
Editorials

LOW-IMPACT CHRISTIANITY

Anyone who watches television for thirty minutes or more usually will see an advertisement for exercise equipment. Such commercials promise, for a minimal time commitment, robust health and a physique to match. One ad pitches a style of *low-impact aerobics*. No laborious commitment; just an effortless glide into physical fitness.

In the past several decades, the Church has begun to serve up something similar. It's for those wanting a leisurely approach to their faith. It could be labeled *low-impact Christianity*.

A good example is the 6,000-member Riverbend Church pastored by Dr. Gerald Mann. Viewers of religious TV may be familiar with Mann through his ministry broadcasts, which bear his name. These telecasts present the Austin, Texas-based minister addressing all sorts of life's difficulties. Mann is a cross between Mr. Rogers and Dr. Phil; Mr. Rogers for his mild-mannered, grandfatherly delivery and Dr. Phil for his ability to respond to all personal problems.

Riverbend promotes itself as "a church where all the dull parts have been eliminated!" It promises that attendees won't have to endure "long, boring announcements, lengthy altar calls, guilt-inducing sermons and cryptic religious phrases." And people are not asked to

make a major time investment because services are only 45 minutes long.

Additionally, the Sunday worship service doesn't get bogged down with such things as the Lord's Supper. Those who want to partake of this observance must go to an adjacent building, where it is "offered on Sunday mornings between 10:15 and 12:15."

For those who want to make Riverbend their church home, the church offers that "You can be as involved as you want to be, or as anonymous as you want to be!" The latter group is just what every local church and its pastor needs: *anonymous Christians*.

Riverbend and its ilk foster the self-oriented mindset of a selfish breed of Christians. This concept is foreign to Scripture. First Peter 4:10 tells us, "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." Believers are to benefit the Church; the Church does not exist for the benefit of believers.

To paraphrase the late U.S. President John F. Kennedy (who was paraphrasing one of his college professors): "Ask not what your church can do for you; ask what you can do for your church." The Lord gives spiritual gifts to Christians for the nurturing of the Church; that is, to serve other believers. They are not to be used for one's own edification, nor are they to be sequestered. When one is allowed to become an "anonymous" church

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- Zondervan Publishing House, 1979, pg. 112, italics in original.
46. *Understanding Watchman Nee*, op. cit., pg. 112.
47. *The Release of the Spirit*, op. cit., pg. 73.
48. Dave Breese, *Know the Marks of Cults*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1975, pg. 76.
49. Watchman Nee, *Spiritual Authority*. New York: Christian Fellowship Publishers, Inc., 1972, pg. 47.
50. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999, Vol. 1, pg. 496.
51. Henry C. Thiessen, *Thiessen's Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1952, pp. 305-306.
52. *Spiritual Authority*, op. cit., pg. 48.
53. See further, *The Expanded Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, op. cit., pp. 483-484.
54. *Ibid.*, pg. 482, italic and ellipsis in original.
55. John MacArthur, *Truth For Today*. Nashville: J. Countryman, 2001, pg. 60, entry for February 17.
56. Renald Showers, "Foundations of Faith: The Sinlessness of Jesus Christ," *Israel My Glory*, February-March 1999, pp. 27-28, italic in original.
57. John F. Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1969, pp. 150-151.
58. Bruce Demarest, *Jesus Christ: The God Man*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1978, pg. 68.
59. Khidhir Hamza, *Saddam's Bomb Maker*. New York: Scribner, 2000, pg. 11.
60. See further, Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, op. cit., Vol. 1, pp. 76-81.
61. *The Release of the Spirit*, op. cit., pg. 20.
62. *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.
63. *Ibid.*, pg. 21, emphasis added.
64. *Being Human*, op. cit., pg. 200.
65. A classic example of this trait is the Latter-day Saint (Mormon) interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:29 ("why are they baptized for the dead") in which they have built an elaborate theology and temple ceremony.
66. *Know the Marks of Cults*, op. cit., pg. 87.
67. *Understanding Watchman Nee*, op. cit., pg. 135.
68. *Spiritual Authority*, op. cit., pg. 71.
69. *Know the Marks of Cults*, op. cit., pg. 95.
70. *Spiritual Authority*, op. cit., pg. 73.
71. *Ibid.*, pg. 109, italic in original.
72. *Ibid.*
73. See further, *The Expanded Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, op. cit., pg. 1100.
74. *Ibid.*, pp. 795-796.
75. *Spiritual Authority*, op. cit., pg. 81.
76. Watchman Nee, *The Body of Christ: A Reality*. New York: Christian Fellowship Publishers, Inc., 1978, pg. 72.
77. *Ibid.*, pg. 73-74.
78. Watchman Nee, *Sit Walk Stand*. Fort Washington, Penna.: Christian Literature Crusade, 1966, pg. 41-42.
79. *Spiritual Authority*, op. cit., pg. 92.
80. *Ibid.*, pg. 93.
81. *Ibid.*
82. *Ibid.*
83. *Ibid.*, pg. 94.
84. *Ibid.*
85. *Ibid.*, pg. 97.
86. *Ibid.*
87. *Understanding Watchman Nee*, op. cit., pg. 151. 

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member, there is little — if any — encouragement or discipline to obey the command of 1 Peter 4:10. The demands (or lack thereof) of Riverbend and similar churches allow for a brand of Christians who are salt that has lost its flavor and lamps hidden under a basket (Matthew 5:13-16).

In the first chapter of 1 John, the apostle spells out that we have been brought into fellowship with God *and each other*. Christians are not to be isolated from one another, but rather they are to be team players. A number of years ago, *Christianity Today* ran a brief sidebar entitled, "The Team Player." The article provided some helpful observations:

- Team members *supplement* one another and they build one another's strengths.
- Team members *encourage* one another and motivate each other to develop and use their abilities.
- Team members are *accountable* to one another.

The article also reminded us, "Shared work means shared responsibility." Local churches that allow members the option of being anonymous allow them the option of dodging work and responsibility.

No doubt, Riverbend Church (and other low-impact Christianity churches) would protest and claim that they are reaching those who would never darken the doorstep

of some other church. Pastor and author Gary E. Gilley repeatedly defuses such an argument and shows its unbiblical premise in his insightful volume, *This Little Church Went to Market*. Gilley demonstrates the flaw in this logic when he writes:

"The seeker-sensitive experts would defend marketing as a tool they use to attract more unchurched Harrys to hear the gospel. 'Methods change, the message stays the same,' is the cliché. What they do not seem to understand is that the message will ultimately be shaped by the method. ... In the seeker-sensitive church, 'needs' reign supreme; God exists to meet Harry's needs. Harry comes to Christ, not to glorify Him, but to find the promised fulfillment and happiness in this life" (pp. 81-82).

R. Albert Mohler, Jr., Southern Baptist Seminary president, is right on target when he states, "Americans are now fanatic devotees of the cult of self-fulfillment and personal autonomy."

Mann's desire not to expose his flock to "guilt-inducing sermons" may well impede the work of the Holy Spirit. In the hours before His crucifixion, Jesus told His disciples that the work of the coming Spirit would be to point to Christ and to convict the world of sin:

"And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me" (John 16:8-9).

Christians assemble under the preaching of the Word, not to *feel* better, but to *be* better. Scripture demands that

we develop our character, not our comfort. Remember, God is more interested in our holiness than our happiness (1 Peter 1:15-16). Happiness and solace can be by-products of our faith, but they should not be the driving force.

Riverbend Church's concept of worship may well play to the masses, but it is merely a repackaging of the unbiblical self-esteem concept. PFO director David Tyler, in his rebuttal of the self-esteem doctrine, expounds on the Beatitudes given by Jesus during His Sermon on the Mount:

"No man can put into practice what the Lord said in these verses unless he becomes dead to self. This means that he is not concerned about personal 'rights of self.' It is the absence of this tendency of constantly 'watching out for self,' of having 'sensitivity about self,' that is so delicate that the slightest disturbance can upset its equilibrium and devastate the individual. The Lord wants to produce in the believer an *indifference to self...*" (*Jesus Christ: Self-Denial or Self-Esteem?*, pp. 23-24, emphasis in original).

Market-driven churches, with their offer of low-impact Christianity, are the antithesis of the scriptural mandate and standard for believers. Weekly installments of a forty-five minute, cotton candy service just won't produce discipline in the life of a Christian. It will not produce sanctification. It will not produce growth.

True believers will experience the abundant life only when they give heed to the words of Christ: "Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me'" (Matthew 16:24) and "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:38). Low-impact Christianity may appeal to our fleshly desires and selfishness, but it will never produce the men and women which God desires for Himself.

—MKG

BENNY HINN IS RIGHT!

Like a broken clock that is right at least twice a day, Benny Hinn occasionally, but rarely, says something that is true.

On the June 26 broadcast of his *This Is Your Day* program, Hinn aired highlights from his recent "Partners Conference" in Anaheim. During the conference, Hinn warned his followers to be careful what teachers they place themselves under since there would be a "transfer of spirits" from the preacher to his disciples. He explained that if a teacher taught falsehood, heresy, or unwitting error, his listeners would have that kind of spirit transferred to them and influence them. On this count, Hinn is right and our experience bears that out.

Hinn, of course, subtly leads his followers to believe that they could listen to him and not be affected in an evil way. Hinn, who has often cursed and castigated his critics, gives his devotees a regular diet of negative evil. For example, he growled at his 1999 Denver crusade: "Yes Lord, I'll do it. I place a curse on every man and every woman that will stretch his hand against this anointing. I curse that man who dares to speak against this ministry."

Hinn's devotees are picking up the "spirit" of their mentor and his harsh, condemning spirit is being transferred left and right. It seems to give some the idea that they can throw around curses and pronounce an awful future for any who do not come into line with Hinn. They are learning well.

The following is a telephone message left on PFO's voice mail by one of Hinn's supporters. It was from a cellular phone caller based in Columbus, Ohio, and was made to PFO "under the cover of darkness" (that is, the call was made at 1:29 A.M.):

"I have something to tell you guys. I was going through your Internet site and saw that you guys criticize Pastor Benny Hinn, man of God. And I just have to say, be careful, you are in danger of hell. You do not want to mess with the man of God. You can — serious things can happen to you. This is not something to play with. You are making fun of God. You are not making fun of a man. Because Pastor Benny Hinn is a servant of God. And be careful by speaking bad about the servant of God, you're speaking bad about the Lord and the Holy Spirit, and danger may await you. Be careful, do not mess with Jesus. Jesus is God, He is Savior, He still heals the sick, whether you believe it or not — you friggin' skeptic. You need to repent, get on your knees and pray. Because the Lord will forgive you, if you repent now."

So it is true: Like teacher, like student. Sadly, Hinn's blind followers do not realize the negative, judgmental attitudes they have acquired by listening to Hinn on a regular basis. We can only pray for those who condemn and curse us.

—GRF

NEWS UPDATES

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Elaine Moses, who claimed to be a former high-ranking witch, occultic diplomat to world leaders, and the wife of Satan. In late 1989, Moses disappeared from the scene when Brown married Daniel Yoder, who claims to be "powerfully anointed as a prophet, healer, and evangelist." Together they operate out of Clinton, Ark., under the banner "Harvest Warriors."