

The Quarterly Journal



THE NEWSLETTER PUBLICATION OF PERSONAL FREEDOM OUTREACH

VOL. 25, NO. 3

JULY-SEPTEMBER 2005

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A Prescription for False Hope and Evil

How the Church Has Allowed Sin to Escape

by David M. Tyler

"[T]he medical model of human behavior, when carried to its logical conclusions, is both nonsensical and nonfunctional. It doesn't answer the questions which are asked of it, it doesn't provide good service, and it leads to a stream of absurdities worthy of a Roman circus," wrote E. Fuller Torrey, M.D., in *The Death of Psychiatry*.¹

Garth Wood, in *The Myth of Neurosis: Overcoming the Illness Excuse*, observed, "For far too long people have been led to believe that the person suffering from an excess of life's problems needs 'expert' medical and psychotherapeutic intervention, thus allowing the 'patient' to qualify for 'illness,' ... Such a view is dangerous nonsense. If we are not ill then we are well, although we may be unhappy."²

The Apostle Paul, in Romans 3:23, declared, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Words can be powerful. They can inspire and they can comfort. Words can move us to action. They can calm a raucous crowd and quiet a fright-



ened child. Words such as "sola fide" have shaped Christianity. A word such as "freedom" shapes our world.

The words, "That's one small step for a man; one giant leap for mankind" helped shape a generation.

Words affect thoughts and behavior. Changing a word's usage can have far-reaching consequences. Consider the word, "gay." Heard in conversation, its meaning 100 years ago was not the same as it is today. Often, the impact of words on a culture is silent and slow. Sometimes the impact is considered positive, sometimes negative.

In the mid-1960s, a remarkable event related to a word occurred in evangelicalism. The event would have a devastating effect on evangelism and the sanctification of believers. Yet, in spite of the destructive consequences, this event went unnoticed by many Christians.

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IS PFO REALLY NEEDED OR SHOULD WE QUIT?

In a day of pluralism and tolerance, apologetic and discernment ministries are viewed by some as antiquated, unneeded, and in the way of getting together and getting along. In a day when unity is put far above truth, counter-cult ministries are seen as passé and even obstructionist.

Televangelists and Word Faith teachers can draw tens of thousands to their meetings while discernment conferences struggle to get a hundred. Truth, clear thinking, and biblical precision are definitely not in, and heresies are gaining popularity. Orthodoxy is out and false doctrine is in vogue.

Of course, there are many reasons for this: Men love darkness rather than light. We have an unseen enemy who goes about like a roaring lion. And liberalism has so eroded confidence in Scripture that many are turning to mysticism and experience. Subjectivism is the drug of choice. Many of the religious are addicted to their own adrenalin.

Truth be known, the deception is getting deeper and more subtle. This only underscores the need for organizations such as Personal Freedom Outreach. Someone needs to sound the alarm. Without discernment ministries, who will do it?

The evangelical Church has tried so hard to be relevant to the world that it is becoming irrelevant. Rather than compromise with the dominant culture, we need to stand more strongly for our distinctives and distinctiveness.

The Apostle Paul warned us in 2 Timothy 3 that deception would be as alluring and impressive as the magicians of Moses' day (v. 8). The antidote, Paul says, is to *carefully follow doctrine* (v. 10), but few are listening. Paul further warns that "evil men and seducers will grow worse and worse, *deceiving and being deceived*." (v. 13).

Deception has multiple masks. Deception is hard to spot. Deception is covered with religious clichés designed to deceive and that is why we need all the help we can get from those with discernment. Deceivers are tricky and most times wear disguises. Deceivers may even say they believe in Jesus, so we fail to stay alert to what they layer onto the name of Jesus. Some may not even ask, "Which Jesus?"

Take, for instance, the following testimony. Read it slowly and see if you can find anything wrong with it:

"...today's society makes me constantly wonder if anyone knows what it's like to give your heart and mind to the truth of Christ and Yahweh, and to be hated and ridiculed for those beliefs, especially by people that don't even know me. I'm always trying to make sense of everything I read and everything I

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SATAN'S EX-WIFE DIES

The woman who claimed to have risen to the top ranks of witchcraft and satanism — to the point of being married to Satan himself — is dead.

Edna Elaine Knost died Feb. 19, 2005. She was 59.

Knost gained a brief measure of notoriety in some circles after teaming with Ruth Bailey — an Indiana physician turned spiritual warfare fanatic. Knost and Bailey claimed to have fought the forces of darkness by leading more than a thousand people in their small Indiana community out of hard-core satanism and into Christianity during a two-year span. Eventually, the pair said, satanists drove them from the region. Facts reveal a less sinister reason for their departure. In the fall of 1983, legal and medical officials in the area began to mount a major investigation of Bailey's medical practices, which led to her losing her license.

Knost and Bailey fled to California where they peddled their wild tales to tract publisher Jack Chick. Chick, always on the lookout for bizarre stories, previously had published the fabrications of John Todd and Alberto Rivera. Chick collected and printed Bailey and Knost's accounts in two full-length books, *He Came to Set the Captives Free* (1986) and *Prepare for War* (1987), which were published with Rebecca Brown, M.D., as the author. Bailey, after arriving in California, had her name legally changed to Rebecca Brown.

In Brown's books, Knost, identified only as "Elaine," reported that as an infant her mother unknowingly sold her to Satan. She claimed that, as a teenager, she was inducted into Satan's service at a "witch camp." She also said that at a national competition of witches, she surpassed all her colleagues and was named top witch. This position, she maintained, allowed her to become "Satan's representative on an international level," traveling the world, meeting with heads of state and foreign dignitaries to negotiate the sale of arms. Knost, around 1980, came in contact with Bailey as the result of a hospital stay and was purportedly converted to Christianity.

As the 1980s came to a close, Knost dropped out of sight. According to Brown's web site, "For several years prior to her death Elaine was in very poor health and lived quietly. She was not in a public ministry of any sort." Brown's association with Knost and publisher Jack Chick concluded around the time she married Daniel Yoder in December 1989. Yoder, like Knost, made incredible biographical claims and told preposterous tales.

In 1989, following numerous inquiries, PFO began a major study of the theology and claims which Brown and Knost were making for themselves. Several articles were published in various editions of this journal, with the prominent reports being collected and published in booklet form under the title *Drugs, Demons and Delusions*.

—MKG

MEYER HOMES UP FOR SALE

Two of the five palatial homes owned by Joyce Meyer Ministries are reported to be up for sale. The asking price for both homes is more than \$2.5 million.

Meyer and her husband, Dave, live in one of the five residences in the compound. The other four are occupied by the Meyers' married children and their spouses. The two homes up for sale are used by her children and flank the house where the Meyers live.

Meyer's ministry pays all expenses for the homes, including property taxes, utilities, landscaping, and renovations. Meyer and her children live in the homes free of charge as employees of the ministry. Mark Sutherland, spokesman for Meyer's ministry, indicated that the other three homes may be placed on the market as well. According to a report in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, "Joyce Meyer, her husband, and their four children all serve on the board of directors that makes financial decisions for the ministry."

In late 2003, the St. Louis newspaper featured a four-part report on Meyer, calling attention to her extravagant personal lifestyle at the expense of ministry finances. As a result, Wall Watchers, a non-profit organization watchdog group, called upon the Internal Revenue Service to investigate Meyer and her family.

According to Rusty Leonard, founder of the North Carolina-based Wall Watchers, "The sale of those houses is an indication that either the IRS is breathing down Joyce Meyer's neck or her lawyers are telling her to do something before the IRS does. The fact that they have huge homes owned by the ministry is very questionable."

The IRS refused comment on whether it was conducting a specific investigation of Meyer or her ministry. According to federal law, funds acquired from the sale of the homes must be returned to the ministry.

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A Retreat from Reason

Gregory Boyd's Judgmental Response to Discernment

by G. Richard Fisher

Some writers get better with each new book. Others go from bad to worse. Such is the case with Gregory A. Boyd and his new book, *Repenting of Religion*. Boyd's 2000 offering, *The God of the Possible*, proposed that God could not know all the future and thus was limited in knowledge.¹ Boyd took the Bible's anthropomorphisms literally and ended up describing a deity not much better or smarter than humanity. Boyd aligned with the heresies of open theism and presented a vulnerable, compromised being devoid of sovereignty. He views God as an extremely intelligent — but not omniscient — chess player.

Book-length answers to Boyd's heretical views followed. Bruce Ware's *God's Lesser Glory* and *Their God is Too Small*; Norman Geisler's *Creating God in the Image of Man*; and John Tal Murphree's *Divine Paradoxes* were just a few.

Boyd is right when he states, "If our mental picture of God is skewed, our relationship with God, with ourselves, and with others will be skewed as well."² However, it is Boyd's view of God that needs straightening out.

Repenting of Religion is a 238-page paperback with the subtitle, *Turning from Judgment to the Love of God*. In his book, Boyd stacks the deck by presenting "religion" in a negative light and implies that anyone who disagrees with his premise possesses this bad form of "religion."

Boyd's unbiblical premise is stated in the preface, where he writes, "We love only insofar as we abstain from judgment."³ He also asserts that "judgment is the 'original sin'"⁴ and, "Our only job is to love, not judge."⁵

Even the usually lenient *Christianity Today* went negative on Boyd and — probably in his view — sinned by negatively judging him. John Wilson wrote:

"A judgmental assessment of judgmentalism is, predictably, full of contradictions. ... Such judgment, Boyd argues — based on his Bonhoeffer-influenced reading of Genesis — is in fact the primal sin from which all other sins derive. ... Perhaps these quotations from Boyd's book will suggest what a strange brew it is, a book riven by self-contradictions and flawed by a hermeneutic so naive it beggars belief. Railing against judgment, Boyd issues sweeping judgments against the church throughout its entire history — judgments that rest almost entirely on sheer assertion. ... Mocking other Christians for their 'system' of evaluating and ranking sins, he himself establishes a hierarchy that collapses all sin into the sin of 'judgment,' the defining sin of 'religion.'"⁶

If judgment had been the original sin, then Jesus and Paul were guilty of

commanding us to commit it. In Matthew 7:15, Jesus instructed us to make judgments with regard to false prophets and wolves in sheep's clothing. In 1 Corinthians 5-6, Paul commanded that sin be judged *in the Church*. Peter, in his second epistle, took to task false prophets and false teachers. Even a cursory study of the Old Testament reveals hundreds of judgment passages directed at Israel and the surrounding nations.

DELIVER US FROM JUDGMENT

Boyd states his thesis and calls it a paradigm shift for most Christians:

"The thesis of this book is that love is the central goal of creation and thus of the Christian life, and that its main obstacle is our getting life from our knowledge of good and evil — from our judgment."⁷

In Boyd's view then, "judging" is an obstacle and an impediment to love. The Bible never sets up a false dichotomy between love and judgment, as Boyd does. God who is love is also justice and judge.

Boyd did not get these views from the Bible and he reveals to his readers some of his sources. One source was Dietrich Bonhoeffer; another was a mystical experience he says he had at a shopping mall.

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Do You Need a Faith Lift?

The Dangers of Misplaced Faith and Those Who Are Responsible

by G. Richard Fisher



"I'll be the first to say that we dare not give to any human being — let alone an impostor — the worship and praise that belong to God alone and His Christ ... It is possible, I suppose, that the world is making a horrible mistake here," writes Paul Maier in his theological thriller novel, *More Than a Skeleton*.¹

Some would suggest that faith consists of believing strongly in something or believing in something one knows isn't true. Others consider it just upbeat, positive thinking.

One respected Christian leader, writing about "Ventures of Faith," likens it to trial and error. Quoting Hebrews 11:6 ("Without faith it is impossible to please God"), he builds to:

"God has a work that He desires to do, and God is simply looking for people who are in harmony with what He desires in order that He might show Himself strong on their behalf. The key is to discover what it is that God wants to do. I've found that the best way is by just stepping out. Try it and see. Maybe God will work. Maybe God is wanting to work. Let's give Him a chance. But again, always have the attitude 'If it doesn't work, let's not push it.' Maintain that flexibility of being able to walk away from a project. If it's obvious that it isn't working, then let's not push

it and try and make it work."²

If the above were true, then the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah failed miserably and many of today's cults must be under God's blessing.

This same writer further says:

"So, take a step in faith. If it works, rejoice. If it doesn't, look for something else. Give God the opportunity. I believe strongly in giving God an opportunity, and when it works, glorious! But when it doesn't work, you haven't really gotten that deeply into it so that you can't just walk away and say, 'Well, it sure looked like a great idea, didn't it?' Don't lock yourself on to it and get yourself in so deep that you can't walk away."³

So we are to "take a step in faith" and see if it pans out. But pragmatism isn't faith.

Many pastors have done it God's way according to Scripture and saw little success, as measured in nickels and noses, then have done it their way and achieved such "success." The operative questions are "Is it right?" and "Is it biblical?"

Many evangelicals seem confused these days. The root of the confusion is that the Church at large has lost the biblical meaning of the word "faith." We don't define words today; we try to "feel" them.

The word "faith" is tossed around like a piece of putty that can be molded by anyone holding it. We are told that faith is this, or that, or some other thing until we feel as though we are with Alice, in Wonderland, where words can mean whatever we wish them to mean.

LET NO MAN PUT ASUNDER

The word "faith" has been divorced from the Scriptures and its biblical definition. Loss of the true understanding of faith will undermine Christianity. After all, we are "saved by grace through faith" (Ephesians 2:8) and "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6).

Cults thrive on confusion. Faith, as they define it, becomes a weapon of control and exploitation. It is imperative that we understand what is, and what is not, biblical faith.

EVERYONE CAN DO IT

There is a sense in which everyone can exercise some form of faith. It is a human faith. We are created with the ability to exercise faith and to commit to certain things. The essence of human faith is unquestioned belief, anything believed, or allegiance to something or someone. We can believe in Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, our government, America and apple pie. We can believe and trust in mutual funds or stocks and bonds. Every human has the ability to believe

things — true or false — and the ability to have allegiances.

Theologian Louis Berkhof writes:

“The word ‘faith’ is not exclusively a religious and theological term. It is often used in a general and non-religious sense, and even so has more than one connotation.”⁴

Charles Hodge concurs:

“Faith in the widest sense of the word, is assent to the truth, or the persuasion of the mind that a thing is true. In ordinary popular language we are said to believe whatever we regard as true.”⁵

A TWO-EDGED SWORD

The rub comes in when we skew this general ability to trust (have faith, believe in, or commit to) and put the wrong objects between ourselves and God, trusting them for eternal life and spiritual guidance. We may be able to trust our mom and dad, the local bank, a friend or neighbor, and that is all well and good on a human level, but what we commit to for eternal life, salvation, and divine guidance is another matter.

When it comes to our eternal destiny we can have *misplaced faith*. Misplaced faith can imperil our souls. Cult leaders can thrive in an environment of misplaced faith. What are the forms of misplaced faith and what does the Bible say about saving faith or rightly placed faith? The various forms of misplaced (religious) faith are:

1. Faith in an individual leader. This can be easily illustrated from a recent novel, *More Than a Skeleton*, by Paul Maier. In modern day Israel, a man named Joshua Ben Yosef (Jesus Son of Joseph) gathers followers worldwide as he claims to be the returned Jesus Christ. Joshua appears in what he calls an “intermediate coming” to warn humanity and prepare them for his coming in power and glory. Born in Bethlehem and raised in Nazareth, he begins to do the miracles in the same places and in the same way that Jesus performed them in the Gospels. He even raises

one of his disciples, Shimom, from the dead.

Shannon Weber, the wife of one of the novel’s key characters, encounters Joshua as he heals a blind man. She is dumbfounded. Maier narrates the scene:

“It was too much for Shannon. She, too, fell to her knees, hands clasped, head bowed in reverence, eyes brimming with tears. Joshua stopped, walked over to her, layed his hand on her head, and whispered, ‘You, too, daughter, will be free of your problem.’ ... He caressed her cheek lovingly and moved on. A feeling of incredible peace came over Shannon, a soft featherbed of faith displacing the demons of doubt that sometimes tormented her.”⁶

Maier is portraying faith, trust, and commitment of one individual in another.

Many years ago, author Dave Breese wrote, “*Only Jesus Christ deserves disciples!*”⁷ Nearly every cult requires allegiance to an overly presumptuous leader and Messiah figure. Yet Christ alone is to be followed. However, as Breese correctly notes, “How fearful is the contrast of the life and ministry of many religious leaders in our time. The cults are replete with the stated or implied suggestion on the part of leaders as to some unusual divine capability that might well inspire worship on the part of their followers.”⁸ And Breese further recognizes:

“The cult leader also strengthens his presumptuous leadership by arrogating to himself the position of being the only repository of divine truth. He frequently talks about ‘my message, my revelation, my leadership, my people.’ In doing this, he is pushing the heretical proposition that he has been made the true custodian of some private revelation from God.”⁹

“FAITH” ON THE FRINGE

On the edge of the fringe of the Charismatic movement we have many self-proclaimed “apostles” and

“prophets” who promote themselves as conduits for the Godhead. They say they are God’s “anointed.” They claim to channel and impart the Holy Spirit and enamor followers with their messages purportedly from heaven itself. They readily dispense “revelations.” God, it seems, is always speaking to them or through them. Even their false prophecies, which should incur the wrath of followers, hardly make a dent because long ago, their followers abandoned Scripture and its tests of a prophet in Deuteronomy 13 and 18. They have unwavering faith in a presumptuous messianic leader. They are so invested in their “prophet” that they have complete faith in him. They are deceived and blind. Long ago these followers have abandoned the biblical criteria for the identification of Apostles, which are:

“1. He must have accompanied Jesus during His earthly ministry, which was from His baptism until His Ascension (Acts 1:21-23). 2. He must have been a *personal* witness of the resurrected Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 15:7; 1 Cor. 9:1; Acts 1:22; 4:33; 10:39-42). 3. He must have received a personal call from Christ to Apostleship and a commission to fulfill its duties (Lk. 6:13; Mk. 3:14-15). 4. He must have had, as his field of labour, *the whole world*, rather than a local church or group of churches (Mt. 28:19; Mk. 16:15).”¹⁰

We could add that the Apostles were the foundation of the Church, and a foundation needs to be laid but once. The Church is the building, not the foundation (Ephesians 2:20-22). To try to lay a foundation all over again one must disrupt the building and cause havoc.

Finding counsel, guidance, and help from a concerned pastor or fellow Christian is a far cry from putting one’s trust in their spiritual guru, feeling they cannot function or live without his (or her) help and prophetic vision. The examples of Jim Jones’ cult in Jonestown, Guyana; David Koresh’s Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas; and Marshall Apple-

white's Heaven's Gate cult in San Diego show the sometimes horrific end of cultic and presumptuous messianic leadership. It illustrates that our faith must be in God and His Word if we are to be safe.

Next on the list of misplaced (religious) faith is:

2. Faith in an institution. In this case, the organization takes the place of God and has the final word on all matters of spirituality. All truth and interpretation reside in a group of autocrats and "group think" is demanded. This has ancient roots and was a major issue in the Reformation. Curtis Crenshaw explains:

"It was the church that was infallible, the Spirit of God guarding the church, speaking directly to it and through it. This is how a new doctrine such as the Immaculate Conception originated. The Reformers rightly saw that this would lead to enormous subjectivity, to endless new doctrines, and to continued enslavement of the lay people to the hierarchy of the church. They argued that though the Holy Spirit was a person and the Bible a book, nevertheless He always spoke through Scripture alone. To separate the Holy Spirit from the written Word was the very essence of Roman Catholicism, locating infallibility to those who could 'hear' Him and essentially placing the Bible in the background. ... In several such statements, it was obvious to Calvin that Sadoleto had made the church leaders the custodian of the truth and the elite of the church the official interpreter of the Bible, thereby separating the Holy Spirit from the Bible."¹¹

In short, Catholicism sees faith as a commitment to all that the Roman Catholic Church has ever taught — biblical or unbiblical — and summarizes this in the latest official *Catechism of the Catholic Church* authorized by the late Pope John Paul II:

"Through the centuries many professions or symbols of faith have been articulated in response

to the needs of the different eras: the creeds of the different apostolic and ancient churches, e.g., the *Quicumque*, also called the Athanasian Creed; the professions of faith of certain Councils, such as Toledo, Lateran, Lyons, Trent; or the symbols of certain popes, e.g., the *Fides Damasi* or the *Credo of the People of God* of Paul VI."¹²

A mirror image of this is the cult of the Jehovah's Witnesses. They deny major Christian doctrine, including the triune nature of God, the deity of Jesus Christ, the personage of the Holy Spirit, the bodily resurrection of Christ, salvation by grace, and the right to save a life through a blood transfusion. They claim their organization and bureaucracy alone is God's "channel of communication"¹³ to its followers. Slavish obedience is demanded under threat of future eternal annihilation.

One source on the Jehovah's Witnesses, apologist Robert Bowman, writes:

"It is universally argued by evangelical critics of the Jehovah's Witnesses that their beliefs are based on the authoritative teachings of their religious leaders in the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. In one sense this is quite true. Certainly the Jehovah's Witnesses today learn their doctrine from the Society's publications and representatives, a fact that the Witnesses themselves generally would not dispute. And the publications of the Society are filled with warnings to follow the organization's teachings without question."¹⁴

To the indoctrinated Jehovah's Witness, his or her leadership is virtually infallible and not to be questioned. From its inception, the organization stated its exclusive patent on truth. A 1919 Watchtower publication rhetorically asked, "Is not the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society the one and only channel which the Lord has used in dispensing his truth continually since the beginning of the harvest period?"¹⁵

This idea of the one and only channel is almost laughable (if not so tragic) as it is claimed by most all the major and minor cults. We have more "one and only channels" than we need. One can channel-surf the cults; they are all on Satan's network.

Having considered misplaced faith in an individual, as well as in an institution, we must also contemplate:

3. Faith in an idea. This characterizes the mind set of those in what is called the Word Faith camp. The Word Faith movement is a loosely connected group of ministers and writers that defines faith in metaphysical terms. They borrow these ideas from one another and they describe faith as a force that can be harnessed and used by anyone. This impersonal force can be manipulated and used to create new reality. Our words, we are told, capture and direct the force of faith. Therefore we must always say positive things. Our faith ends up being faith in faith or faith in the positive words we can utter to affect our own reality. This never comes to grips with all the real, but negative, statements of almost every single Bible character, including Jesus. God instructed the Old Testament prophets to vocalize all kinds of negative statements. It is obvious that Word Faith is not God's message. This idea seems to always work in cultures that are rich and greedy, but not in the slums or poverty nations.

NAMING NAMES: THE HALL OF SHAME

Names attached to this idea are Oral Roberts, Benny Hinn, Kenneth Hagin, Gloria and Kenneth Copeland, Frederick Price, Charles Capps, T.D. Jakes, Joel Osteen, Jerry Saville, Norvel Hayes, Robert Tilton, and Jan and Paul Crouch. Pat Robertson inhabits the fringe of the Word Faith by promoting many of the above. There is little doubt that this idea appeals to the greed of most humans and, as a result, it has become a lucrative business with its promoters busy building their own little kingdoms and, in some cases, multiple mansions. The Canadian Broadcasting Commission (CBC News), for instance, reported

that Benny Hinn has a “parsonage” in Southern California overlooking the Pacific Ocean worth \$10 million!¹⁶

The roots of Word Faith go back approximately 70 to 80 years to the ideas of Smith Wigglesworth and E.W. Kenyon. If Wigglesworth could be said to be the grandfather of this idea, then Kenyon can be called its father.

British-born Wigglesworth (1859-1947) is more mythical because documented evidence of his spiritual powers and exploits is scarce.¹⁷ We know he was a plumber who had no formal education, and who actually started working at six years of age. His wife taught him how to read. The writings that survive him show he was no prophet: he predicted Christ would return in 1900.

Wigglesworth said faith “is the personal, inward flow of divine favor which moves in every fiber of our being.”¹⁸ And he further claimed that, “there is within you a divine force, the power of limitless possibilities.”¹⁹

So faith is a power, a flow, a force that we can manipulate from within. Electricity or gravity are forces as well: impersonal, possible to manipulate, and everywhere available to everyone.

Kenyon (1867-1948) absorbed many of the religious ideas of his day, including strains of metaphysical thought and mind science. It can be established that “E.W. Kenyon is the twentieth century father of the Word of Faith movement, even more so than Kenneth Hagin. Kenyon is the source of their theology, and Hagin is the popularizer.”²⁰ Like a virus, the idea of faith as a force passes from one false teacher to another. Kenneth Copeland says, “Faith is a power force. It is a tangible force. It is a conductive force. It will move things. Faith will change things. Faith will change the human body.”²¹ We become mini-gods and controllers of our own fate and destiny.

So, according to these above and many more, faith is a metaphysical force that we can manipulate and use to create and change reality. Through

the force of faith, we can speak ourselves healthy and rich.

LITTLE GODS

The twisted logic is as follows: God manipulated and used the force of faith by speaking faith-filled words to create the universe. In the same way, we can speak faith-filled words and create a new reality for ourselves. The problem is simply that God created everything by and through His own omnipotence, and we are not omnipotent. Assigning the attributes of God to man is idolatry.

Curtis Crenshaw has an accurate read on the Word Faith camp:

“It is the essence of the charismatic movement that the Bible is not *sufficient* for life and godliness. It is *necessary*, but not sufficient. We hear much from the charismatics about the necessity of Scripture; but since they believe in new revelation in the form of dreams, visions, impressions on the heart, and statements like ‘God told me in my spirit man,’ they say nothing about the Scripture *alone* being all we need.”²²

This now brings us to the next misconception:

4. Faith in an image. Those who know the Bible are familiar with the Ten Commandments. They are familiar with God’s command to “make no graven image” (Exodus 20:4). No Bible believer would consider bowing or kneeling before a religious statue or a religious image. It is just another form of idolatry. However, religious statues are just one type of image.

A bit more subtle is the concept of image today, as it is used to speak of pictures, films, drama, PowerPoint, and other visual images used to enhance truth. There is definitely a tidal wave in regard to the use of image and images in the modern sense as they relate to Bible stories and spiritual truth. There is the constant drumbeat that we are a visual society. We have no argument with the idea that the soul is moved by more than word and that the power of images can reach souls. Jesus re-

peatedly used word pictures, as well as common illustrations (sower and seed, thorns, flowers, a king and his son, etc.).

Any thinking person, though, would assent to the fact that there is a danger that the image *could* become an idol or be seen as more powerful, seductive, and desired than the Word of God. The image is to be a window letting light in to shine on truth. God forbid that we would be so enamored with the glass and the frame that we forget the rest of the room. But it can happen.

A CHILLING TREND

Having said the above, very few would want to get rid of pictures, films, and so forth in the illustration of truth. The frightening thing, however, is a trend within the Church to displace the Scriptures with images. Having lost the concept of the Gospel as the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16), we hear such forbidding statements as:

“Reformed Christians are examining what it means for them to seek God *apart from the spoken and written word of Scripture*. Answers vary, especially since the craze has touched both conservative evangelicals and liberal mainliners, who sometimes have different agendas for the use of images. But on at least one point, there is agreement: a longstanding hallmark of Reformed tradition is disappearing.”²³

Let’s pray this “craze” ends quickly.

So some think we can seek God apart from Scripture. What God? Who or what defines Him? How can we have images without content? Do we give the images any meaning we wish? Some pastors need to get honest and just admit: 1) They have no confidence at all in the Bible and reject the words of all the prophets and Jesus Himself. 2) That they are too lazy to put the time into preparing vital, dynamic, and interesting sermons, and that it is their dullness, not the Scriptures, that are the turn off. 3) That they may as well stop calling their churches “Christian

churches," because they have jettisoned what defines them. The command to "preach the Word" (2 Timothy 4:1) has not become obsolete and neither has "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17). We are to proclaim the Gospel, making disciples as Christ commanded (Matthew 28:19-20).

There is no inherent power in an image, but there is in the Word of God. Blessing only comes as we invest ourselves in the teaching and preaching of Scripture. If people want to go to the movies or the art gallery, then they should go. The Church, however, *must* be what it is, the pillar and ground of truth. Imagery may be helpful at some level, but when the images displace, rather than illustrate, the Word of God, we are in deep trouble.

Let's move on and now consider:

5. Faith in insanity. Some place their faith in things that defy all reason and rationale. This gross idolatry launches people headlong into what can only be called religious insanity. The "flagellants" of Italy are a vivid example of this. Flagellation is the "Whipping or beating a person in order to improve health or morals" and it "dates back to ancient times in western culture. Flagellation has been employed to induce spiritually elevated states of consciousness."²⁴

This practice still goes on today:

"Some Roman Catholics belonging to the organization called Opus Dei ('Work of God') whip themselves for purification and ecstasy. Some members of the modern witchcraft movement in England, particularly in the Gardnerian and Alexandrian branches, have included ceremonial scourging in their initiation rituals to symbolize that painful experiences can expand one's consciousness."²⁵

GETTING STRANGER AND STRANGER

India is replete with religious and moral insanity. One recent news article reported that, "One of the major

Hindu festivals in Nepal and India is Tihar, which was celebrated November 10-15. Each day features a different type of worship. Day one is crow worship. Day two, dog worship. The other three days are set apart for the worship of wealth, brothers, and COW DUNG."²⁶

Then, there is a local church fighting a legal battle to use hallucinogens in their services. In an Associated Press article titled, "Church can serve sacred tea," it was reported:

"The Supreme Court sided Friday with a New Mexico church that wants to use hallucinogenic tea as part of its services this Christmas. ... The Bush administration contends that the hoasca tea is illegal and dangerous. Nancy Hollander, attorney for the Brazil-based O Centro Espirita Beneficiente Uniao do Vegetal, told justices in a filing that hoasca is not only safe, but to members it 'is sacred and their sacramental use of hoasca connects them to God.'"²⁷

Moving on, we will also weigh:

6. Faith in our intuition. A song by Josh Groban tells us, "You have everything you need, If you just believe. If you just believe. If you just believe. If you just believe. Just believe." One has to be amazed at the raw humanism and mysticism and then ask, "Believe what?"

In the motion picture, *The Polar Express*, the conductor (Tom Hanks) says, "One thing about trains: It doesn't matter where you're going. What matters is deciding to get on." What if the train is heading for a bridge that is out? We'd better be sure that any train we board or any endeavor we commit to has a known outcome. Materials are available which offer suggestions to pastors on preaching and teaching on this movie's themes.²⁸ While we may learn acting techniques by watching movies, there are safer sources to consult for theology. Imposing theology on secular movies is as creative as seeing images in clouds or the face of Jesus on a tree trunk.

BURIED TRUTH

Faith in an individual, an institution, an idea, an image for the image's sake alone, moral insanity, or our own intuition are all at the bottom of the proverbial "slippery slope" when it comes to the health of our souls. All of these are misplaced and destructive faith.

It is surprising that all of these have a thread of truth woven through them, but those threads are so overlaid with so much error that truth is lost. Committed Christians do have faith in an individual: Jesus our Savior. We promote an institution because Jesus said He would build His Church. Certainly, we promote ideas and constructs in the many Christian doctrines we teach. Images such as pictures and film can be an aid to our teaching the Bible.

The Apostle Paul was accused of being mad. Unbelievers think of biblical things as odd and perhaps crazy. Also, at times, our intuition, guided by Scripture, has us doing things that we know please the Lord. The (human) "faith" commitments that we've surveyed are a negative broken mirror image of the truth. They totally distort any germ of veracity.

ONLY ONE PLACE TO FIND IT

So what is *true* faith? True faith must be defined by the Bible. God's Word is the only sure and unchanging foundation. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew root word for "faith" is the word *he'emin*. This word is often translated "believe" and carries the idea of trust or trusting in something or someone. Theologian Charles Hodge affirms that the "primary idea of faith is trust."²⁹ The next question is: Trust in what?

Inherent in the idea of faith is an object. What or who, according to the Bible, is it that we are to ultimately trust? We cannot just say, "believe, believe, believe," because the issue is: Where will what we trust in take us? Will we believe, trust in, and commit to an individual, an institution, an idea, an image, just plain insanity, or our own intuition when it comes to eternal issues, eternal health, and eternal life?

Proverbs 3:5-6 instructs us to, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths." The context is God's commands, God's truth, and God's directions (vv. 1-3). We must trust the Word and bring our thoughts and ideas to its grid. Ultimately saving faith is simply trust in God, the saving work of Jesus, and God's Word. The Bible is always our starting and ending point.

The Scriptures are very clear as to the objects of our faith. Faith not only implies an object, as we stated, but mandates it. The Greek word used throughout the New Testament is *pisteuo* and the classical use was clear, "conveying the thought of a movement of trust going out to, and laying hold of, the object of its confidence."³⁰ Ultimately, as far as religious faith is concerned, the only worthy objects of faith are God and His Word. If my faith is not grounded in God and His Word, my faith is misplaced and my trust will be disappointed.

Hebrews 11:1 *does not* give to us a definition of faith, but a description of its essence when it says, "faith is the substance [or realization] of things hoped for, the evidence [or confidence] of things not seen." The foundation and object of our faith here is "the Word of God" (v. 3).

The Ryrie Study Bible instructs us thus:

"Faith is described in this great verse as the *assurance* (or reality, the same word translated 'nature' in 1:3) of things hoped for, the conviction (as in John 16:8) of things not seen. Faith gives reality and proof of things unseen, treating them as if they were already objects of sight rather than of hope."³¹

The words of respected theologian Louis Berkhof are equally helpful:

"If faith in general is a persuasion of the truth founded on the testimony of one in whom we have confidence and on whom we rely, and therefore rests on authority, Christian faith in the

most comprehensive sense is man's persuasion of the truth of Scripture on the basis of the authority of God. ... The knowledge of faith consists in a positive recognition of the truth, in which man accepts as true whatsoever God says in His Word, and especially what He says respecting the deep depravity of man and the redemption which is in Christ Jesus."³²

J.I. Packer opens the rich meaning of the word "faith":

"The Reformers restored biblical perspectives by insisting that faith is more than orthodoxy — not *fides* merely, but *fiducia*, personal trust and confidence in God's mercy through Christ; that it is not a meritorious work, one facet of human righteousness, but rather an appropriating instrument, an empty hand outstretched to receive the free gift of God's righteousness in Christ; that faith is God-given, and is itself the animating principle from which love and good works spontaneously spring; and that communion with God means, not an exotic rapture of mystical ecstasy, but just faith's everyday commerce with the Saviour."³³

R.E. Nixon concurs regarding the objects of our faith, stating, "God is supremely the One in whom confidence may be placed ... but His word and His promises are also reliable (Rev 21:5)."³⁴

NOTE THE DIFFERENCE

In the New Testament we see a distinction between the word "faith" and the words "the faith." While the word "faith" has to do with intellectual assent and trust in the Living God and His Word, "the faith" (e.g., Jude 3) has to do with the content of our faith, sometimes called "the Apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42). "*The faith*" is what we believe. It really is the sum total of Christian doctrine.

We should all be concerned about the great basic doctrines of our faith. In 2 Timothy 1:14, Paul calls it "the good deposit."

T. Ernest Wilson says that "the faith" is a "synonym for the message itself. It is not just the act of believing, but the doctrine believed."³⁵ Wilson also warns that "an undefined faith produces a weak and shaky paradise of peace and tranquility, a heretic's haven, a peace at any price."³⁶

Faith, that is, trust and confidence in God, His Word, and His Savior, is the safest route to travel. We need not worry whether our faith is strong enough. We can take this as paradigm: Strong faith in a weak bridge will cause us harm and loss, but even weak faith in a strong bridge will get us across safely. It is not the strength of our faith, but the strength of our Savior that is all important.

For a person confronted with a swollen stream with a rotted tree that fell across its banks, faith in that tree will be in vain. Likewise, lack of faith in a steel bridge will not make a difference in that bridge's integrity. Christ is our strong bridge. Individuals (cult leaders), institutions, ideas, images, mystical insanity, and our intuition are all rotted weak passage ways. Our faith must be in the strong, eternal bridge of our loving Heavenly Father, a Savior, and His infallible and inerrant Word. These alone are safety and assurance.

The great hymn writers caught the biblical concept of faith with these words:

"Simply trusting every day,
Trusting through a stormy way;
Even when my faith is small,
Trusting Jesus, that is all."³⁷

And:

"My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness.
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' Name.
On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand;
All other ground is sinking sand."³⁸

Endnotes:

1. Kevin Sullivan to Jon Weber from the

novel, *More Than a Skeleton*, by Paul Maier, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), pg. 156.

2. Chuck Smith, *Calvary Chapel Distinctives*. Costa Mesa, Calif.: The Word For Today Publishers, 2000, pg. 134.

3. *Ibid.*, pg. 137.

4. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975, pg. 500.

5. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999, Vol. 3, pg. 42.

6. *More Than a Skeleton*, op. cit., pg. 119.

7. Dave Breese, *Know the Marks of Cults*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1975, pg. 45, italics in original.

8. *Ibid.*, pg. 47.

9. *Ibid.*, pg. 56.

10. Alan Morrison, *The Serpent and the Cross*. Birmingham, England: K&M Books, 1994, pg. 493, italics in original.

11. Curtis I. Crenshaw, *Man as God: The Word of Faith Movement*. Memphis: Footstool Publishing, 1994, pg. 236.

12. U.S. Catholic Conference, Foreword by Pope John Paul II, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. New York: Doubleday, 1995, pg. 59, italics in original.

13. See, for example, *The Watchtower*, Dec. 1, 1981, pg. 27.

14. Robert M. Bowman Jr., *Understanding Jehovah's Witnesses*. Grand Rapids, Mich.:

Baker Book House, 1991, pg. 47.

15. *The Watch Tower Reprints*, April 1, 1919, pg. 6414.

16. Bob McKeown, host, "Do You Believe in Miracles?," CBC News, Nov. 3, 2004.

17. See further, G. Richard Fisher, "Back to the Source, The Truth About Smith Wigglesworth," *The Quarterly Journal*, January-March 1995, pp. 1, 11-14.

18. Smith Wigglesworth, compiled and edited by Wayne E. Warner, *The Anointing of His Spirit*. Ann Arbor, Mich.: Vine Books, 1994, pg. 27.

19. *Ibid.*, pg. 35.

20. *Man as God: The Word of Faith Movement*, op. cit., pg. 54.

21. Kenneth Copeland, *The Force of Faith*. Fort Worth: KCP Publications, 1983, pg. 10.

22. *Man as God: The Word of Faith Movement*, op. cit., pg. 4, italics in original.

23. G. Jeffrey MacDonald, Religion News Service, "Reformed Protestants No Longer See Images as Idolatrous," *Christianity Today*, Dec. 6, 2004, emphasis added. Document available at: www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/149/12.0.html.

24. Leonard George, *Alternate Realities*. New York: Facts on File, 1995, pg. 101.

25. *Ibid.*, pg. 102.

26. David W. Cloud, "Worshipping Dung," *Christian News*, Dec. 6, 2004, pg. 3, capitalization in original.

27. The Associated Press, "Church can serve sacred tea," Dec. 11, 2004. Document available at: www.kansascity.com/mld/kansascity/news/nation/10390553.htm.

28. Promotional DVD, copy on file.

29. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, op. cit., Vol. 3, pg. 43.

30. James I. Packer in Everett Harrison, Editor, *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1973, pg. 208.

31. Charles C. Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1976, annotation for Hebrews 11:1, pg. 1850, italics in original.

32. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, op. cit., pp. 501, 503.

33. Packer in *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, op. cit., pg. 211, italics in original.

34. R.E. Nixon in Merrill C. Tenney, Editor, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, Vol. 2, 1975, pg. 483.

35. T. Ernest Wilson, *Mystery Doctrines of the New Testament*. Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Brothers, 1975, pg. 15.

36. *Ibid.*, pg. 16.

37. Edgar P. Stites, "Trusting Jesus."

38. Edward Mote, "My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less" ("The Solid Rock").



A RETREAT FROM REASON

(continued from page 4)

Regarding Bonhoeffer, Boyd is clear when he states, "my thesis has been greatly inspired by my reading of Bonhoeffer. Indeed, this work can be understood as a consistent interaction with his thought."⁸ It's clear that Boyd must have made some kind of judgment that Bonhoeffer was a safe guide to be trusted and followed. Boyd's lack of discernment — or judgment — betrays him here. We are only as good as our sources.

Bonhoeffer was a German Lutheran pastor (1906-1945) who participated in an abortive plot to overthrow Hitler. He eventually was hanged in a German concentration camp on April 9, 1945. Bonhoeffer's thoughts and writings are obtuse enough to inspire even "the ephemeral 'death of God' theologians."⁹

In some instances, Bonhoeffer denied some major fundamentals of the

faith and was ambiguous about others, such as the resurrection of Christ. David Becker has investigated the theology of Bonhoeffer and in the *Christian News* wrote:

"I don't mean to be critical of people, but I do want to speak the truth in love, and one of my pet peeves is when I see people, especially those who consider themselves to be, and present themselves as, theologically conservative, praise Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer espoused a so-called religionless Christianity, and expressed doubt about God as a working hypothesis. He was a father of the so-called 'death of God' 'fad' of a few years ago. He wrote a lot and also wrote some things that sounded orthodox but he consistently had a low view of the Bible, considering a lot of it myth."¹⁰

Bonhoeffer set up the most unlikely premise by suggesting that while

Jesus may have been without sin, His body or flesh was sinful:

"In his flesh, too, was the law that is contrary to God's will. He was not the perfectly good man. ... The assertion of the sinlessness of Jesus fails if it has in mind observable acts of Jesus. His deeds are done in the likeness of flesh. They are not sinless, but ambiguous. One can and should see good and bad in them."¹¹

Bonhoeffer is contradicted by the Apostle Peter and Holy Writ: "[Jesus] committed no sin and, nor was any deceit found in His mouth" (1 Peter 2:22). Certain Gnostics and the Nestorians divided the humanity and deity of Jesus in much the same way as Bonhoeffer did.¹²

Bonhoeffer called the Virgin Birth a "hypothesis" and added, "It is both historically and dogmatically questionable. The biblical evidence for it is uncertain."¹³ One may choose to deny the Virgin Birth, but to say the biblical

evidence is “uncertain” is ludicrous. Matthew 1:18-25 allows for no other interpretation. From the Spirit’s work in Mary’s womb, (vv. 18, 20), to the Greek word *parthenos* (v. 23), to Joseph’s struggle with divorce, (v. 19), to the clear statement of no marital relations until after the birth of Jesus (v. 25), Scripture is emphatically clear.

Another foundation stone is the resurrection of Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:1-4, Romans 10:9). Yet to Bonhoeffer, even this was ambiguous and uncertain:

“Empty or not empty, it remains a stumbling block. We are not sure of its historicity. The Bible itself reveals the stumbling block in showing how hard it was to prove that the disciples had not perhaps stolen the body. Even here we cannot evade the realm of ambiguity.”¹⁴

In the end, Bonhoeffer was merely an apostle of uncertainty.

Then there is Boyd’s shopping mall revelation. He calls it “**An Experience of Love.**”¹⁵ Boyd describes an existential and subjective mystical experience while, with a Coke in hand, watching people at the mall:

“As I replaced judgmental thoughts with loving thoughts and prayers of blessing, something extraordinary began to happen. I began to *see* the worth I was ascribing to people, and I began to *feel* the love I was giving to them. As I ascribed worth to people, not allowing any other thought, opinion, or feeling to enter my mind, my heart began to expand. In fact, at certain moments I felt as though I would explode with love. I was waking up to the immeasurable value and beauty of each person in the mall that afternoon. Sitting in the mall, sipping a Coke, enjoying God’s creations, I was experiencing the heart of God. It felt like finding home after having been lost for a long while. It was like waking up from a coma. It was like finding undiluted truth when all you’d known up to that point was the watered-

down kind. I felt as though I was remembering something I had long since forgotten or unveiling something I had been covering my whole life. The love, joy, and peace I was experiencing as I dwelt in this place — and it did seem like a mental and spiritual ‘place’ — was beyond description. ... I believe I was in my own way participating in God’s seeing and God’s feeling for people. I believe I was participating in his love.”¹⁶

Subjective experiences are a dime a dozen and notoriously unreliable. Others have claimed to experience God in the opposite way: seeing people in judgment scenes. Ultimately we can get correct views of God and man only from the Scriptures. We can never resort to reductionism where we reduce God to primarily one attribute and all humans to warm, fuzzy love objects. This would be like defining an automobile as a headlight or a house as a door.

One only need ask how God would have felt that day at the shopping mall about, for example, the unrepentant child predator who walked past Boyd. When we unconditionally love criminals and are non-judgmental, we refuse to shelter and protect the innocent. Life is not lived at the mall in ecstatic experiences; they are not a paradigm for Christian living. We must constantly make evaluations between good and evil, “Test all things, hold fast to that which is good,” Paul declares (1 Thessalonians 5:21). We are sanctified — not by warm feelings — but by the Word of God (John 17:17).

Here is where Boyd should have followed his own advice:

“We therefore must not try to make our own imprint of God by projecting onto him conclusions about what he is like deduced from our own life experiences, conceptions, and expectations.”¹⁷

Yet this is exactly what Boyd has done.

Boyd’s view draws us into a world-view and perspective diametrically

opposed to the Scriptures. The Bible is set up in terms of antitheses, contrasts, and opposites. We are to think in terms of good and evil, darkness and light, God and Satan, and heaven and hell. Proverbs is full of judgment and contrasts between the fool and the wise, the moral and immoral, anger and patience. God’s love is not unconditional. Christ had to pay a price. He met the conditions of justice. Forgiveness is based on confession; salvation is based on repentance and faith.

Beyond this is Boyd’s commitment — via Bonhoeffer — that judgment is the original sin. He believes that because the first couple ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, judgment and evaluation of others’ behavior constitutes continuing to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil:

“Our fundamental sin is that we place ourselves in the position of God and divide the world between what we judge to be good and what we judge to be evil.”¹⁸

In fact, Boyd wants us to return “to a state where we don’t live by our knowledge of good and evil.”¹⁹ Remember that Boyd says that “Our only job is to love, not judge.”²⁰

Boyd goes so far as to say:

“My conviction is that we have neglected the biblical teaching that the origin and essence of sin is rooted in the knowledge of good and evil.”²¹

Jesus, though sinless, had the knowledge of good and evil as he faced the temptations and onslaughts of Satan in the wilderness. It is the choice of evil that is the essence of sin, not just an awareness of it.

There is nothing inherently wrong with the knowledge of good and evil. God has this knowledge (Genesis 3:5). King Solomon prayed for this knowledge: “Therefore give to your servant an understanding heart to judge your people, that I may discern between good and evil” (1 Kings 3:8) and God gave him what he asked for (v. 13). The knowledge of good and evil is commended and likened to the wis-

dom of angels (2 Samuel 14:17). Christ Himself had this knowledge (Isaiah 7:15). The issue is not possession of this knowledge of good and evil, but how we have acquired it and what we do with it.

Boyd misconstrues the doctrine of sin and what was happening in the Garden at the time of the Fall. The real point was that God wanted Adam and Eve to get their views of good and evil *directly from Him*. Adam chose another way to acquire such knowledge. He selected another route rather than God. He also ignored God's timing for the unfolding of knowledge and sought to get it summarily through an act of disobedience. The knowledge itself was not evil, but rather the source apart from God. The crux of the Fall is choice — a choice to distrust God. It was all about choice: Would Adam get his views of God and morality from God, or trust his own wisdom and his right to choose in another direction and bypass God?

This issue of the nature of sin, the Fall, and its relationship to choice is so important it warrants a lengthy quote from C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch:

“God had given such sacramental nature and significance to the two trees in the midst of the garden, that their fruit could and would produce supersensual, mental, and spiritual effects upon the nature of the first human pair. The tree of life was to impart the power of transformation into eternal life. The tree of knowledge was to lead man to the knowledge of good and evil; and, according to the divine intention, this was to be attained through his not eating of its fruit. This end was to be accomplished, not only by his discerning in the limit imposed by the prohibition the difference between that which accorded with the will of God and that which opposed it, but also by his coming eventually, through obedience to the prohibition, to recognize the fact that all that is opposed to the will of God is an evil to be

avoided, and, through voluntary resistance to such evil, to the full development of the freedom of choice originally imparted to him into the actual freedom of a deliberate and self-conscious choice of good.”²²

The ability to choose is what makes us human and became the staging ground for Adam to obey or disobey:

“By obedience to the divine will he would have attained to a godlike knowledge of good and evil, i.e. to one in accordance with his own likeness to God. He would have detected the evil in the approaching tempter; but instead of yielding to it, he would have resisted it, and thus have made good his own property acquired with consciousness and his own free-will, and in this way by proper self-determination would gradually have advanced to the possession of the truest liberty. But as he failed to keep this divinely appointed way, and ate the forbidden fruit in opposition to the command of God, the power imparted by God to the fruit was manifested in a different way. He learned the difference between good and evil *from his own guilty experience, and by receiving the evil into his own soul*, fell a victim to the threatened death. Thus through his own fault the tree, which should have helped him to attain true freedom, brought nothing but the sham liberty of sin, and with it death, and that without any demoniacal power of destruction being conjured into the tree itself, or any fatal poison being hidden in its fruit.”²³

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

Boyd has a penchant for making up definitions, but never gives linguistic or any other kind of documentation to support his assertions.

He uses the term “unconditional” love. He says, “There is a kind of love that is universal and unconditional, however. It is the kind of love referred to by the word *agape*.”²⁴

The term “unconditional” love springs from the secular psychology of Carl Rogers, who lapsed into occultism in his later years. Biblical counselor and author Dave Powlison takes issue with the notion:

“I also have felt uncomfortable with the term ‘unconditional love.’ I rarely use the term because God’s love is so much different and better than unconditional. Unconditional love, by contemporary definition, starts and stops with sympathy and empathy, with blanket acceptance. It accepts you as you are, with no expectations. You can take it or leave it. But think about what God’s love for you is like. God does not benignly gaze on you in affirmation. God cares too much to be unconditional. ... I’m uneasy with the term unconditional love because it so frequently sidesteps reality. It keeps company with teachings that say to people, ‘peace, peace,’ when, from God’s holy point of view, there is no peace (Jeremiah 23:14,16f). If you receive blanket acceptance, you need no repentance. You just accept it. It fills you without humbling you. It relaxes you without upsetting you about yourself — or thrilling you about Christ. It lets you bask without reckoning with the anguish of Jesus in the garden and on the cross. It is easy and undemanding. It does not insist on or work at changing you. It deceives you about both God and yourself. Most people speak of and aspire to unconditional love containing a large dose of this cultural baggage.”²⁵

Paul Brownback also caught the flaws in the secular and evangelical varieties of unconditional love and acceptance:

“We need to be clear that we are not just talking about accepting a person as he is when he comes in his contrition, his sorrows of heart for the past and his desire to change, to reach out for help to affect that change. We are also

talking about acceptance of the person who is bent on continuing in his sin without remorse. That is the implication implicit in the idea of unconditional love."²⁶

Linguist W.E. Vine sees Christian love differently:

"Christian love has God for its primary object, and expresses itself first of all in implicit obedience to His commandments, John 14:15, 21, 23; 15:10; 1 John 2:5; 5:3; 2 John 6. ... Love seeks the welfare of all."²⁷

At times when we seek the welfare of others, it may involve honest, loving confrontation. *That* may be the loving thing to do as we seek the highest good of others.

It is commendable that Boyd exalts God, the Trinity, and the deity of Christ in chapter 1, "Dancing with the Triune God."²⁸ He is misleading, however, because he teaches that God's love is "universal and unconditional." Plus, Boyd never fully explains what he means by "dancing" with God.

OUR WORTH IN GOD'S EYES

Boyd seems to have assimilated secular psychological theories when he writes of "*Our Unsurpassable Worth before God*."²⁹

He further explains:

"This is why we can say that the worth God ascribes to us, which is to say the love God has for us, is *unsurpassable*. And precisely because it is unsurpassable, the act of God ascribing worth to us reveals the perfect, eternal love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."³⁰

Then he adds, "We are invited to receive the worth God ascribes to us in Christ and are called and empowered to extend this worth to ourselves and all others."³¹

And then this:

"By sacrificing himself for us, God ascribes unsurpassable worth to people who in and of themselves have little apparent worth."³²

Paul exalts the love of God not because of our worth, but because of the very opposite in that He loved us when we were worthless — while we were yet in our sins (Romans 5:8).

Two decades ago, Jay E. Adams wrote that such talk comes out of the old worth movement and self-esteem theories. He calls this view a "false belief that borders on heresy."³³

Did God redeem man because of his great worth? Not a chance, says Adams. This view loses sight of grace:

"In an attempt to exalt man, by supposing him to be of infinite worth, God's grace is unwittingly

and all of orthodox Christianity ever since) is that it was not because of anything God saw in man that He redeemed him, but out of pure mercy and His determination to set His love on him. God's love was not the response to man's loveableness!"³⁴

It certainly is commendable that Boyd emphasizes our position in Christ and the importance of the Church and fellowship within the Church. However, he then proceeds to slice and dice the Church for its failures, attributing these to churches being too judgmental. Boyd is doing the very thing he accuses others of.

Paul exalts the love of God not because of our worth, but because of the very opposite in that He loved us when we were worthless — while we were yet in our sins (Romans 5:8).

denied. This denial is unintentional, I presume, because those who assert the false doctrine would in other contexts profess to believe that it was not because of anything in us that God sent His Son, but that He did so only out of pure, unmerited favor and unwarranted love. ... The point is that God saved man not out of pure grace, totally apart from anything in man that would commend him to God, but rather because of some 'redeemable value' He saw in him. That is to say, man was too valuable to lose, and *that* is why Christ came to die on the cross! The actual teaching of the Bible (and that of the sixteenth-century reformers

Romans 2:1 warns, "Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things." Apparently, Boyd is the only one allowed to judge.

Cultic leanings can begin very subtly. One thing that sends many groups on their way to culthood is segmented biblical attention, where one verse, phrase, or concept is stressed and becomes an obsession at the expense of balanced biblical doctrine. Boyd goes overboard on love. And, as important as that is, love is not the only fruit of the Spirit, or the only character quality insisted upon in the Scriptures. Reading Boyd, one

would think so as he states, "Love is the central biblical truth."³⁵

It is difficult to understand what Boyd means when, speaking of the command to love, he writes that "there really isn't any other commandment."³⁶ That is really a biblically irresponsible statement. While we would never deny the importance of loving God and one another (Matthew 22:37-40, John 13:35), we can never divorce love from truth ("speak the truth in love," Ephesians 4:15) and discernment ("that your love may abound...in all discernment," Philippians 1:1). Boyd's segmented biblical attention causes him to ignore pertinent passages, qualifiers, and, yes, even commands to judge as in Matthew 18.

All through the book Boyd creates a false dichotomy of love vs. judging, never indicating that there are right and wrong ways of judging.³⁷ God, who is perfect, is perfect love and perfect judge. God is perfect compassion and perfect justice, so the two need not be exclusive. Wrong ways of judging may be evil, but judging in and of itself is not. Jesus said if we examine ourselves and are willing to take the log first from our own eye, we can see clearly to evaluate (judge) and help others with their specks (Matthew 7:4-5). We are to make judgments as Jesus said and "do not give what is holy to the dogs" (Matthew 7:6).

Boyd needs to give heed to *balanced* biblical attention, not segmented biblical attention. He is so far out of balance he claims that "the concern to balance love with any competing command is misguided. It is, in fact, *unbalanced*."³⁸

In Boyd's world, to attempt to be balanced is to be unbalanced! In fact, Boyd says anything that "competes with love as our first and foremost concern, it becomes to this degree evil."³⁹ Boyd so stacks the deck that he wants us to believe that to put doctrine, truth, and holiness on the same level as love is to create evil.

Boyd violates his own teaching by condemning overweight people and

those who do not judge them.⁴⁰ By his own criteria he has fallen into the sin of "religion." Other readers of Boyd's volume agree. One customer review found on the Amazon.com web page advertising Boyd's book stated:


"If only the judgmental author could see the speck in his own eye when he attempts eye-surgery on the broader evangelical community he attacks! He should repent of his own 'righteous-than-thou' religious attitude of self-appointed fruit inspector."⁴¹

Another reviewer wrote that Boyd, "Does not balance personal skew with God's holy wrath against sin" and that the "problem is not so much *Repenting of Religion*, but *Repenting of SIN*."⁴²

It would take a book-length treatment to address all of Boyd's errors. In calling all forms of judgment or evaluation "religion," he shuts down discussion. He is, in fact, despising the gift of discernment and seeing it as something evil rather than a precious gift from God. Isaiah reminds us, "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil" (Isaiah 5:20). As he leans heavily on Bonhoeffer and his own subjective experience, he distorts Scripture. In doing so, Boyd sounds the call for a retreat from reason.

Endnotes:

1. See further, G. Richard Fisher, "The Infinitely Intelligent Chess Player — Gregory Boyd's Remaking of God in Man's Image," *The Quarterly Journal*, July-September 2000, pp. 4-13.
2. Gregory A. Boyd, *Repenting of Religion*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2004, pg. 35.
3. *Ibid.*, pg. 9.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*, pg. 18.
6. John Wilson, "All You Need Is Unconditional Love," *Christianity Today*, web site posting, 2/10/2005, italics in original. Document available at: www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2005/002/33.87.html.
7. *Repenting of Religion*, op. cit., pg. 18.
8. *Ibid.*, pg. 10.
9. See A.A. Glenn in Daniel G. Reid, Coordinating Editor, *Dictionary of Christianity in America*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1990, pg. 173.

10. David Becker, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer Rejected Classical Christology," *Christian News*, June 5, 2000, pg. 7.
11. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christ The Center*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1960, pp. 112-113.
12. See further, Frank Mead, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*. New York: Abingdon Press, 1965, pg. 102.
13. *Christ The Center*, op. cit., pg. 109.
14. *Ibid.*, pg. 117.
15. *Repenting of Religion*, op. cit., pg. 13, bold in original.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.
17. *Ibid.*, pg. 35.
18. *Ibid.*, pg. 17.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*, pg. 18.
21. *Ibid.*, pg. 66.
22. C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Vol. 1, The Pentateuch, 1985, pp. 85-86.
23. *Ibid.*, pg. 86, emphasis added.
24. *Repenting of Religion*, op. cit., pg. 24, italic in original.
25. David Powlison, "'Unconditional Love?'," *Counsel the Word*. Glenside, Pa.: Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation, 1997, pp. 80-81.
26. Paul Brownback, *The Danger of Self-Love*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1982, pp. 65-66.
27. W.E. Vine, *The Expanded Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1984, "agapao," pg. 693.
28. *Repenting of Religion*, op. cit., pg. 23.
29. *Ibid.*, pg. 27, bold and italics in original.
30. *Ibid.*, italic in original.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*, pg. 34.
33. Jay E. Adams, *The Biblical View of Self-Esteem, Self-Love, Self-Image*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House, 1986, pg. 87.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 87-88, italic in original.
35. *Repenting of Religion*, op. cit., pg. 58, italic in original.
36. *Ibid.*, pg. 52, italics in original.
37. See further, G. Richard Fisher, "To Judge or Not to Judge - The Rights and Wrongs of Biblical Discernment," *The Quarterly Journal*, October-December 1996, pp. 1, 11-13.
38. *Repenting of Religion*, op. cit., pg. 58, italic in original.
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*, pg. 84.
41. Amazon.com web page, "Repenting of Religion: Turning from Judgment to the Love of God by Gregory A. Boyd." Document available at: www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0801065062/104-3752445-0888723.
42. *Ibid.*, capitalization in original. 

At that time, a major shift began in how evangelicals viewed and dealt with sin. The Church stopped calling sinful and deviant behavior "sin" and started calling it "sickness." The sexual sinner Paul wrote about (1 Corinthians 6:9) became the sex addict. The thief (1 Corinthians 6:10) became the kleptomaniac. The drunkard (1 Corinthians 6:10) became the alcoholic. The rebellious child (2 Timothy 3:2) became afflicted with "Oppositional Defiant Disorder." A family in which the husband will not work, the wife will not keep the home, and the children will not obey is no longer considered sinful; it is dysfunctional. The liar became a compulsive liar. The gambler became a compulsive gambler. The idolater became a person who suffers from an obsessive-compulsive disorder. The "deeds of the flesh, which are immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing" (Galatians 5:19-21) have all been redefined using psychopathological words.

Placing sin in the category of sickness compromises the message of salvation. It sets aside the historical-grammatical method of interpreting Scripture and replaces it with a hermeneutic centered on pathology of the flesh. This interpretation views man as a victim who is sick rather than a sinner who is responsible to God. It eliminates the necessity for repentance. As such, the doctrine of the total depravity of man is undermined. Culpability and guilt vanish and there is no need for a Savior. In a similar way, sanctification is hindered. There is no need for repentance and change; no need for discipleship and spiritual growth. Believers are duped into thinking they are sick and need recovery. This explanation removes accountability. For example, if one has the flu, one is sick and misses work. No fault is assigned and one is not personally accountable for the sickness by one's employer. If

the drunkard has a "disease" called alcoholism, he is no longer accountable for his behavior, rather, he is sick. It is not his fault. He has no need to repent; he needs 12 steps to recovery. Sick people need recovery. Sinners need Christ.

Pastors must realize that when they turn sin into sickness in the pulpit or in ministering to others, they are preaching "another gospel." Paul wrote:

"I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is *really* not another; only there are some who are disturbing you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ" (Galatians 1:6-7, NAS).

WORLDLY WORDS VS. SPIRITUAL WORDS

The faculty of language and speech is one of the greatest abilities God gave to mankind. Of all the things man does, speaking is one of the most important. The uniqueness of language is highlighted in God's revelation to man through His Word. Jesus Christ Himself is the living Word. When God spoke and wrote, He raised language to a place of significance. Spoken and written language became the principal medium of truth. Through words, God revealed Himself. Through words, God reveals His plans and purposes. Through words, God defined, explained, and interpreted the world around Adam and Eve. God said to them:

"Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.' Then God said, 'Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you; and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every thing that moves on the earth which has life, *I have given* every green plant for food';

and it was so" (Genesis 1:28-30, NAS).

God spoke, but Satan spoke also. God's authority was challenged and His words were contested. The devil had a dramatically different way of explaining and interpreting Adam and Eve's world:

"Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, 'Indeed, has God said, "You shall not eat from any tree of the garden"?' And the woman said to the serpent, 'From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, "You shall not eat from it or touch it, lest you die."' And the serpent said to the woman, 'You surely shall not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil'" (Genesis 3:1-5, NAS).

We live in a world where there are many interpretations of the same set of facts. One person looks at a butterfly and is moved by the splendor of God who created it. Another looks at the same butterfly and is moved by evolution's ability to make such a delicate insect. One man looks at a child's behavior and sees a sickness that is said to be caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain that could be corrected through the use of medications. Another man looks at a child's behavior and sees rebellion and sin.

It is not the facts, but the interpretation of those facts at the core of the issue. Many explanations of life and the world do not recognize the authority of God and are, therefore, incompatible with a biblical worldview. The right things are not said because the right things are not believed. Adam and Eve listened to the serpent and believed an interpretation that was contrary to God's truth. From that point forward, the war of words has been raging. Today, Christians are listening to sinful man's —

or the serpent's — interpretation of the facts, rather than God's.

Christians are involved in the logical outgrowth of the war of words every day. It is the battle of ideas. While most believers, understandably, think of the battle in terms of its spiritual dimensions and "other-worldliness," we must realize there is an intellectual side to the battle that must not be overlooked. Paul wrote:

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm" (Ephesians 6:10-13, NAS).

Paul goes on to write about the various elements of the Christian armor. There are the defensive pieces and one offensive/defensive piece: "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (v. 17). If the Word of God can be neutralized in the life of a Christian, he is left with no offensive weapon for the battle. He is struck time and time again, yet he cannot strike back. To any military strategist or, for that matter, to anyone, the defensive strategy alone can be seen as a losing strategy.

The Church has always been involved in a defensive battle involving ideas and words. These battles can be found all through the New Testament and Church history. There were debates about Jesus' identity and nature (Matthew 16:13). There were disputes over Christ's bodily resurrection (Acts 17:18). There were arguments as to whether a person must keep the Law of Moses in addition to faith in order to be saved (Acts 15:5).

In Paul's letter to Timothy, he spoke of his concern about worldly philoso-

phies that were being taught at Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3). The battle of ideas and words continued throughout the centuries as one heretical idea arose after another. Conflicts of ideas and philosophies are what led the early Church to organize its statements of doctrinal beliefs, such as the deity of Christ, personage of the Holy Spirit, the Trinity, and so on. During the Middle Ages, perversion had crept into the Church, and a battle of ideas concerning the purity of the New Testament and salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone was fought by the Reformers.

In the 18th century, man became "enlightened" and optimistically believed his reasoning powers and scientific approaches would lead to a brighter future without God. In the 19th century, problems and challenges arose from Darwinism and Freudianism. Since the Church's inception, it has been in one skirmish after another with competing worldviews, ideas, and words.

A worldview is a set of beliefs that shapes the way a person views his world. It is the lens through which a person processes the events in his life. There is a biblical worldview, a naturalistic worldview, and so on. Every person has his or her own worldview. Thus, the correct worldview is very important in understanding words, ideas, events, and behaviors. Many disagreements among individuals stem from their differing worldviews. Atheists and Christians, Protestants and Roman Catholics, Calvinists and Arminians, and others have different worldviews. In each case, man has constructed a grid, as it were, that filters out certain ideas and arguments leading him to a belief or an interpreted fact. Those whose worldviews differ often consider those with other views to be in error. Confused? Know this: God's Word is absolute truth!

Christians need to start thinking of Christianity not as a collection of bits and pieces of ideas to be believed, but as a complete, conceptual system — a total worldview, as it was originally

designed. To break any worldview into disconnected parts will distort its true character. To mix certain parts of a worldview with a competing one leads to confusion and chaos. Each worldview carries its own assumptions. Each set of assumptions is, for the most part, incompatible with others. However, particular pieces of differing worldviews may be similar, like two slightly different circles that are superimposed. They are quite similar, but they are not easily reconciled. For example, two people with differing worldviews may both be pro-life or pro-choice. They may be similar in their politics or their morality. However, a significant problem occurs when major elements of conflicting worldviews are integrated. The result, eclecticism, is borrowing from a variety of worldviews, and is common practice in "Christian" counseling today.

A biblical anthropology, which teaches that man is made in the image and likeness of God, is combined with naturalistic-evolutionary anthropology, which views man as merely an evolving biological organism. The resulting eclectic integrationism, like purely secular psychology, calls sin sickness by mixing two antithetical worldviews. It is an attempt to be true to both worlds. Plainly, the integration of psychology with Christian theology by sincere but misguided believers has, in the Christian community, legitimized labeling sin as sickness. As a result, the Church has become convinced that the elaborate systems and theories, based on competitive worldviews, are a necessary addition and compliment to God's Word. The Apostle Paul condemns the integration of man's imaginary "wisdom" or worldview and God's true wisdom or worldview:

"... which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*" (1 Corinthians 2:13, NAS).

Evangelicals have been habituated to think and speak psychologically. Biblical words — words taught by the

Spirit — have been replaced by worldly words — words taught by human wisdom. God’s true words, which are supposed foolishness, are exchanged for man’s words, which are supposed wisdom. Words such as “kleptomaniac” and “alcoholic” (words taught by human wisdom) are misleading. They are euphemisms for sinful behaviors. The Bible never refers to a person as an alcoholic or a kleptomaniac. God’s Word refers to a person who habitually gets intoxicated as a drunkard. A person who habitually steals is called a thief. In the sickness model, he needs recovery while in God’s model, he needs to repent, put off the sinful habit, renew his mind, and put on the biblical alternative. Christians should use words taught by the Spirit as they accurately portray God’s reality. The Apostle Paul wrote:

“See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ” (Colossians 2:8, NAS).

“Rather than according to Christ” is the pivotal phrase Paul used to describe the system of doctrine (world-view) that had found its way to Colossae. It was a philosophy setting up the wisdom of man in opposition to the wisdom of God. “Man’s wisdom,” over the centuries, has taken many different forms, including the present-day sin/sickness movement. It has varied with time and culture, but it has always been present in one guise or another, to displace Christ’s sufficient Word with man’s wisdom.

DECLARING PEOPLE SICK

In the early 1960s “illness” meant physical illness. The criterion for determining a disease was a change, alteration, or abnormality in the structure or function (anatomy or physiology) of the body as determined by invasive or non-invasive testing and/or a patient’s history and thorough physical examination. According to *Webster’s Comprehensive Dictionary*, “disease” is defined as “Disturbed or

abnormal structure or physiological action in the living organism as a whole, or in any of its parts.”³ Abnormalities in these findings make it possible for a physician or pathologist to distinguish between the presence or absence of a disease. For example, a family physician takes a throat culture and discovers the presence of infectious streptococcus. A radiologist reads the result of an MRI indicating the presence of a brain tumor. A dermatologist takes a biopsy of a mole, sends it to the lab where a pathologist discovers no disease or abnormality. By using objective methods (throat culture, MRI, biopsy, etc.) for discovering physical abnormalities, physicians can make a diagnosis. Abnormal anatomy or physiology dictates the presence or absence of disease.

Dr. Thomas Szasz, a psychiatrist and well-known critic of psychiatry and author of hundreds of papers and books, says of disease:

“All too often the problem of defining disease is debated as if it were a question of science, medicine, or logic. By doing so, we ignore the fact that definitions are made by persons, that different persons have different interests, and hence that differing definitions of disease may simply reflect the divergent interest and needs of the definers.”⁴

Szasz goes on to say:

“...the decisive initial step I take is to *define illness as the pathologist defines it — as a structural or functional abnormality of cells, tissues, organs, or bodies*. If the phenomena called mental illnesses manifest themselves as such structural or functional abnormalities, then they are *diseases*; if they do not, they are *not*.”⁵

There are constraints on a physician when he seeks to determine the presence of disease. In the past, a physician was constrained, bound, and limited to the scientific method. Disease was discovered based on objective tests. Under the new criteria in

vogue today, instead of discovering disease by objective measures, a person can be declared sick based solely upon his complaint and the subjective opinion of the health care provider.

For example, one complains, “Doc, I’ve been having headaches for the past several weeks.” The doctor replies, “You have a brain tumor. I need to operate first thing in the morning.” You ask, “How do you know I have a brain tumor?” The doctor says, “You said you have headaches.” You reply, “But doctor! Couldn’t my headaches be caused by a sinus infection, low blood sugar, eye strain, stress, or lack of sleep?”

Surgery is risky business. Taking medication for a declared mental condition diagnosed by subjective means is also risky business. When sin is called sickness, the boundaries and limits of good sense are removed and people are subjectively declared sick.

Today’s diagnostic criteria say there does not have to be a change or abnormality in the structure of the body for a person to have a disease. If a person behaves badly, in a bizarre way, or fails to exercise self-control, he may be *declared* sick. After all, one who kills another has to be sick. Normal people do not kill or behave in wicked ways. At the core, there is good in every man, right? Wrong, see Jeremiah 17:9. The Bible says Cain murdered Abel and God called it sin. David murdered Uriah and God called that sin. Jesus said, “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders” (Matthew 15:19, NAS). Every one of those sins has been now declared to be a sickness. Jesus did not say out of a sick heart, but out of an evil heart comes sin.

The mental health industry has transformed the common everyday difficulties and hardships of life into declared diseases. A rebellious child has a conduct disorder. A person who overeats has an eating disorder. A person who is anxious or depressed has a mood disorder. There is adjustment disorder for the man who can-

not seem to cope with his new job. The woman who is boastful and conceited has narcissistic personality disorder. The young man who repeatedly is arrested for destroying property, harassing others, or stealing is sick, too. He has antisocial personality disorder. Other conditions that may require clinical attention range from job dissatisfaction to religious issues such as questioning one's faith or values. People with common experiences of life are now damaged, wounded, abused, traumatized, and sick. They are by themselves incapable of dealing with their disease. It takes an "expert" trained to deduce psychological illnesses, to diagnose, categorize, and label the human experience.

We have allowed psychology to explain what we say, feel, and do. It interprets for us our words, moods, and actions, and what these really mean on an "unconscious" level. What one person says about an event of life and its effects are oftentimes interpreted by the psychologist into ideas which are very different from what is described. The psychologist then presents his diagnosis as fact, applies it to the person's situation, while transforming him into a victim and lifelong patient.

The progression of events resembles the following:

- 1) A theory of victimization is constructed by the psychologist;
- 2) The theory is applied, using the esoteric language of psychology, to the person's situation;
- 3) The theory converts the person's experience into a disorder or disease;
- 4) Only the psychologist knows how to help provide relief;
- 5) Thus, a need for the psychologist is created.

Psychologizing or pathologizing, as some call it, turns routine experiences and feelings into abnormal conditions. Anxiety, apprehension, fear, sadness, and doubt are typically part of life's experience. Some become anxious when they ride an elevator or fly in a

plane; others when they have to speak before a large group of people. Some may become fearful when driving in city traffic; others are fearful of the dark. While all of these may be annoying emotions and disturbing feelings and may disrupt life, they are, nevertheless, typical human experiences. However, to a psychologist, being anxious means something more. It means "having anxiety" or "having an anxiety disorder."

The mental health industry takes authentic victims of accidents, abuse, neglect, etc., and manipulates them into believing they are damaged and sick people. Traumatic life experience is turned into an ongoing emotional problem. The traumatic cause is often followed by a pathological effect. For example, the man, who after twenty-five years, is laid off from his job (the traumatic cause or experience) is later diagnosed with adjustment disorder (the pathological effect). A parent whose child dies (the traumatic cause or experience) is diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (the pathological effect). A person who was abused (the traumatic cause or experience) is diagnosed with Paranoid Personality Disorder (the pathological effect).

A TRAUMATIC CAUSE = A PATHOLOGICAL EFFECT

A traumatic cause leading to a pathological effect is accomplished by focusing on the negative and accentuating the trauma. The person now thinks of himself in terms of the distress or suffering he experienced. He is told that the experience has weakened him. To recover he must face the fact that the event was traumatic. He must then face it, confront it, and go through the psychological process which means changing himself from victim to survivor.

Real victims do not want to be victims at all. A woman who was raped would rather have not been raped. No one wants to be in a car crash. Pain, suffering, and loss are the consequences of being a genuine victim. No one wants to be assaulted and robbed. So why do people allow

themselves to be categorized as psychological victims? Quite simply, there is an advantage to being made a victim. The psychological victim is given permission to live a psychologized life. Once diagnosed, he may step into another world. Being recognized as a victim of some major life trauma is the starting point in the journey where the therapist is viewed as the shepherd who will lead the victim to the promised land of recovery. What makes the future brighter for the psychologized individual is his victim status. The undiagnosed have to live with their disappointments, failures, regrets, crimes, and sin. The psychological victim's world is free from guilt, shame, and responsibility. Whatever the matter may be, an external cause is found for the damaging effects. The disease has removed the accountability that has, in turn, removed the guilt. As a corollary, it has also removed the need for a Savior or for the work of the Holy Spirit in sanctifying the believer.

Because Christians have become so indoctrinated with the sickness model, they unconditionally accept the diagnosis. Persons who are lazy, irresponsible, bitter, full of self-pity, mean, or immoral are *declared* to be sick. AIDS was discovered to be a disease. Alcoholism was *declared* a disease. Cancer was discovered to be a disease. Social anxiety disorder and pedophilia are *declared* to be diseases. When sin is called sickness, behavior is labeled healthy or unhealthy as opposed to righteous or unrighteous. Drunkards are now in the same category as Alzheimer's patients. Rebellious children are in the same category as the man with heart disease. A murderer is in the same category as the cancer sufferer. And the man who gambles away his savings and loses his home to the mortgage company is in the same category as the little girl diagnosed with a terminal brain tumor.

It is not surprising that unbelievers would call sin sickness. The natural man does not accept the things of God, for they are foolishness to him (1 Corinthians 2:14). What is hard to

believe is that the things of God have become foolishness to Christians. The Church itself has become an accomplice with the world in helping men justify their sin. Men suppress the truth (Romans 1:18) when they call sin sickness. They exchange the truth of God for a lie (Romans 1:25). As James teaches, they are carried away and enticed (James 1:14).

The whole idea of sin has always been hated by the world. Since Adam and Eve ran, hid, covered up, and shifted the blame in the Garden of Eden, man has been trying to justify himself. Calling sin sickness allows man to feel better. A healthy self-image is impossible if a man's heart is "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 17:9, KJV). Or, as Isaiah writes:

"Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, And are regarded as a speck of dust on the scales; ... All the nations are as nothing before Him, They are regarded by Him as less than nothing and meaningless" (Isaiah 40:15, 17, NAS).

The solution to these "destructive" words is that man rebels against, overrules, and turns upside down the Word of God. Behavior is reduced to chemical imbalances, electrical impulses, diseases, or low self-esteem. Personal accountability for thoughts and behaviors is abdicated.

If there were such a thing as "corporate" multiple personality disorders, it would seem the Church has one. Out of one side of the Church's mouth, the Church says man is a sinner. Out of the other side of the Church's mouth, man is said to be sick. Is it possible to deny the doctrine of sin by calling sin sickness and still be preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Sermons, Bible study literature, and books by beloved Christian authors are filled with euphemisms for sin. A fornicator may be called to repentance, but if he is sick then he is no sinner. Instead, he is an addict.

NO SIN, NO GUILT

If man is not a sinner then he is a patient who is suffering. He is a

victim of the cruel and callous treatment of others. We are told that we must learn to be sensitive, tolerant, and compassionate, realizing the very behaviors we formerly labeled as sinful are now evidence of victimization or illness.

The culture we live in encourages all sorts of sinful attitudes and behaviors, but will not tolerate the guilt and other feelings that sin produces. Man does not exist in a vacuum. There are consequences to his actions. These consequences are part of the curse God put on man as a result of sin. Sinful behaviors and attitudes affect the way we think and feel. Sin can produce feelings of personal guilt, depression, anxiety, fear, and so on. For example, Cain's sinful behaviors led to depression (Genesis 4:5-7). David experienced depression, anxiety, and several physiologic symptoms as a result of his sinful relationship with Bathsheba (Psalm 38). However, to admit responsibility and guilt is unsuited and irreconcilable with today's concept of human dignity and self-esteem. Guilt is therefore viewed as a "neurosis." It is an abnormal fixation that must be eradicated. Despite the incessant voice of one's conscience, the sinful behavior that causes us to feel guilty must be denied.

Sin as sickness has gained such a foothold in our thinking there is no longer much thought of personal sin. We give a token recognition in sermons and conversations to what used to be a strong and ominous word, but for the most part, has disappeared along with the whole notion of offending God. Have we ceased sinning? No, we are just calling it something else. Man, since the Fall, has become an expert at covering up his sin. Today, however, we are better equipped with psychological euphemisms for sin. Something is terribly wrong. By claiming the status of a sick person or victim, an individual can escape the responsibility of everything from murder to sloth. All kinds of immoral, perverse, and wicked behavior are now considered to be symptoms of some psychological disease. No one is responsible for these

acts. People will admit they have vague feelings of personal guilt, anxiety, and depression, but no one has committed a sin. There are plenty of patients, but sinners are hard to find.

Christianity does not make sense without sin. The Church teaches, "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8, NAS). On the other hand, the Church calls sin sickness. What's the truth? Is sin sin? If so, why does the Church sometimes call it sickness? If sin is sickness why does the Church sometimes call it sin? Is the Church really confused or just embarrassed to use the word sin? Has fear of man made us ashamed of the Gospel? Is the Church willing to trade biblical correctness for political correctness in order to be "seeker-sensitive" and build staggering attendance numbers? Paul wrote, "If the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare for battle?" (1 Corinthians 14:8, NKJV). There is definitely an uncertain sound coming from the pulpits of evangelism today. As a result, evangelism, discipleship, and sanctification all suffer.

The Apostle Paul was not ashamed of the Gospel (Romans 1:16). The reason he was eager to preach in Rome was because the Gospel was the way of salvation. The Gospel was not some new philosophy of life. It is not some new idea, which can be interesting and absorbing to discuss and debate. No, the Gospel is about deliverance from sin. Paul sets the Gospel over and against the Greek culture, which had come to Rome years before. The study of philosophy is interesting, but it tends to begin and end with ideas of men. It ultimately leaves men where they started. Philosophy does nothing about sin. It does not save man from the guilt, power, and pollution of sin. It does not reconcile man to God.

Paul's letter to the Romans deals with fundamentals. With respect to systematic theology, the book of Romans is the most important book in the Bible. It has played a more important and more crucial part in

the history of the Church than any other single book. Some of the Church's greatest leaders were converted while reading the Epistle to the Romans. For example, Augustine was saved while reading Romans 13. Augustine fought the Pelagian heresy and defeated it by expounding the book of Romans. While he was still a Roman Catholic and a teacher of theology at the University of Wittenberg, Martin Luther prepared a series of lectures on the book of Romans. In doing so, his teaching of the doctrine of justification by faith through Jesus Christ and apart from works became a reality. John Bunyan and John Wesley also were converted to Christianity by means of this remarkable book.

Paul declared that God provides a way of salvation though faith in Jesus Christ. The question is why did God do that? Why did Jesus Christ leave heaven, die on a cross, and rise again? The reason may be summed up in the following verse:

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (Romans 1:18, NAS).

The most striking aspect of Paul's presentation of the Gospel is that he begins with the wrath of God. Wrath refers to God's hatred of sin. If one recognizes the love of God, he must also recognize the hatred of God. All that is opposed to God is hateful to God. Paul said that God's righteousness has been revealed (Romans 1:17), making the following verse, “For the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (v. 18), quite inevitable.

Therefore, Paul does not begin the Gospel presentation with man and his problems, but with God, who is angry having been offended by sinful men. He does not say he is ready to preach the Gospel to them because they are living defeated and troubled lives and the Gospel will lift them out of their depression. He does not say he is ready to preach the Gospel because

they are unhappy and the Gospel will make them happy again. He does not start with man's troubles and difficulties. He does not start by telling them that he has had a wonderful experience and wants them to have it, too. Paul starts by talking about the wrath of God against all men because of sin. The wrath of God against sinful man is the motive for evangelism.⁶

Mixing Christianity and psychology has created a climate in which the word “sin” has been diluted of its true meaning and has been rendered harmless. If an unbeliever has no consciousness of sin, he will not be able to see the point of Christianity. To him, Paul's statement concerning the wrath of God will not make sense. This is true not only of unbelievers, but also Christians. Many Christians have lost their consciousness of sin. It is considered harsh, insensitive, or even “un-Christian” to speak of problems as being the result of sinful behavior. No one wants to hear he is a sinner. There is great comfort in being told problems are caused by a disease, disorder, chemical imbalance, addiction, repressed memories, phobia, low self-esteem, or a painful past. To many, the problem is how to market the Church in a way that will bring it in line with the latest intellectual and cultural beliefs while not compromising biblical integrity. The goal is to bring more people under the preaching of the Gospel. Psychology, they thought, was one way to give Christianity a “scientific” relevance and make it more attractive. Proponents of psychology insist it actually improves Christianity. Sadly, biblical integrity and, therefore, the Gospel, have been enormously compromised. The Church's fear of irrelevance in the postmodern world has led to uncritically accepting man's wisdom and denying God's.

Meanwhile, the Church has become weakened and has experienced a dramatic decline in conversions over the past several decades. Church leaders are falling all over one another trying to do all they can to make the Church “relevant,” to give it purpose. Christian leaders speak of the “assured

results” of a seeker-friendly atmosphere, contemporary music, and so on. If one of the problems is calling sin sickness, then nothing short of a return to the language and intent of the Bible will rectify the problem. Sinful people need to repent and follow God's prescribed plan rather than relying on a prescription for a medication to treat their feelings.

The point of Christianity is that man sinned and Christ died to reconcile him before a righteous and holy God. Christians throughout history have been motivated to evangelize by their conviction that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is true. It has created in them a sense of urgency to go tell others. Paul wrote:

“I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. Thus, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome” (Romans 1:14-15, NAS).

And:

“For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf” (2 Corinthians 5:14-15, NAS).

It was the love of Christ in Paul, combined with the conviction that what Christ did was complete and necessary for the redemption of all men, that produced the urgency motivating him to ministry.

How do we begin the task of communicating the Gospel to a society believing sin is sickness? Tell them the big story. Begin with the creation and the first man and woman. Explain the first act of rebellion toward God and the curse that God placed on mankind as a result. Continue through the Old Testament with Cain, Abel, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, and so on. Step by step, establish in them a biblical worldview with the intent to introduce them to Jesus Christ. Effective evangelism has always been accomplished using key

passages and verses that deal with sin, grace, and faith. The point is found in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It does not matter whether one is preaching or teaching from the Law, the prophets, the historical books, the wisdom literature, the Gospels, or the Epistles, they all point to the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for our sins.

The landscape of evangelicalism today is very disturbing. Christians have jettisoned their commitment to God's sufficient Word. A psychological Tower of Babel has been erected. Biblical definitions and categories have changed and a new vocabulary has emerged within the Church. Behaviors and attitudes once regarded as sinful have undergone a dramatic change. They have been reappraised. Sin is called sickness. Confessing sin

has been replaced with recovering from sickness. The word "sin" has nearly disappeared from our vocabulary. As such, the impact of the Gospel to a non-believer is less pronounced and the need for progressive sanctification in the believer is minimized. Nevertheless, there is, in the back of our minds, the fact that sin is still with us — somewhere, everywhere. It is a vaguely uneasy feeling. Although we try to make ourselves feel better by calling sin by another name, it is always there. It never fully goes away.

Endnotes:

1. E. Fuller Torrey, M.D., *The Death of Psychiatry*. Radnor, Pa.: Chilton Book Co., 1974, pg. 24.
2. Garth Wood, *The Myth of Neurosis: Overcoming the Illness Excuse*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1986, pg. 1.

3. A.H. Marckwardt, F.G. Cassidy, and J.B. McMillan (eds.), *Webster Comprehensive Dictionary International Edition*. Chicago: J.G. Ferguson Publishing Company, 1992, Vol. 1, "disease," pg. 365.

4. Thomas Szasz quoted in Janet Vice, *From Patients to Persons*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1992, pg. 14.

5. *Ibid.*, italics in original.

6. Throughout the New Testament the starting point when declaring the Gospel is the wrath of God. For example, the first point John the Baptist made to the people who came to hear him was they should repent of their sins and "flee from the wrath to come" (Matthew 3:7). Peter, on the Day of Pentecost, preached concerning men's relationship to God. The sermon would affect them in such a way that they cried out, "Brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). Paul's sermons throughout the book of Acts emphasize man's relationship to God and the judgment that will come because of sin. (See, for example, chapters 13, 14, 17, and 20.)

EDITORIALS

(continued from page 2)

see going on around me and holding back my disgust for those that I feel are responsible for the lies that my people so easily accept as truth. I see drug dealers, gang members and other criminals killing and being killed all the time with no sign of fear from these individuals. But we Christians that are promised life everlasting seem to stand back and let things get out of control because of our fear and because of the Judeo-Christian preachers and the government constantly telling us that these problems will be taken care of. But they never are. My hateful thoughts toward my enemies sometimes consume my logic. But I am always mindful of the mistake and great wrong it would be to take any kind of action out of hate or ignorance. As a messenger of Yahweh I am always praying that what I have expressed to my people will make them thirst for more knowledge. And that what I have told them will never escape their minds. As a Christian I don't need to see what will take place in the future because Yahweh has told me what will happen, therefore I know it will be. But knowing what the future holds doesn't make it any easier living in the present. So, when I'm asked, don't you get depressed or do you ever feel like giving up, my answer is 'yes.' But it is my faith that sustains me and I start out every morning with the thought that every new day means one more day of Satan's rule behind me and one day closer to the second coming

of Christ. My wife also reads Psalm 91 every morning, which I suggest that everyone should read for spiritual fortification."

On some level the words are challenging and would resonate with most Christians. The deception, however, is not the words, but the real *interpretation* given by the speaker. The one who spoke these words is Charles Lee, Grand Dragon, White Camelia Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. The quote is from *Soldiers of God* by Howard Bushart, John Craig, and Myra Barnes (pp. 171-172).

On the basis of Lee's words alone, most anyone would consider the speaker a dedicated Christian. However, a discernment ministry would pick up on all the baggage that so denies Christ as to nullify Lee's testimony. It would know about the "seed line" theory that gives the white supremacist the liberty to persecute Blacks and Jews. Remember: The Pharisees were fundamental and believed the Old Testament. However, the traditions they added made their religious system void in the eyes of God (Matthew 15:8-9). Whatever they had right was nullified by their endless traditions and additions. A religion may offer the name Christ and even have a correct Christology, but then offer a plan for salvation by works. A proper Christology does one no good if Christ is put out of reach by a defective doctrine of salvation. One correct doctrine is not enough if another totally ignores the pattern of the Apostles' teachings (Acts 2:42, 2 Timothy 1:13).

The above is almost a no-brainer, but there are others less obvious and more deceptive. The Word Faith movement may superficially speak of Christ, but their

Christology of a born-again Jesus who suffered in hell, denies the Christ of the Bible and is rank heresy. Using Christian words and defining them in non-Christian ways is the essence of deception and cultism.

There are many reasons we need organizations such as PFO. We need to help one another spot deception. We need to help one another be more discerning overall.

Pray for PFO — support it with your prayers and gifts. It is a ministry that is desperately needed as the darkness and deception deepens. There are men who want to be thought of as evangelical who sit on the boards of organizations of New Age gurus, and who endorse New Age teachers and a Catholic contemplative web site. Someone needs to sound the alarm on the fence-straddling.

“Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you have learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple” (Romans 16:17-18, NKJV).

—GRF

NEWS UPDATES

(continued from page 3)

Meyer’s organization indicates that the homes were originally purchased as investments for the ministry. “The increase in property values makes it hard not to sell,” Sutherland told the *Post-Dispatch*.

In a report last April, the *Post-Dispatch* revealed that the “ministry’s board of trustees, which is led by Joyce Meyer, agreed to pay her a \$900,000 annual salary in 2002 and 2003. The board agreed to give her husband, Dave Meyer, the board’s vice president, an annual salary of \$450,000 in each of those same two years.”

As a result of the newspaper’s 2003 reports, Meyer, beginning in 2004, reduced her salary to \$250,000, but still receives additional perks, including a “portion of the \$3 million a year in royalties earned from books and tapes.” Weeks after the *Post-Dispatch*’s initial reports divulged her expensive lifestyle, the televangelist told listeners at a local St. Louis-area conference that the news articles were a “satanic plot.”

—MKG

WHO IS THIS NEW POPE?

On April 19, 2005, German Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger was elected Pope of the Roman Catholic Church. In his opening statement, he acknowledged his need for help from Jesus, Mary, and the Saints.

The new pontiff is certainly well known in the Vatican, but not to the general public. Ratzinger, the oldest of the candidates at 78, became a Cardinal in 1977 and was appointed guardian of the church’s doctrinal orthodoxy in 1981. He is an old-line Catholic and was a trusted friend of former Pope John Paul II. John Paul was the velvet glove, but Ratzinger was the clenched fist inside. He was one of the key men John Paul relied on to silence dissident theologians and reiterate church teaching. There is a reason he is referred to as the Vatican’s enforcer and was responsible for the excommunication of dissidents.

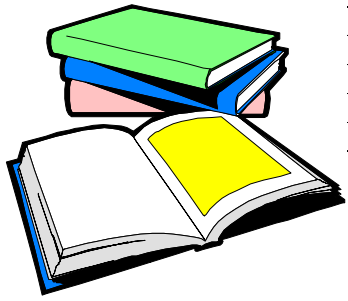
In electing Ratzinger, the College of Cardinals has signaled to Catholics worldwide that it is business as usual. The new Pope is definitely conservative and a traditionalist. News reports speak of Ratzinger’s inflexible reputation. One of the major issues, celibate clergy, will continue to be practiced and debated. Ratzinger has always been a tough opponent of practicing homosexuals and the ordination of women. Women’s rights probably will not be high on his agenda, either. He holds all the dogmas and traditions of Rome with deep commitment.

Ratzinger has selected the name Pope Benedict XVI. Benedict XV was the Pope of the First World War, reigning from 1914-1922. He is best known for canonizing Joan of Arc as a Saint. He spoke unrealistically of global peace and reconciliation between nations, but was marginalized and ignored by the world powers at the time. The powers of that day saw him as a nothing but a provincial potentate. Perhaps Ratzinger wishes to signal the world that he is a man of peace and for peace among all nations. Perhaps he wishes to give his papacy an aura of global concern. Perhaps he can be the new Benedict that the world will heed. The choice of the name is certainly not arbitrary. It is all about image.

Already, conservatives and liberals within Catholicism are taking sides. Ratzinger most likely will have a stormy and controversial papacy with little internal change for some years. There is little chance that anything in Rome will tilt back toward Scripture. Ratzinger undoubtedly will tenaciously uphold dogma, tradition, and papal infallibility. Publicly, Ratzinger will speak of Christians uniting, but in Ratzinger’s mind Christian unity involves all coming under the papal banner.

As Ratzinger reaffirms Catholic traditions, Bible-believing Christians could benefit. The cafeteria theology of American Catholics confuses and misleads even them. As the differences between Roman Catholicism and orthodox Christianity become clearer, witnessing could become easier. If Ratzinger makes Catholicism more like pre-Vatican II Catholicism — which he would like to — it surely will prompt more Catholics to questioning their beliefs and perhaps make them more receptive to Bible witness.

—GRF



Books in Review

RUNNING AGAINST THE WIND

by Brian Flynn

Lighthouse Trails Publishing, 206 pages, \$12.95

This book's Foreword calls it "a personal and transparent account of God's sovereign grace, delivering a man who had given himself over to the demonic world of the occult. After Brian became a born-again Christian, much to his shock and dismay, he found within the evangelical church the very practices that had characterized his life in the New Age."

Flynn summarizes astrology, Ouija boards, channeling, auras, Transcendental Meditation (TM), reincarnation, monism, yoga, human potential movement, visualization, guided imagery, Reiki (therapeutic touch), witchcraft, goddess worship, crystal healing, Shamanism, labyrinths, contemplative prayer, the emerging church movement, Neale Donald Walsch (*Conversations With God*), Richard Foster (*Celebration of Discipline*), Marianne Williamson (*A Course in Miracles*), Brennan Manning (*The Ragamuffin Gospel*), Thomas Merton, and Tilden Edwards. An index provides for quick information retrieval and a brief glossary offers definitions of a few key terms.

Flynn tells how he acquired his spirit guides. The account may seem strange to those unfamiliar or unaware of this practice, but a former astrologer-turned-Christian confirmed its accuracy. She said Flynn's experience was similar to hers and standard procedure for many who attempt to "pick up" spirit guides. The origin of this mechanism is widely debated. Some argue it is the product of the human imagination. Others say it is fully demonic. Others see it as a combination of both. It certainly is a real experience to the recipient and used by Satan to further the kingdom of darkness.

The only negative aspect of the book is that the author could have spared readers some detail about some aspects of his former sinful lifestyle.

Also a small correction which needs to be made in future printings is where contemporary medium and best-selling author John Edward (of *Crossing Over* fame) is identified as John Edwards (pg. 115).

Flynn explains the difference between healthy imagination and visualization and guided imagery. The occult form of visualization employs mental pictures of desired outcomes in an attempt to bring them into existence and thereby play God. This New Age technique attempts to change or create reality and manipulate outcomes. It goes far beyond healthy imagination.

In the chapter titled, "A Trojan Horse in the Church," Flynn targets the contemplative prayer movement, a dangerous mystical practice which has gained wide acceptance within even the mainstream of the Church. Flynn warns, "The similarities between TM and contemplative prayer are quite remarkable. In both disciplines the goal is to achieve silence or that sacred space. With TM the goal is to silence the thoughts so a oneness with the universe can be achieved. In other words, get closer to God or the universal energy that connects us all. The goal of contemplative prayer is also to get closer to *God*" (pg. 162, italic in original). Richard Foster's brand of meditation even moves one into the occult practice of astral projection or out-of-body meditations.

We can hear Flynn's deep passion and concern in some of the closing words of his book:

"When I see the church changing before my eyes and following practices that I left behind, I can only describe the feelings as one of deep betrayal. Some of the very Christians who helped me to see my wretched evilness and need for God, who taught me that these New Age Eastern practices were an anathema to God's teachings, have now opened the door and let the world's ideas breeze in unopposed! How can this be? These are my brothers and sisters. They should be joining me in my opposition, but they do not. I cannot merely stand at the church door blocking these currents of change. I will run full force against them" (pg. 188).

As the modern Church continues to lose ground in its ability to discern and as it accepts more false teaching and methods, books like this one need to receive a wide hearing. Yet, like the prophets of old, gaining that hearing appears to be an insurmountable task. Flynn states, "I would rather be running against the wind of false doctrine than be swept up in the fleeting emotions brought by unbiblical practices" (pg. 189). The Church should desire more such Bereans who are willing to *run against the wind*.

—GRF

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