involvement we have in the lives of those outside of our closest group of friends. We confuse surface relationships with discipleship of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Let’s imagine, for instance, that you are seated in your usual pew on Sunday morning. Now think of the person who usually sits three rows up or on the opposite side of the church. Ask yourself, “What is the greatest spiritual struggle they are facing this week?” If it is more difficult to answer this question than it was to decide who would be seated three rows ahead of you in church, you probably aren’t actively involved in a discipling relationship with that individual.



What keeps us from being more involved in discipling or the mission work of our local church? The barriers to developing this kind of loving relationship in the local church are many. One is proximity. We simply lack daily contact with one another. Many of us work in different cities at different jobs and do not even see each other outside of church. Another is society teaching. We are trained from childhood that we are to be self-reliant and depend on ourselves alone.

To share your burdens with someone else is often perceived as weakness. Over-commitment is another barrier. We are too busy shuttling children to games, working jobs, and performing other duties in our community to have much time for investing in the lives of others. Even debt can rob us of investing time in others’ lives as we seek to work long and hard hours to pay our mortgage, car payments, etc.

Whatever our personal barrier might be, all of these can be overcome by our love and duty to Christ. In II Timothy 2:3-4, Paul admonished Timothy to “Endure hardship with us as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civil-

ian affairs- he wants to please his commanding officer” [Jesus]. To be about the service (mission) of our Lord means putting aside the barriers in our lives in an effort to reach out and teach others how to walk with Christ. In doing so, we become missionaries “entrusting [the gospel] to reliable men who will be able to teach others.

Daniel Record, serves as a member of the Oak Grove Baptist Church Missions Board.

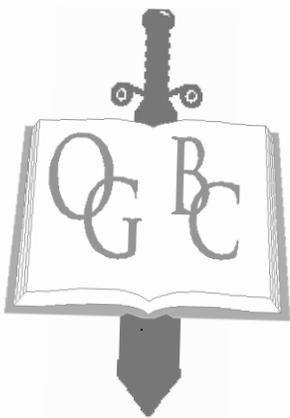


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