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## Is the Trinity a Biblical Idea? An Introduction to a Central Christian Doctrine

by J. Greg Sheryl

In 1981, the first issue of *The Quarterly Journal* (at that time called the *Personal Freedom Outreach Newsletter*) carried an article titled, “Is the Trinity a Pagan Idea?” This final issue of *The Journal* comes full circle to revisit this vital Christian doctrine.

The hymn, “Holy, Holy, Holy,” written in the early 1800s by Anglican minister Reginald Heber contains the line, “God in Three Persons, blessed Trinity!” The hymn reminds us that the doctrine of the Trinity is central to Christianity. The doctrine is not *sufficient* to define Christianity, but it is so important that anyone who denies it is a heretic.

While the three major branches of Christendom — Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Protestantism — have significant differences, all three teach that there is one God, and that this one God is three distinct persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. All three branches also teach that each of the three persons is unique. The Father is not the Son or the Spirit, the Son is not

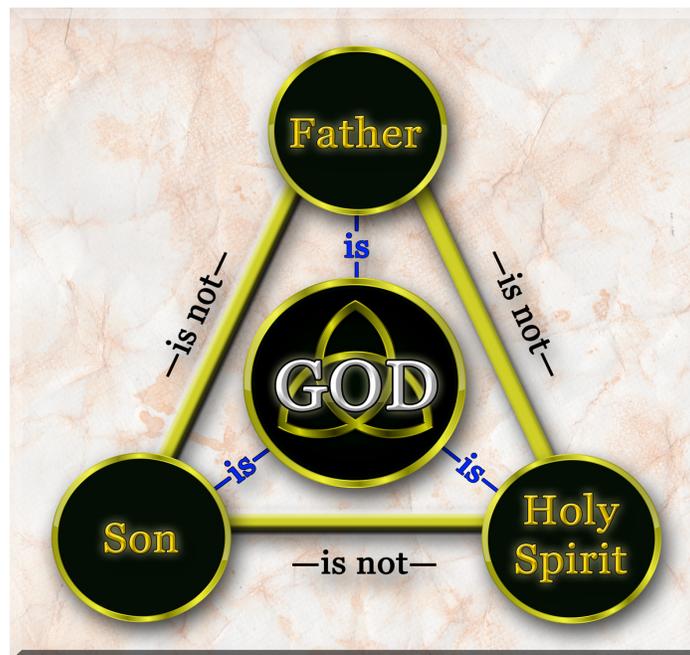
the Father or the Spirit, and the Spirit is not the Father or the Son. There is one God; but the one God is three

distinct persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The doctrine of the Trinity is unique among religions and sects. No other religion has a doctrine of God as one and three, in the sense that the Christian faith does.<sup>1</sup>

Christians should strive to understand the doctrine of the Trinity. First, because it is a biblical doctrine — God’s self-revelation of who He is within Himself — and because, as Christians, we should want to know who is the God we worship and serve. Second, we are called to love God with all our minds as well as with the rest of our being (Mark

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# Editorials

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## I HEAR IT TOO OFTEN

It is something that I hear too often from the mouths of believers. And Christians should know better. Take, for example, one evening when I sat down to watch a movie. It was one of those “Family Approved” Dove films about a married man who logs into a social networking website and *accidentally* reconnects with his old high school girlfriend. The man, who was the son of a Christian pastor and who supposedly made a profession of faith as a young boy, eventually is convicted of his sin, repents, and recommits his life to Christ. But in his confession prayer, there comes an example of just how poorly believers understand the nature of the God they worship. He prayed:

“Dear Father, I acknowledge to You that I am a sinner. I’m ready to ask for Your forgiveness, Father. I know that You died on the cross for me. And that You rose again. I pray that You come into my life and become my personal Savior, Lord. I want to live my life to serve You. I ask in Your holy name. Amen.”

Clearly this young man’s prayer does not reflect a Trinitarian theology, but rather communicates the ancient heresy of Sabellianism — the teaching that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three different modes or aspects of God. What he prayed is the foundational teaching of “Oneness Pentecostals,” and when Christians allow its aspects to cloud their understanding of God, it makes them easy prey for such anti-Trinitarian groups as Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Now, perhaps at this juncture, you’re saying, “Wait, this is just a movie and while Dove “approved,” that’s only in respect to its wholesome story content, not its theology.” But, tragically, throughout my life I have heard nearly those same prayers come from the mouths of deacons, Sunday school teachers, Bible study leaders, and even a pastor (or two) during worship services.

As Professor of Theological Studies Stan Fowler discerning points out:

“If you listen carefully when someone prays to give thanks at the Lord’s Table, you may hear a prayer addressed to God the Father, and then in a few sentences the Father is thanked for coming to die for our sins. That collapses the divine persons into one person, which is the ancient error of modalism (the view that God is one person who reveals himself by three names and roles). The Father sent the Son, who became human and died for human sin, but the Father did not die” (“The Father Is Not the Son,” Heritage Theological Seminary blog, Jan. 31, 2017).

Fowler also expresses uneasiness over the same concern being articulated in the lyrics of modern Christian songs. Yet, he responds with the gracious warning that, “I am not charging those who pray and those who write songs with conscious rejection of Trinitarianism or orthodox Christology, but I am suggesting that we ought to be much more thoughtful and careful about our God-language” (ibid.).

That is some excellent advice to consider and put into practice.

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### PERSONAL FREEDOM OUTREACH

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# News Updates

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## WEST ANNOUNCES WHITE HOUSE BID

Grammy-winning rapper Kanye West believes he's headed for the West Wing — at least that's what he's saying God told him. West announced, via Twitter, on July 4, "I am running for president of the United States."

In an interview with *Forbes* magazine following the announcement, West claimed, "God just gave me the clarity and said it's time." However, there appears to be a lack of "clarity" in God's revelation, as West also said, "Let's see if the appointing is at 2020 or if it's 2024 — because God appoints the president. If I win in 2020 then it was God's appointment. If I win in 2024 then that was God's appointment."

West also told *Forbes*, "For the other candidates, I just gracefully suggest y'all bow out — Trump and Biden, gracefully bow out. It's God's country, we are doing everything in service to God, nobody but God no more. I am in service of our Lord and savior, Jesus Christ, and I put everything I get on the line to serve God."

In declaring his run for the presidency less than four months from the date of the general election in November, West had already missed the filing deadline in a few states and faced the task of collecting sufficient signatures in states that require them for inclusion on the ballot.

Less than a week after his tweet, The Hill, an American political journalism website, reported that West "received 2 percent of the vote in a national presidential poll conducted by Redfield & Wilton Strategies after the megastar announced that he was going to make a late bid for the White House." And then, less than two weeks after his presidential bid tweet, God's "clarity" appeared to become even more obscure. Several news outlets said that the 43-year-old rapper had suspended his campaign and dropped his run for the White House. Despite the news reports, West continued his candidacy for president.

West, who describes himself as "a born-again Christian," began holding weekly "church services" in 2019. The meetings are said to be more concerts than worship. According to the *New York Post*, "Kanye's church also seems to be more of an ad campaign for his music and fashion brand" and are by "invite-only." The newspaper quoted one who attended as saying, "My major issue with Kanye's Sunday Services is that they appear to be exclusive clubs for the rich and famous. The average person can't visit — instead, we're kept at arm's length merely watching on screens."

West has been married to reality star Kim Kardashian since 2014.

—MKG

## WATCHTOWER SUCCEEDS IN REMOVING VIDEOS

The founders of the Truth and Transparency Foundation have come up short in their bid to continue to post numerous videos of Watchtower conventions on the Internet. Ryan McKnight and Ethan Dodge said that without the funds necessary to fight the Watchtower's lawsuit against them, they had no choice but to settle.

The Watchtower maintains the videos are copyrighted materials. According to *The Salt Lake Tribune*, "As part of the settlement, McKnight and Dodge agreed to remove all documents owned by Watch Tower from all of their websites. They agreed to never again publish Watch Tower's copyright material and will pay \$15,000 in damages."

One critic of the Watchtower posted in a blog, "Ever notice how the speeches of theologians are literally all over the internet? Speakers like Billy Graham, John Piper, William Lane Craig, John MacArthur, and J. Vernon McGee are all over the internet with no problem. They want their messages examined. But noooooo, the WT. will sue you for publishing their 'free' & 'public' speeches."

—MKG

## PROPHET SAYS PASSOVER WOULD END PANDEMIC

Modern-day prophecy attracts, entices, and motivates followers in a variety of Charismatic camps. It is also a significant marketing tool making profits for the prophets and those who publish their revelations. Chief among those promoting these oracular utterances is Stephen Strang and his Charisma Media company.

Oftentimes these modern-day prophets work the major world events into the grid of their own prophetic schemes and scenarios. Jonathan Cahn is a prime example of one who offers this type of revelatory insight. Prophets such as Cahn want people to believe the Bible is a coded book, full of mysteries, and that they can interpret and apply that knowledge to our present day. Strang has published all of Cahn's best-selling books.

And then there are the *ex post facto* prophets, those who tell you after the event that they predicted — beforehand — what has taken place. But even then, if they get too far ahead of themselves, the sheepskin slips and they are exposed as the false prophets they are. Chuck D. Pierce,

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# The Influence and Success of

# Hillsong Church

## Exploring Brian Houston's Controversial Religious Empire

by Glenn E. Chatfield

Hillsong. It's a name which brings up all sorts of bouquets or brickbats. Is it a church? A denomination? A singing group? Or maybe even a cult? Whatever you may think of it, it is one of the fastest-growing religious organizations in the world. So just where did it come from?

Hillsong Church began as an Australian Christian Church (Australian branch of Assemblies of God) plant in 1983. Brian Houston and his wife, Bobbie, started the Hills Christian Life Center in Sydney, Australia, with 45 people at their first service. In 1999 their name changed to Hillsong Church. Until September 2018, Hillsong was under the oversight of the ACC, but then formed its own denomination. In April 2019, *Charisma* magazine reported:

"Every week, roughly 130,000 people attend one of the 123 Hillsong campuses, spanning 24 countries on six continents. People from another 183 countries have watched the Hillsong Channel, which broadcasts nonstop to nearly 164 million households worldwide."<sup>1</sup>

All 123 campuses are under the sole control of Houston. As part of its

ministry, Hillsong has three worship bands. In conjunction with this, it is noted that, "Hillsong church in Australia is one of the largest, if not the largest, distributor of 'worship music' in the world and have multiple 'worship conferences' each year with tens of thousands in attendance."<sup>2</sup> It is a multimillion-dollar business. Hillsong's own fact-sheet says:

"[Houston] has launched churches located in some of the world's most influential cities, three record labels, a film and television platform, multiple worldwide conferences, and an international college. Each week, Hillsong's music is sung by an estimated 50 million people in 60 languages, and Houston's sermons are broadcast around the globe. ... Through Hillsong's college, conferences, podcasts, broadcasting and publishing, Houston trains and equips tens of thousands of Christian leaders and encourages countless others in their daily faith."<sup>3</sup>

Hillsong's primary "target" is "young Christians in big cities, where faith seems out of fashion but where its services are packing them in."<sup>4</sup> And not just any young people. *Seven-*

*teen* magazine reports on its attraction of some big names in entertainment:

"What do Hailey Baldwin, Hailee Steinfeld, Justin Bieber, Kendall Jenner, and Vanessa Hudgens have in common? No, it's not just their incredible star power and young age, it's where these celebs like to spend their Sundays — at church. At Hillsong Church to be more exact."<sup>5</sup>

According to the magazine, other celebrities who have frequented Hillsong services include Selena Gomez, Austin Butler, Nick Jonas, and Kendall Jenner's siblings Kylie Jenner and Kourtney Kardashian. Thus, one can expect a concert-like atmosphere for their "worship" services. R. Albert Mohler Jr., president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, has observed:

"It's a prosperity movement for the millennials, in which the polyester and middle-class associations of Oral Roberts have given way to ripped jeans and sophisticated rock music. What has made Hillsong distinctive is a minimization of the actual content of the Gospel, and a far more diffuse presentation of spirituality."<sup>6</sup>

Beyond doubt, Hillsong appeals to carnal desires.

Also notable is the nepotism in the organization: His wife, Bobbie, is “Co-Senior Pastor” in Sydney; his son Joel is the “Lead Pastor” of Hillsong New York City; his son Ben and his daughter-in-law Lucille are “Lead Pastors” of Hillsong Los Angeles; and his daughter Laura, together with her husband Peter Toganivalu (aka, Toggs), pastor the youth ministry of Hillsong Church in Sydney.

Of important concern in regard to the leadership make-up of Hillsong, which is shared with some of its denominational assemblies, is the idea of husband and wife being a senior pastor couple (“co-pastors”). As noted, Brian and Bobbie are the senior pastors at their church, and Ben and Laura are the joint leaders in Los Angeles. Then there is Darlene Zschech, who was a worship pastor at Sydney but later became a senior pastor with her husband, Mark, in New South Wales,<sup>7</sup> Hillsong Sweden is led by Andreas Nielsen together with his wife Lina,<sup>8</sup> and the list goes on.

Beyond the egalitarian position of Hillsong comes the marketing culture. Geoffrey Grider, of Now the End Begins website, states:

“The Hillsong Church global corporation is a multimillion dollar cash cow that provides an opulent lifestyle for all it’s [sic] leaders. And the millions of dollars that now flow in from parishioners would come to a grinding halt if they ever started preaching Bible truth. The only reason why thousands line up to attend their services is because there is no conviction of sin, no preaching about Biblical righteousness, no hard truths from the Scriptures. What they get is a ‘christian’ rock concert with strobe lights and massive video displays, so that the people who were out in the clubs the night before will feel right at home.”<sup>9</sup>

Bruce Herwig has an interesting take on the Hillsong phenomena. He says:

**“As I studied Hillsong as an organization, they seem to be**

**organized around Six ‘C’s.** 1. Churches (Hill Song Church plus International plants). 2. Concerts (Tours). 3. CDs (Extensive discography Amazon.com). 4. Conferences (Hillsong Church Conference, Women’s Color Conference). 5. College (Hillsong Leadership College). 6. Cinema (Hillsong Movie). From a marketing and communication perspective, this is genius! **Each one is designed to feed the other.** Hear the song in church? Buy the album. Like the album? Come to a Concert. Like the Concert? Come to a Conference. Like the Conference? Attend our college, join our church, etc.”<sup>10</sup>

To finish our overview of Hillsong, let’s review what some other ministries have stated about them. Steven Kozar wrote:

“Hillsong is a global corporation that is taking over churches all across the world. They don’t teach orthodox, Bible-based Christianity; they are spreading the Word of Faith Gospel and the New Apostolic Reformation. ... These are large, professional organizations lead [sic] by CEO pastors/leaders that bear little resemblance to church congregations of the past — and they have no precedent in scripture. Newer. Bigger. Louder. More modern. No hymnals, choirs, crosses, organs ... and frankly, not a lot of older people. People are attracted to the rock music, the feeling of a theater or night club (certainly not a church) and the positive, feel-good messages delivered by celebrity ‘pastors.’ The real problem? The Gospel of Jesus Christ has been altered until it’s recognized by name only.”<sup>11</sup>

Cameron Buettel and Jeremiah Johnson, of John MacArthur’s Grace to You ministry, wrote:

“Speakers frequently play fast and loose with Scripture and its meaning. Context is rarely a concern. The general pattern is to isolate a portion of Scripture’s narrative and turn it into an analogy for the audience and a promise of God’s blessing and favor. Even the most familiar verses and passages are exceedingly pliable in the hands of

Hillsong’s leadership. The first Sunday we attended, Hillsong LA’s lead pastor Ben Houston turned John 3:16 into an exhortation to give to the church, explaining how ‘God so loved that He gave,’ and that our love for the church ought to prompt us to give our money. That sort of postmodern flexibility is brought to the text in every service, and it turns every lesson into a reminder of God’s aggressive love for you, His eager desire to bless you, and your integral part in unleashing that blessing in your own life. It’s not much more than a watered-down version of the prosperity gospel or the Word Faith movement.”<sup>12</sup>

Additionally, Buettel and Johnson describe how during an evening service “anti-trafficking activist and international speaker” Christine Caine “brought the audience to hysterics with the following description of God’s creative work: ‘God woke up one day and burped and [gestures] earth, and [said] ‘Whoops, look what I did.’ Those simply aren’t the words of someone who takes God and His Word seriously.”<sup>13</sup>

Hillsong also teaches that all of the apostolic sign gifts continue today, including prophesying, speaking in tongues, and healing.<sup>14</sup>

## THE LIFE OF BRIAN

What about Brian Houston? To begin with, Houston personally teaches false prosperity doctrines in his books, *You Need More Money*, *You Can Change the Future*, *Get A Life, For This Cause*, *For This I Was Born*, and *How To Live A Blessed Life*.<sup>15</sup> Although, according to *Sydney Morning Herald* reporter Deborah Snow, “Infamously, in 1999 Houston put out a tome entitled *You Need More Money*; he regrets it now, though, insisting ‘the idea of the book, I think, was pure’.”<sup>16</sup>

Snow also revealed what she saw at Hillsong’s 2015 annual conference in Sydney:

“[Houston is] in full flight — cajoling, conversing, proselytizing — when suddenly he drops like a stone to the stage and launches into a series of push-ups. ‘We are lean, mean kingdom machines, all set for everything that God wants

to do in this place. Amen! Amen!' he proclaims, pumping the stage as they stomp and cheer. 'Your words can frame your future,' he tells them. 'Speak your faith, start seeing miracles ... Owner of your first home! Best-selling author ... Mother of handsome sons and beautiful daughters! Businessman who is prosperous and fruitful! Your brother's salvation, your sister's healing ... Speak it into being! Speak it into being! Speak it into being! Amen!' The uplifting mood is punctured for me two days later when I'm hauled out of my \$300 conference seat near the rafters by a burly security guard wearing a Hillsong T-shirt. My sin, apparently, is to have made people 'feel uncomfortable' by writing in a notebook and asking the young chap next to me a few questions."<sup>17</sup>

An interesting statement from Hillsong's website should grab the attention of any discerning Christian. In the article titled, "5 Things That Should Matter to a Worship Pastor," "Thing" number 2 states:

**"We are about fulfilling our Senior Pastor's vision (not our own).** It is so important that as amazing as our creative ideas might be, if they don't ultimately line up with what our Senior Pastor and leaders want, then we happily put them aside. The church doesn't exist to build our worship teams... our worship teams exist to build the Church!"<sup>18</sup>

In other words: If you discern something amiss, keep your mouth shut.

### HOMOSEXUAL PASSIVITY

With Houston being the "head guy" of the Hillsong denomination, you shouldn't be surprised about some of the issues involving Houston and his followers. Let's first take a look at how Houston and other leaders have handled the sin of homosexuality. In a radio interview, Houston was asked how he addresses the issue of same-sex "marriage." His response was:

"Well I think it's very vexing and very challenging. The moment you get asked the question on ah-secular media in particular- ah-

'What do you think about homosexuality?' or 'What do you think about gay marriage?,' you're going to lose people. You're either going to lose people on the one side or you are going to lose your constituency on the other side. And if you say nothing, you lose everybody. And so it's one of those questions where there's no great answer."<sup>19</sup>

So rather than specifically state the biblical teachings on this issue, Houston obfuscated. Additionally, Houston's interview has since been scrubbed from the Internet. Nevertheless, we can still gain a clear perspective of Houston and Hillsong's view of homosexuality by looking at the overall movement. For example, Pastor Carl Lentz, of Hillsong New York City, has stated, "We have a lot of gay men and women in our church and I pray we always do."<sup>20</sup>

By 2012 Lentz had allowed an "engaged" homosexual couple, Josh Canfield and Reed Kelly, to lead his church choir. When Lentz was asked what he thought about homosexuality he said:

"Jesus was in the thick of an era where homosexuality, just like it is today, was widely prevalent. And I'm still waiting for someone to show me the quote where Jesus addressed it on the record in front of people. You won't find it because he never did."<sup>21</sup>

Lentz's wife, Laura, stated that, "It's not our place to tell anyone how they should live, it's — that's their journey."<sup>22</sup>

When asked about the subject during an interview with Katie Couric in December 2013, Lentz said that he didn't feel he had a moral imperative to speak publicly about controversial matters. He stated:

"Very rarely did Jesus ever talk about morality or social issues. He was about the deeper things of the heart. And often people want to talk about behavior modification, our church isn't about that. ... We're about soul transformation. So you start talking about some of the symptomatic stuff, that's not what we're about. We're about talking to people about their heart

and the condition of their soul, and some of that stuff out-works itself. But we're not trying to change anybody because we can't."<sup>23</sup>

But Jesus did indeed talk about moral issues, like marriage, and the people he taught all knew the Old Testament moral commands, so He really didn't have to go into the topic. In that same interview Lentz praised well-known proponent of prosperity theology Joel Osteen, saying, "Well, first of all I love Joel and I'm thankful for men like him who have paved the way for younger guys like me to have an opportunity to do what we do. Joel is a pioneer."<sup>24</sup>

In the summer of 2015, Kelly released a statement on behalf of himself and Canfield which said:

"Josh has been with Hillsong for eight years in a variety of ways: choir director, vocal director, and worship team. I've been there since the beginning of our relationship, over three years ago, and eventually began singing in the choir and opening my apartment as the gathering place for a connect group for Hillsong members in the Broadway and theatrical communities."<sup>25</sup>

Additionally, the men have stated, "We have been open and forthright about our relationship from the get-go."<sup>26</sup>

Yet, as word spread and controversy arose, Houston issued a statement of his own, claiming:

"Several months ago when one of our choir directors made an unexpected public statement regarding his engagement to a man who sometimes sang in the choir, it was a complete surprise to us as well."<sup>27</sup>

So if Canfield and Kelly have been "open and forthright" about their relationship from the beginning, Houston is apparently trying to do damage control. In fact, Houston *knew* about the couple three months before they spoke of their ministry and eight months before he "corrected" reports about the couple being in the choir. Houston mentioned them in a November 14, 2014, television interview on ABC's *Nightline*!<sup>28</sup> So, it appears,

Houston was not caught by “complete surprise” when news came out about Canfield and Kelly’s relationship.

In further response to the issue of Canfield and Kelly leading the choir, Houston issued a statement which appeared under the “CP Opinion” header of the online news source, The Christian Post. In the opinion piece, Houston affirmed Hillsong’s biblical position on homosexuality, stating:

“I also live by my own convictions, and hold to traditional Christian thought on gay lifestyles and gay marriage. I do believe God’s word is clear that marriage is between a man and a woman. The writings of the apostle Paul in scripture on the subject of homosexuality are also clear, as I have mentioned in previous public statements. Hillsong Church welcomes ALL people but does not affirm all lifestyles. Put clearly, we do not affirm a gay lifestyle and because of this we do not knowingly have actively gay people in positions of leadership, either paid or unpaid. I recognize this one statement alone is upsetting to people on both sides of this discussion, which points to the complexity of the issue for churches all over the world.”<sup>29</sup>

He then stated, “So if you are gay, are you welcome at Hillsong Church? Of course! You are welcome to attend, worship with us, and participate as a congregation member with the assurance that you are personally included and accepted within our community. But (this is where it gets vexing), can you take an active leadership role? No. ... We are a gay welcoming church but we are not a church that affirms a gay lifestyle.”<sup>30</sup>

Houston circumvents directly stating that Scripture condemns the practice of homosexual behavior as sinful. Rather he sidesteps expressing the biblical teaching by making such statements as the “writings of the apostle Paul in scripture on the subject of homosexuality are also clear,” leaving the reader to determine what that is. The question also arises as to how does a Christian assembly accept with open arms those who practice homosexual behavior with no remorse or

sense of sinning? On this point, Scripture is equally emphatic, “Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?” (2 Corinthians 6:14, NASB).

In a later interview, Lentz commented on Canfield and Kelly:

“These two men in particular are amazing human beings. ... And they are going through a really amazing journey called life. Yes, their sexuality is involved with it, but it’s not as cut-and-dry as you think it is. And if they make a decision to live as gay men, they are going to get married, our stance in this church is there’s going to be a limited involvement when it comes to leadership, because you don’t believe what I believe. This would create friction that wouldn’t be fair to the people that we’re serving. If you believe that homosexuality is God’s will for your life, and I disagree, well, what if you’re a leader and, you know, a young man comes up to you, and he has questions about his sexuality? What are you going to tell him? What I believe or what you believe?”<sup>31</sup>

If these homosexual men claim to be Christian (and they do), then welcoming them into the church is totally against Christian teachings; Paul says to put them out of the church and hand them over to Satan (1 Corinthians 5).

In the same interview, author Taffy Brodesser-Akner wrote:

“But, Carl begs me, don’t miss the point: It’s important to him that we know that everyone is welcome at his church — that homosexuality isn’t a different kind of sin to him than, say, tithing at 9 percent instead of 10 percent, or gossiping or telling a lie. Everyone should feel welcome at Hillsong.”<sup>32</sup>

So now we have a Hillsong leader addressing homosexuality as sin. While Houston sidesteps, Lentz minimizes. Lentz ignores that there are very different kinds of sin, and sexual immorality — especially homosexual immorality — receives much stronger

judgments in the Bible than other sins. Paul even points out the difference in 1 Corinthians 6:18 when he says, “Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body” (NASB). As for tithing, Christians don’t even have that rule, and neither gossiping nor lying are against the body.

On February 14, 2019, Houston again issued a statement clarifying Hillsong’s position in regards to homosexuality and “its welcoming of LGBT attendees.” Appearing on the Charisma News website, it sought to “clarify and correct” the “misinformation” which supposedly appeared in several media outlets, and stated:

“Hillsong Church does not preach against anyone or any group; we are not ‘anti-anyone.’ We are an inclusive Christian church that loves, values and welcomes all people, regardless of their background, ethnicity, beliefs, values or personal identity. ... Believing the teachings of the Bible and loving all people — including those who have different perspectives — are not mutually exclusive. In fact, this is the very definition of tolerance and inclusiveness.”<sup>33</sup>

Hillsong violates the very purpose of “church,” which is supposed to be a gathering of *believers*! The assembled saints meet to hear the teachings of Scripture, for sharing the Lord’s Table, for singing worship and praise songs, and for fellowship and prayer. It is not a time for evangelization or concerts or for failing to tell LGBT attendees the truth about their “different perspectives.”

This attitude toward homosexuality also shows up in Hillsong’s Los Angeles church. Labeling it a “man-centered culturally-minded organization” and “a business built around entertaining the goats” that is “no stranger to controversy,” apologist Jeff Maples reports:

“Yet, in the midst of their controversy, the voting bloc of Yelp consumer reviews tells a different story and Yelp has landed Hillsong as one of the top ten gay-friendly churches in Los Angeles.

This says something about Hillsong. A homosexual can walk in, sit down, be entertained, and not have their conscience pricked by the preaching of the biblical gospel and a call to repent of sins and come to Christ."<sup>34</sup>

### THE SAME GOD?

Houston was also involved in another controversy when he tried to cover his tracks in a teaching about Allah. In a 2013 sermon, Houston specifically stated that Christians and Muslims worship the same God. That sermon, "Living for the Master's 'Well Done'," was originally posted on YouTube, but later removed.<sup>35</sup> In that message, he stated, "Do you know — take it all the way back into the Old Testament and the Muslim and you, we actually serve the same God. Allah to a Muslim, to us, Abba Father God."<sup>36</sup>

Houston claimed he was taken out of context and that "misinformation" was being spread about his teachings. But, once again, his claim did more to obfuscate than clarify. Houston alleged:

"The spirit of the message was exactly the opposite of what some critics are claiming. If you listened to the message in its entirety, my point was that; who a Muslim extremist believes God is, determines what they believe God does, and what they believe God loves."<sup>37</sup>

Houston further asserted that his sermon was supposedly based on Psalm 119:68, but his sermon had nothing to do with that Psalm, rather as its title indicated, it was based on the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30). So Houston lied to cover up his error.

Houston stated that it "was clearly a (clumsy) way of me explaining that though both Christians and Muslims believe they serve the God of Abraham, they are very DIFFERENT 'entities' or 'deities' in both nature and action."<sup>38</sup>

I listened to the entire sermon and that was *not* the projected meaning. Houston has stated he does *not* believe God and Allah are the same, but that supposedly his carelessly-worded

message went all around the world and could have caused great damage in the church.

Additionally, for Houston to then attack those who questioned his teaching as promoting "false claims" is certainly uncharitable, because the wording of the sermon was plain and didn't leave anything to doubt. The timeline showing how the exposure and correction all went down proves there is a lot of deception by Houston in his coverup of what he said in the sermon, a sermon that was pulled from the Internet so that no one could see the context!<sup>39</sup>

So it appears that whenever Houston gets caught in controversial issues, he lies and tries to cover-up the errors, even to the point of scrubbing sermon videos from the Internet.

### HILLSONG NEW YORK CITY

While all of the Hillsong assemblies have a concert-style worship complete with Word Faith heretical teaching, Hillsong New York seems to have the worst leadership. It could be seen as an example of all that is wrong with Hillsong. This church's previously noted attitude towards homosexuality is just one example.

Hillsong NYC is led by Pastor Carl Lentz, with Houston's son Joel as co-pastor. Lentz was introduced to Hillsong Church in Sydney, Australia, as a new believer in 1999. Lentz said "he couldn't believe how much fun Hillsong had made church."<sup>40</sup> For Lentz, then, church was meant to be "fun." Lentz "has a half-shaved head, ripped jeans, is covered with tattoos and draws a celebrity audience of people like Justin Bieber and NBA star Kevin Durant."<sup>41</sup> Lentz has also been seen with a "Mohawk" hairdo and body piercings.<sup>42</sup>

Lentz is a social justice warrior who has joined with the "Black Lives Matter" movement. On a Facebook post Lentz wrote:

"At THIS church, we are not saying 'all lives matter' right now because this is a logical assumption that most reasonable people agree with. All lives are not at risk right now. We ARE saying BLACK LIVES MATTER. Because, right now, black lives apparently

are worth LESS on our streets. It's 'our fight' not 'their fight.'"<sup>43</sup>

In May 2016, Lentz was involved with Hillsong's Colour Conference held at the Hulu Theater located in New York City's Madison Square Garden. At this women's conference he joined other Hillsong "pastors" singing and dancing on stage with a cowboy-hat-wearing-man clad only in scant shorts behind a guitar, so that he looked naked, as they all sang the song, "New York, New York" along with an ensemble of dancing girls.<sup>44</sup> In his critique of the event, Steven Kozar writes:

"In case you don't know, the 'naked cowboy' is a real character who walks around Times Square in New York City. So it appears that the staff at Hillsong thought it would be funny for someone to portray that guy on stage at this woman's conference. Once again, Hillsong has been caught on camera doing something questionable and inappropriate, but we're supposed to trust them and not believe what we can see with our own eyes."<sup>45</sup>

Hillsong's "naked cowboy" was none other than their youth "pastor" Diego Simila, a former male model with tattoos plastered across his chest and arms. Houston responded to the incident with:

"I do know that Bobbie — my wife — who was convener of the conference was clearly unaware that this was going to happen and was taken back [sic] by it. She was at the dress rehearsal and there was no sign of a cowboy there. Carl and Laura Lentz were also not part of the decision. I can only guess at this point, that some one thought it would be funny and sent him out there without thinking about the ramifications. ... Some well-meaning person just made a silly decision. It won't happen again."<sup>46</sup>

All the pastors were on the stage and yet Houston claims not to know who was responsible. However, within hours of Houston's statement the videos were scrubbed from the Internet, as well as were all other videos of Simila on Hillsong's site.<sup>47</sup>

And the sensuality continues. In the late spring 2019, Hillsong NYC put on a “musical conference” where women dressed in towels, and some in bathrobes, performed suggestive dances.<sup>48</sup> Yes, for Lentz and his flock, church is meant to be “fun.”

### ADDITIONAL LENTZ CONCERNS

During a 2017 interview with Joy Behar on *The View*, Lentz was asked, “So it’s not a sin in your church to have an abortion?” His response was:

“That’s the kind of conversation we would have, finding out your story, where you’re from, what you believe ... God’s the judge. People have to live to their own convictions, and I think if I have to tell you ... that’s such a broad question to me.”<sup>49</sup>

Behar then asked, “So it’s not an open-and-shut case with you?” To which Lentz responded, “Some people would say it is. I think, to me, I’m trying to teach people who Jesus is first, find out their story before I start picking and choosing what I think is sin in your life. I’d like to know your name.”<sup>50</sup>

After receiving much backlash from the Christian media and leaders, Lentz wrote on Twitter:

“Recently in an interview, I was asked direction if abortion is sin. I did not answer the question directly for a number of reasons and that has caused some confusion about our stance as a church on this matter. I do believe abortion is sinful. Our prayer is that we can continue to help and love those that deal with the pain of regret from personal choices, rather than cast further shame and guilt on those already carrying so much and create a church that can teach people how to form convictions based on God’s word, that will be the driving force in all their decisions.”<sup>51</sup>

So he now states that abortion is indeed a sin — or at least “sinful” — but apparently he doesn’t think the person who had an abortion should be confronted with that fact. Unsurprisingly, Lentz has stated that those who criticize him and his church for their

teachings must know a “different Jesus” than he knows.<sup>52</sup>

In October 2018, during an interview with Oprah Winfrey, Lentz provided additional false teachings. He was given a perfect opportunity to preach the Gospel, but never did. When discussing the Holy Spirit, Winfrey said of the third person of the Godhead that “it’s a thing, it’s a power, it’s a force,” and “I call it divine energy.” Lentz responded with, “I don’t disagree with your term ... I think when you put it like you just did — divine energy — that’s exactly what it is.”<sup>53</sup> This is, of course, heresy, more at home with the theology of Jehovah’s Witnesses than of biblical Christianity.

Lentz later told Winfrey that, “because of Jesus you have the right to put your hand up and totally start a new cycle. That, to me, is the essence of what we’re [Hillsong NYC] trying to do, is get people to allow God to do what only God can do.” Really? People have to *allow* God to do things? Then he cited Psalm 46:10, “Be still and know that I am God,” and asked, “Why does it do that? Because when you’re still you realize who’s God and who isn’t.” Winfrey responded with, “Oh yeah,” and Lentz ended by saying, “It’s the best idolatry fighter in the world.” This is an egregious abuse of Scripture. The passage has nothing at all to do with what he claims. At the end Winfrey asked him to define “success.” Lentz responded with a self-serving statement: “Seeing other people thrive. That’s, for me, I just couldn’t think of a more successful life than being able to look back and say people’s lives were better because they crossed my path.”<sup>54</sup>

### HILLSONG LONDON

Hillsong UK (Central London) has caught the eye of apologists because they seem to take Lentz’s “fun” to a new level. Discernment ministries took note when, in 2015, they put on a special concert which included a ramped-up, raucous rock and roll version of the Christmas hymn, “Silent Night.” It seems the female soloist was made to look like a cabaret singer, complete with heavy make-up and lots of leg showing in a white outfit. While dancing a wee bit pro-

vocatively, the female dancers around her were dressed in black. After she finished singing a verse an ensemble of men came up to dance with the women and then one man soloed the same verse with other men dancing (including pelvic thrusting) behind him, and then more dancing took place with the whole group. The dancing was quite frenzied.<sup>55</sup>

Steven Kozar, of Pirate Christian Radio, stated the following:

“For those of you who say ‘but this was a performance at a special concert event — this wasn’t an actual worship service; you need to see this in its proper context...’ Here’s a question; why would a ‘church’ have an event/concert with moral guidelines that are different from the moral guidelines that govern a worship service? Why be ‘a little more like the world’ to attract people to a spectacle (like this video) and then ‘re-adjust’ things for a Sunday morning service? If this video is supposed to be sleazy on purpose to somehow try and teach a lesson, Hillsong doesn’t mention it anywhere — and this is from their own YouTube channel. It seems that this is just a very obnoxious version of Silent Night to grab the attention of the crowd.”<sup>56</sup>

Kozar also noted that a few hours after his ministry posted a video of the performance, it was “made private” by Hillsong.

Charismatic apologist Michael L. Brown — who is described as one who “has simply never met a heretic he could not make an excuse for” — admitted:

“I was absolutely appalled by Hillsong’s super-slick, cabaret rendition of Silent Night. It was the farthest thing you could imagine from the words ‘Silent night, holy night’ and some viewers rightly dubbed it ‘Unholy Night.’ From the dissonant jazzy sounds to the cabaret dancers, it was nothing less than shockingly irreverent.”<sup>57</sup>

However, in his typical excuse-making fashion, Brown advised:

“But the Hillsong ‘Unholy Night’ controversy reminds us that we

must be very careful in how we make our judgments, not judging by mere outward appearances but rather judging righteously. In this case, the outward appearances were damning, but there was more to the story than met the eye. Again, you might still differ with Hillsong's Christmas presentation, and you might still take issue with some of their teachings or with their overall approach to ministry. But for those who completely threw them under the bus because of their cabaret version of Silent Night, this should be a cautionary lesson. It's a lesson we should all learn well, since we will be judged in the same way that we judge others. And it's a lesson I try to remember before I ever write or speak, since it's far better to wait and be sure than to launch an unrighteous attack. Let's make this a teachable moment."<sup>58</sup>

It appears that Brown's defense comes in spite of the fact that he learned that Hillsong wanted the piece to be sleazy. Brown reported a comment that a Twitter follower shared by one of the pastors at Hillsong Australia:

"He explained that this despicable version of Silent Night was designed to be cringeworthy in every way — in other words, it was intended to elicit the kinds of responses that it drew — and it was written and produced to portray Herod's alleged desire to worship the newborn King. This, then, was meant to be the world's version of Silent Night, which was anything but holy. The pastor also explained that later in the Christmas play, in adoration of Jesus, Silent Night was sung again, this time the right way, in stark contrast with Herod's version. Now, you still may not like what Hillsong did, and you still might not agree with their overall methodology, but the great reminder for me was this: I went through every scenario that I could think of, trying to figure out any possible explanation for this travesty, and I could find none. Yet there was an explanation, and it was one that I

had never considered. Honestly, who would have ever thought of it without being told?"<sup>59</sup>

So, Brown's excuse was to not judge by outward appearances. But there was *no* excuse for such a display by a supposed Christian group. Kozar had a response to Brown's defense. Kozar, in reviewing the Twitter post that Brown cited to defend the performance, discovered the statement that "This video was not released by Hillsong, nor would this number ever be an item on its own" was false. Kozar states that "the video *was* released by Hillsong... as an item of it's [sic] own... on Hillsong's *own* YouTube channel!"<sup>60</sup>

As for "context," what was described by Hillsong with what took place before and after this song may be justification for some, but the fact remains that *they* are the ones who posted the video out of its context! And if they really thought it was okay, then why did they pull the video erasing the evidence against them? It was never previously explained to the audience exactly what they were trying to get across. Moreover, it is shameful to take a beloved and reverent hymn and denigrate it as a means to convey their message of "Herod's alleged desire to worship the newborn King." Regardless of Hillsong's intent, that portion of the concert was shocking and disgraceful, period.

In a similar vein, a few months earlier, Hillsong London held a conference with a comparable performance:

"In 2015, the London conference began with a procession of dark-clad people with white, alien being-like bulbous headpieces, accompanied by loud music. Presumably this was supposed to symbolise the spiritual blindness of those who live their lives without Christ. When reviewing the promotional literature and websites, one finds that a very strong emphasis is placed on the level of spectacle provided: as though potential delegates to conferences and Christmas carol concerts will not be persuaded to part with their cash unless they believe they

will get enough bang for their bucks."<sup>61</sup>

The London church's "senior pastor" Gary Clarke had also demonstrated his lack of discernment in 2016 when he dressed up as fictional movie character Austin Powers at a women's gathering called the Colour Conference.<sup>62</sup> Powers is described as "a womanizing, hard partying British spy embodying the Swinging London mod culture and hippie culture of the 1960s" who exhibits an "advocacy for free love."<sup>63</sup> This is the same event where Hillsong's youth pastor, Diego Simila, appeared as the "naked cowboy."

In December 2017 another "Christmas" rock concert was put on, only this time the dancing women weren't dressed as immodestly. One critical review stated, "Thankfully, there was no open skirts flying open, but the short shorts and miles of thighs to behold were keeping with Hillsong's fetish of sensuality."<sup>64</sup>

And the following year, Christmas 2018, Hillsong continued with yet another provocative theme:

"The trailer for the Hillsong London's Christmas program depicts the 'Three Wisemen' hunting down the newborn Christ at the Inn. The Inn, in the Hillsong depiction, was a place where patrons were swilling mugs of beer at a bar, while serving wenches danced on tables. As the scene progresses, Jesus is depicted with Mary and Joseph in the midst of the bar scene, among much mirth and merriment."<sup>65</sup>

## OTHER HILLSONGS

Hillsong Phoenix, in February 2019, hosted "the apostate Alpha Conference — an ecumenical, emergent conference that seeks to unify all the various faiths under one umbrella" which featured Catholic priest Mike Schmitz as well as held a Catholic Mass!<sup>66</sup> In January 2020 they hosted another Alpha conference with another Catholic speaker, James Mallon, as well as Francis Chan, an ecumenist who associates with various false teachers.<sup>67</sup>

Hillsong Sweden demonstrated it aligns with the methodology of other

Hillsong assemblies. At a “worship service” they played “The Eye of the Tiger,” by Survivor, during which “lead pastor” Andreas Nielsen smashed his guitar to pieces.<sup>68</sup>

And Hillsong Gold Coast, in Queensland, Australia, actually put on a circus in 2019:

“Hillsong Gold Coast, led by James & Elida Turner, recently put on a circus performance at their campus. Not kidding. In a program they call #SundayNightAtTheMovies, they put on such an outlandish and ridiculous stunt that even the most biblically-ignorant unbelievers can look at this and tell it has absolutely nothing to do with Christianity. It’s a freak show. A literal freak show.”<sup>69</sup>

### WORSHIP AND MUSIC

Always remember that Hillsong’s music program funds the entire denomination. Whenever a church sings their songs they are funding their false “vision” and false teachings.

All Hillsong assemblies seem to make their “worship” times into concerts, whether at Sunday services or during concerts. For example, well known pop music star Selena Gomez led a “worship” time in February 2016 at Hillsong’s “Young & Free Revival Concert” in Los Angeles. She wrote a song, “Nobody,” specifically for that “worship.” The song’s lyrics speak of a “you” who is unidentified and could very well be a lover. One news report sought to clear up the ambiguity:

“After a fan inquired who the ‘Nobody’ lyrics were about, Gomez revealed in a Twitter question-and-answer session last year that the song is about her relationship with God. ‘God,’ Gomez answered. ‘Nobody is about Him.’”<sup>70</sup>

GQ magazine describes the Hillsong phenomena:

“The book on Hillsong, however — the other book, lowercase *b* — is that they’re the real article: the world’s first genuinely cool church. ‘The music! The lights! The crowds!’ begins an incredulous woman narrating a CNN

segment on Hillsong NYC in smarmy CNNese. ‘It looks like a rock concert. And the lines around the block are enough to make any nightclub envious.’ The chyron reads ‘Hipster preacher smashes stereotypes.’ They call Pastor Carl a hipster — ABC actually said ‘hipster heartthrob’ — and Carl says he doesn’t know what that means, and he wears a motorcycle jacket when he says this.”<sup>71</sup>

Hillsong participated in the 2008 Roman Catholic “World Youth Day” event in Sydney. At the gathering, “Their Hillsong ‘UNITED’ band lead [sic] worship on the final night while Roman Catholic’s [sic] participated in their pagan Eucharist practice.”<sup>72</sup> Hillsong Phoenix Pastor Terry Crist sees Hillsong’s role “in uniting Roman Catholics, Evangelicals and Hillsong believers together in the name of Jesus Christ.”<sup>73</sup>

Althea Talbot-Howard offers an interesting observation about Hillsong music:

“Hillsong’s music ranges in quality from world-class, Grammy-winning prog-rock-ish, poetically-pleasing, doctrinally-adequate and prophetically-anointed songs; to overly-emotional, doctrinally-vacuous ‘Jesus is my girlfriend’-type ditties that can’t be forgotten too quickly. The music might draw people in, but is it sound enough to make disciples and root people in the gospel?”<sup>74</sup>

Bruce Herwig says:

“My goal of writing this is to challenge churches and worship leaders to think seriously about not only WHAT they are singing, but to also consider where their songs come from and who (and what) they may be unintentionally endorsing in the process. *All MOVEMENTS have an agenda and need to be scrutinized ... much more than a solo songwriter. When it comes to worship, why are we taking our cues from a movement where we don’t align on some very fundamental doctrinal issues?* • Apostolic Authority • Second Blessing • Prosperity Gospel • Women Lead Pastors • A

church that offers a non-committal answer when it comes to homosexual marriage.”<sup>75</sup>

And he further comments:

“As for me, I do not align with Hillsong, their teaching or their theology. *Therefore, no matter how popular they are, or how I might not take issue with a particular song, I do not think it is wise to partner with them in worship.* There are enough good songs out there that don’t have the baggage. We have a choice ... we can sing something else.”<sup>76</sup>

And Taffy Brodesser-Akner, writing in GQ magazine, had a quite amusing statement about the songs of Hillsong:

“The music of Hillsong is a catalog of Selena Gomez-grade ballads, with melodies that all resemble one another, pleasingly, like spa music. They call to mind deeply sincere love songs, if it were appropriate to put phrases like *my savior on that cursed tree and furious love laid waste to my sin and suffered violence healed my blindness and facedown where mercy finds me first* in a love song. Tonally and tunefully, it’s a Jonas Brothers song. Lyrically, it’s a hymn, and yet the singing is hot-breathed and sexy-close into microphones. It made my body feel confused.”<sup>77</sup>

Cameron Buettel and Jeremiah Johnson have some very critical things to say about Hillsong’s music:

“Hillsong has probably done a better job than anyone else in filling the musical void that many modern churches have experienced. Their songs are catchy, their musicians are excellent, and their songwriters know how to ‘sound Christian’ enough to salve the consciences of all in attendance. Consequently, their music permeates the Christian world, and their album sales are huge — even by secular standards. ... But we should be wary when our ancient and exclusive faith is overrun with modern songs featuring a fluid and indistinct message. In many instances, Hillsong lyrics are so vague they could be embraced

by most religions. ... In fact, there's little to distinguish [their song 'Wake'] from the forlorn ramblings of a junior high love letter."<sup>78</sup>

Referring to Hillsong's "What a Beautiful Name," Buettel and Johnson point out that:

"... the second verse is a great example of the doctrinal maladies that plague most of the Hillsong catalogue — malpractice, man-centeredness, and missing information. ... The writer of 'What a Beautiful Name' would have us believe that the reason for Christ's life, death, and resurrection was because He 'didn't want heaven without us.' That's a nice sentiment, but it's not remotely biblical. In fact, it's doctrinal *malpractice* by people who should know better. ... Furthermore, that unbiblical statement flows out of the *man-centered* worldview that permeates almost everything Hillsong does. ... It's exceedingly rare for Hillsong worship to even mention sin, but even if they do it's left completely undefined. Similar subjects like God's wrath, repentance, judgment, depravity, and personal holiness are virtually absent from the entire Hillsong catalogue. ... In our estimation, Hillsong represents the next wave of the kind of seeker sensitivity John MacArthur has warned about throughout his ministry. They are cut from the same cloth as Robert Schuller, Bill Hybels, and Rick Warren — they're just aiming for a younger, hipper audience."<sup>79</sup>

Buettel and Johnson conclude with: "Hillsong LA's church services are virtually indistinguishable from rock concerts. From the moment you walk in, your eyes and ears are assaulted by incoherent multimedia displays, with vague artistry passing for profundity. While the familiar elements of a church service are there — prayer, worship, teaching, etc. — they're usually designed and deployed as an appeal to your senses, not your soul. It makes you wonder what people think they're committing to

during the pseudo-altar call that ends every service."<sup>80</sup>

If you really need to know why Hillsong's music is what it is, recall what Jonathan Douglass listed as his second point in "5 Things That Should Matter to a Worship Pastor":

**"We are about fulfilling our Senior Pastor's vision (not our own).** It is so important that as amazing as our creative ideas might be, if they don't ultimately line up with what our Senior Pastor and leaders want, then we happily put them aside. The church doesn't exist to build our worship teams... our worship teams exist to build the Church!"<sup>81</sup>

Where does one find this claim supported in Scripture?

While there are some songs from Hillsong which do have proper theological lyrics, they seem to be few and far between, and even then they will likely have a whole lot of repetitive lines! Others, also with lots of repetitive lines, tend to have lyrics that are vacuous and/or esoteric. But aside from some with poor theology, so very many are of the "Jesus is my boyfriend" genre — *theoerotic* is the term which has been coined for such songs.

Examples could abound with the *theoerotic* lyrics, but a few examples should be sufficient for understanding the problem:

- "Oceans" has a theme repeated three times in the song: "When oceans rise, my soul will rest in Your embrace. For I am Yours and You are mine."

- "Forever Reign" has a chorus repeated several times: "I'm running to Your arms. I'm running to Your arms. The riches of Your love, Will always be enough. Nothing compares to Your embrace."

- "Where You Are," which *Charisma* magazine calls "an electronic love song for Jesus,"<sup>82</sup> intones: "I lived. Heart on a wire. Hand in the fire for so long. But You've shown me better. A new kind of love. It's ever the one I want. ... I just want to be where You are. Your love, like nothing I've seen. My wildest of dreams don't come close. I've never known better than living like this. I cannot resist You, Lord." While the song concludes with

"I cannot resist You, Lord," those who sing this song could very well be singing to a lover.<sup>83</sup>

And apart from its "love" songs, Hillsong travels into other questionable territory. "So Will I (100 Billion X)" is a 2017 song which promotes theistic evolution: "All nature and science, Follow the sound of Your voice. And as you speak, A hundred billion creatures catch your breath. Evolving in pursuit of what you said. If it all reveals your nature so will I." In his critique of the song, David Mathis says, "It's difficult to read 'evolving' here, in the context of *nature and science*, as anything other than an affirmation of what we might call 'theistic evolution' — that God governed and guided the process modern science has called 'evolution.'"<sup>84</sup>

Lest Mathis be accused of overemphasis, Joel Houston, in regard to the song, stated on Twitter:

"Evolution is undeniable — created by God as a reflective means of displaying nature's pattern of renewal in pursuance of God's Word — an ode to the nature of the creative God it reflects — and only ever in part — not the SOURCE! Science and faith aren't at odds. God created the Big-Bang."<sup>85</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Summing up the major problems with Hillsong, we see that their leadership includes nepotism and husband/wife pastoral teams which are rife with false teachings, including a passivity towards homosexuality. Their concerts are known to be sensual displays of blasphemy and their music is usually vacuous and/or *theoerotic*. As Gary Gilley points out:

"Passion and emotionalism are often and easily confused in the modern church. The Christian life runs the full range of emotions: joy, peace, delight, love, sorrow, grief, concern, etc. Ours is a faith not only of the head but also of the heart. As a result it is right and proper to desire spiritual experience. The problem is that many Christians cannot tell the

difference between enthusiasm for God and manipulation of the moment. Entertainment can look strangely like worship; fun can masquerade as joy; fleshly excitement can be perceived as divine encounter.”<sup>86</sup>

Hillsong’s worship services are of the market-driven genre with a concert atmosphere focusing on a younger audience. Because of their focus, sin is something rarely talked about as the entire experience is about driving emotions. Moreover, Hillsong — through its music ministry — has been able to infiltrate and influence otherwise sound biblical churches. That is an important aspect which has flown under the discernment radar for far too long. Sadly, and perhaps unknowingly, churches that use their music are helping to fund Hillsong’s apostasy.

In the end, Hillsong is really a cult of personality. Their teachings are typical auspicious sermons, often with the prosperity gospel, and even the social gospel occasionally slipped in. They are part of the New Apostolic Reformation, which leads to sharp charismatic leanings. The controversial religious empire started by Brian Houston is a church that emphasizes “feel good” experiences at the expense of biblical truth; enticing and entertaining rather than educating and edifying.

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## THE TRINITY

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12:30). Third, understanding the doctrine of the Trinity can guard us against mistaken concepts of who our God is and protect us from cults and other religions that deny and distort the concept.

### A MALIGNED, MISREPRESENTED AND MISUNDERSTOOD DOCTRINE

The Trinity doctrine is easy to misunderstand. We cannot fully comprehend it with our finite minds and perhaps never will — even in eternity.

Bill Bright, the late founder of Campus Crusade for Christ (now known as Cru), wrote, "One of my seminary professors once said, 'The man who denies the Trinity will lose his soul. The man who tries to understand the Trinity will lose his mind.'"<sup>2</sup> While a correct understanding of the Trinity is *not* a requirement for salvation, one can sympathize with the sentiment about losing one's mind.

Likewise, Chuck Smith, founder of the Calvary Chapel church movement, observed:

"Many cult groups (such as Jehovah's Witnesses) take advantage of [the] gulf between the finite and the infinite to attack the triunity of God by denying the deity of Jesus Christ and passing off the Holy Spirit as an essence. Other groups deny the existence of the Father and the Holy Spirit, and say that Jesus alone is God."<sup>3</sup>

Theologian David Wells explains:

"This much is certain. Had the Christian faith merely been a human invention, Christians would never have come up with the doctrine of the Trinity. This doctrine is too thorny to understand and too difficult to explain for anyone to have deliberately fabricated it. There is no other religion that has anything remotely like this. No, this is not the fruit of our imagination but a doctrine of the way things are. God is triune. Knowing him in his triunity is central to Christian faith. Indeed, without this truth, that faith is not Christian at all."<sup>4</sup>

As a possible example of a sincere misunderstanding of the Trinity, some Muslims believe that the Trinity is

composed of God, Jesus, and Mary. Christian apologist Ron Rhodes explains:

"This idea seems to be based on Sura<sup>5</sup> 5:116 in the Quran: 'And behold! Allah will say: "O Jesus the son of Mary! Didst thou say unto men, worship me and my mother as gods in derogation of Allah?"' This may well be the way Muhammad understood the Christian belief in the Trinity. (Muhammad actually misunderstood a number of Christian doctrines. Scholars are convinced that Muhammad never knew the correct doctrines of historic, orthodox Christianity, and hence was unable to reject it. What he rejected were *distortions* of Christianity.)"<sup>6</sup>

As far as apparently deliberate mischaracterizations of the Trinity, Mormon Church founder Joseph Smith ridiculed the Trinity. He stated:

"Many men say there is one God; the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are only one God! I say that is a strange God anyhow — three in one, and one in three! It is a curious organization. ... All are to be crammed into one God, accord-

ing to sectarianism. It would make the biggest God in all the world. He would be a wonderfully big God — he would be a giant or a monster.”<sup>7</sup>

Instead, Mormons believe that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three gods. And they believe in many other gods. So, Mormons are polytheists, even teaching that people may become gods over their own planet.

Jehovah’s Witnesses deny the Trinity. Members vigorously mock, attack, and misrepresent it.

In 1989, the Jehovah’s Witnesses published the booklet *Should You Believe in the Trinity?*<sup>8</sup> Jehovah’s Witnesses are a contemporary manifestation of an early church heresy called Arianism. The Arians believed that Jesus was the highest of God’s created beings and not truly God.

Unitarians do not believe in the Trinity, hence their name. A Pentecostal offshoot, called the United Pentecostal Church, believes that Jesus manifests Himself as the Father, or the Son, or the Holy Spirit, at various times. This “Jesus Only” Pentecostalism is a manifestation of an ancient heresy called modalism (or Sabellianism).

## DEFINING THE TRINITY

The Trinity describes who the God of the Bible is within Himself. Here we will cite four theological works describing the Trinity, not because they say different things, but to give clarity to the doctrine:

- “We may say, then, that when the whole text of Scripture is taken seriously, the doctrine of the Trinity emerges. It teaches clearly that God is one and is unique, that he is the only God that is true and exists. It teaches, either directly or indirectly, that there are three persons who are fully divine, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And it also teaches, indirectly and by implication, that these three are one.”<sup>9</sup>

- “Put in a simple form, the doctrine of the Trinity consists of three affirmations: 1. God eternally exists as three distinct persons — the Father, the Son, and

the Holy Spirit. 2. Each of these persons is fully God — the Father is fully God, the Son is fully God, and the Holy Spirit is fully God. 3. There is only one God. ... each of these three affirmations is essential for us to believe.”<sup>10</sup>

- “The term ‘Trinity’ is not itself found in the Bible. It was first used by Tertullian at the close of the 2nd century, but received wide currency and formal elucidation only in the 4th and 5th centuries. Three affirmations are central to the historic doctrine of the Trinity: 1. There is but *one* God; 2. The Father, the Son and the Spirit is each fully and eternally God; 3. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit is each a distinct person. Nowhere does the Bible explicitly teach this combination of assertions. It may, nevertheless, be claimed that the doctrine of the Trinity is a profoundly appropriate *interpretation* of the biblical witness to God in the light of the ministry, death and resurrection-exaltation of Jesus — the ‘Christ event’.”<sup>11</sup>

- “The Christian Scriptures, along with the wider Church tradition that nurtured, cherished, and spread them, present us with three basic convictions: 1. There is only one God. 2. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is each God. 3. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are not the same. It cannot be said often enough that this *is* the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity in a nutshell.”<sup>12</sup>

## BIBLICAL SUPPORT FOR THE TRINITY

Because Christianity affirms that God is the Holy Trinity and because we say that the Bible is the authority for our beliefs, it follows that we should be able to see that the doctrine of the Trinity is a legitimate interpretation of the biblical data regarding who God has revealed Himself to be in the Scriptures, that is, that in the one nature, essence, or being of God, there are three distinct, co-equal, and co-eternal persons: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And God’s Word identifies each one of these three persons as God.

**The Father is God.** The Bible reveals that the Father is God. In the Sermon on the Mount, including the section that we call the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus Himself taught us to pray to the Father (Matthew 6:9-13), which indicates that the Father is God. And in the high priestly prayer of Jesus in John 17, Jesus prayed to the Father and in His prayer He said, “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (v. 3).

**The Son is God.** Scripture teaches that Jesus is God. The Bible says, “yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live” (1 Corinthians 8:6). So, Jesus is here called “Lord” (“God”). However, in this same passage, the Father is called God.

In the Gospels, Jesus quoted Psalm 110:1:

“Then Jesus answered and said, while He taught in the temple, ‘How is it that the scribes say that the Christ is the Son of David? For David himself said by the Holy Spirit: “The LORD said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.’” Therefore David himself calls Him “Lord”; how is He then his Son?’” (Mark 12:35-37a).

In this passage, Jesus’ quotation from the Psalms demonstrates that there are two different persons called “Lord” in that verse: “the LORD” (that is, the Father); and David’s Lord (that is, the Lord Jesus, who is God the Son).

Titus 2:13 tells us that God’s grace teaches us, among other things, that we should be “looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.” Thus, Jesus is here called “our great God and Savior.” And many more Scriptures also testify that Jesus is God.

**The Spirit is God.** There are Scriptures also that show that the Spirit is God. In Acts 5:3-4, we read:

“But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part

of the price of the land for yourself? ... You have not lied to men but to God.”

Second Corinthians 3:17 says, “Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”

Yet, the Bible clearly teaches the oneness of God. Deuteronomy 6:4, which Jews recite, says, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!” Jesus Himself quoted this verse in Mark 12:29.

In Isaiah, we read, “I am the LORD, and there is no other; there is no God besides Me” (45:5). Elsewhere, we read, “there is no other God but one” (1 Corinthians 8:4). Scripture says, “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5).

These verses, among others, demonstrate that there is only one God.

### OLD TESTAMENT INDICATIONS OF A PLURALITY WITHIN THE ONE GOD

Although the Old Testament does not reveal the doctrine of the Trinity with the clarity of New Testament, we can see indications of it. This is an example of what theologians refer to as “progressive revelation.” Theologian R.C. Sproul explains:

“This is the idea that, as time goes by, God unfolds more and more of His plan of redemption. He gives more and more of His self-disclosure by means of revelation. The fact that there is this progress in revelation does not mean that what God reveals in the Old Testament He then contradicts in the New Testament. Progressive revelation is not a corrective, whereby the latest unveiling from God rectifies a previous mistaken revelation. Rather, new revelation builds on what was given in the past, expanding what God has made known. Therefore, we do not see a manifest teaching of God’s triune nature on the first page of Scripture. There are hints of it very early in the Old Testament, but we do not have full information about the Trinitarian character of God in the Old Testa-

ment. That information comes later, in the New Testament, so we have to trace the development of this doctrine throughout redemptive history to see what the Bible is actually saying about these things.”<sup>13</sup>

Theologian Alister McGrath locates “four points in the Old Testament in which God speaks of himself in the plural (Genesis 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; Isaiah 6:8).”<sup>14</sup> McGrath wrote that while these four passages where God speaks of Himself in the plural, “are usually understood as ‘plurals of majesty’, or ‘the royal we’, ... many Christian writers, such as Augustine, argued that these verses already contained hints of a Trinitarian way of thinking.”<sup>15</sup> There are also other passages in the Old Testament that suggest that although God is one, He is not a solitary one, but plural in His being. For instance, the Hebrew word *Elohim* (the plural of the Hebrew word for God, *El*) is used for God many times in the Old Testament, as one source notes:

“The usual word for God in the Hebrew is *Elohim*. This noun is in the plural, whereas in several places the term for God is a singular, such as *El* or *Eloah*. ... When *Elohim* is used regarding the God of Israel, it is used with singular verbs, indicating that the God of Israel is a single being. The plural **allows** for a plurality of expression for God, as later revealed in the New Testament, but Hebrew grammar may also simply be using a plural of plentitude.”<sup>16</sup>

As noted above, in Psalm 110 we find evidence for two persons called “Lord,” where David says, “The LORD said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool’” (v. 1). Another Old Testament passage where the Father and the Son are is Proverbs 30:4,<sup>17</sup> which reads:

“Who has ascended into heaven, or descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has bound the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name, and what is His Son’s name, if you know?”

In Isaiah 48:16, we read, “And now the Lord GOD has sent Me, and His Spirit” (NASB).

### SOME NEW TESTAMENT EVIDENCES FOR THE TRINITY

There are New Testament passages that show all three members of the Trinity together. Although a caution must be issued against using what appears to be the “ideal” New Testament Scripture verse to “prove” the doctrine of the Trinity. That verse, 1 John 5:7, is found in both the KJV and the NKJV. In the NKJV, it says, “For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.”

However, as desirable as it would be to have this as a verse to prove that the Bible teaches the doctrine of the Trinity, the portion of this verse that states that the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit are one is almost certainly not in the original text of the Greek New Testament. In a text note on this passage, the NKJV even admits that, “Only four or five very late manuscripts contain these words in Greek.”<sup>18</sup> This verse probably was a later addition. Therefore, it should not be used to try to prove the doctrine of the Trinity.

In the synoptic Gospels, we see all three persons of the Trinity involved at Jesus’ baptism (Matthew 3:16-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22). Matthew’s account reads:

“When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’”

In the Upper Room discourse given to His disciples on the night before His crucifixion, Jesus said:

“And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever — the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him,

for He dwells with you and will be in you" (John 14:16-17).

Here we see that Jesus will ask the Father to send the Holy Spirit and that the Holy Spirit, who has been dwelling with them, would then come to live inside of them. This then came to pass at Pentecost.

When Jesus gave the Great Commission, we see all three persons of the Trinity linked together in the baptism that the disciples were to administer:

"And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.' Amen" (Matthew 28:18-20).

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are included in the baptismal formula because each is God. Even though there are three distinct persons mentioned here, the word "name" is singular, indicating three persons but one God.

We see all three persons of the Trinity in the benediction that Paul gives at the end of 2 Corinthians 13, where he writes, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen" (v. 14). If all three persons were not equal, it would seem strange for Paul to link them together in his benediction.

Ephesians 4:4-6 says, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." So, here we see one Spirit, one Lord (Jesus), and one God and Father of all — three persons, but one God.

First Corinthians 12:4-6 states, "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all."

Hebrews 9:14 says, "how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" Notice also the Spirit is called "the eternal Spirit." Only God is eternal in his nature.

### THE TRINITY IN CONCERT IN THE SCRIPTURES

Some of the attributes and activities attributed to God the Father also are shared by the Son and the Spirit.

**Love.** *The Father:* "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16; see Romans 5:5; 1 John 2:15). *The Son:* "For the love of Christ compels us" (2 Corinthians 5:14; see Romans 8:35, 39). *The Spirit:* "Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me" (Romans 15:30).

**Truth.** *The Father:* "So that he who blesses himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth; and he who swears in the earth shall swear by the God of truth" (Isaiah 65:16a). *The Son:* "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life'" (John 14:6a). *The Spirit:* "And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever — the Spirit of truth" (John 14:16-17a).

**Creation.** *The Father:* "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). *The Son:* "All things were made through Him [Jesus], and without Him nothing was made that was made" (John 1:3; see Colossians 1:16-17). *The Spirit:* "You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; and You renew the face of the earth" (Psalm 104:30).

### THE HOLY SPIRIT IS A PERSON

Some groups, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, try to characterize the Holy Spirit as an impersonal force or power, like electricity. But if the Holy Spirit is God, He is a person. We can show from Scripture that the Holy

Spirit is a person because He exhibits attributes of personality. He strives (Genesis 6:3); He teaches (John 14:26; 1 Corinthians 2:13); He reminds (John 14:26); He convicts (John 16:8-11); He speaks (Acts 8:29; 13:2; 28:25-27; 1 Timothy 4:1; Hebrews 3:7-11); He loves (Romans 15:30); He knows the things of God (1 Corinthians 2:11); He can be grieved (Ephesians 4:30); He can be lied to (Acts 5:3-4); He can be blasphemed (Matthew 12:31-32); He can be insulted (Hebrews 10:29). All of these are indications of personhood.

### THE NON-BIBLICAL WORD "TRINITY"

Jehovah's Witnesses, Muslims, and others point out that the word "Trinity" is not found in the Bible. While this is true, it is irrelevant. Many, if not most, disciplines have a specialized vocabulary to explain certain concepts, and theology is no exception. "Trinity," "incarnation," "inerrancy," and other such words are shorthand ways to describe biblical concepts, even though those exact words do not appear in the Bible.

Jehovah's Witnesses like the term "theocracy," which describes a biblical concept. Yet this word does not appear in the Bible. Regarding Muslims who raise the objection that the word "Trinity" doesn't appear in the Bible, Ron Rhodes suggests:

"One point you can make to a Muslim who argues this way is to point out that the Muslim term for God's unity (*tawhid*) is not in the Quran either. Yet Muslims still believe in the *concept* of God's unity because they believe the whole of the Quran teaches it. Likewise, though the *word* 'Trinity' is not mentioned in the Bible, the *concept* is clearly derived from Scripture."<sup>19</sup>

Theophilus, a bishop of Antioch in the late second century, used the Greek word *trias* ("triad") around A.D. 180.<sup>20</sup> Baptist theologian Millard Erickson explains:

"Theophilus identified the Spirit with Wisdom, which God used along with his Word in creation (Ps. 33:6). He was the first to use the term 'triad' with respect to the

Godhead, stating that the three days that preceded the creation of the sun and the moon 'were types of the Triad, that is, of God and of His Word and of His Wisdom.'"21

### THE CONTRIBUTION OF TERTULLIAN

Although Theophilus used the Greek word *trias* in connection with the Godhead, Erickson (along with many others) notes that it was the Latin theologian and church father Tertullian (c. A.D. 160-c. 220)<sup>22</sup> "who coined the term 'Trinity' (*trinitas*)."<sup>23</sup> Tertullian's contributions greatly advanced the church's understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity. He was a remarkable and intelligent man who strayed not long after his conversion to Christ, which occurred "shortly before 197."<sup>24</sup> Nathan Feldmeth notes, "Tertullian, in or just prior to 202, openly associated with a charismatic sect known as the Montanists ... Tertullian became the leading theologian of this group."<sup>25</sup>

Regarding the doctrine of the Trinity, however, Christian theologian Alister McGrath observed:

"The theologian who may be argued to have been responsible for the development of the distinctive trinitarian terminology is Tertullian."<sup>26</sup>

The first word McGrath mentions is "*Trinitas*," noting, "Tertullian invented the word 'Trinity' (*Trinitas*), which has become a characteristic feature of Christian theology since his time."<sup>27</sup> The other two words that McGrath notes that Tertullian applied to the doctrine of the Trinity, which have lasting importance, are *Persona* ("person") and *Substantia* ("substance").<sup>28</sup>

### HISTORICAL MENTIONS

Hippolytus and Origen also contributed to the church's eventual understanding of the Scripture's teaching on the Trinity. The major crisis that led to the church's formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity, however, was the teaching of an Alexandrian presbyter named Arius. One source notes, "The outset of the controversy, probably in about the year 319, was caused by Arius's preaching."<sup>29</sup> Arius

taught that Jesus was an exalted creature; but a creature, nonetheless, and not God. To Arius, it was appropriate to call Jesus, "God" or "Son of God," but only as courtesy titles.<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, Arius' teaching was opposed by his own bishop, Alexander of Alexandria.

In A.D. 325, the church convened its first ecumenical council, the Council of Nicea (Nicaea), where it condemned Arius and his doctrine and produced the Nicene Creed. Yet, what we call the Nicene Creed today is a revision of the creed produced in 325. However, "The issue at Nicaea was the Son's co-eternity with the Father, not the unity of the Godhead."<sup>31</sup> And, "Nicaea's lack of clarity became a weakness."<sup>32</sup> Moreover, Arianism didn't die out. Athanasius, who succeeded Alexander as bishop of Alexandria in 328,<sup>33</sup> championed Nicene's orthodoxy against Arianism.

Other theologians who were important in solidifying the doctrine of the Trinity after the Council of Nicea were the so-called Cappadocian fathers: Gregory of Nazianzus, Basil of Caesarea, and his brother, Gregory of Nyssa. "The Cappadocian fathers' Trinitarian formula stated that God is 'three persons [*hypostaseis*] in one essence [*ousia*].'"<sup>34</sup>

Almost 60 years after the Council of Nicea the church held its second ecumenical council at Constantinople in 381. This council produced a more complete, fully Trinitarian statement on the Godhead — a revision and expansion of the creed produced at Nicea. It is this latter creed that is today commonly referred to as the "Nicene Creed."<sup>35</sup>

After this council, Arianism largely went away. However, it was 70 years after this council that, "The Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451) focused on the relationship of Christ's humanity to his divinity and issued the formula of Chalcedon, which became the orthodox statement on the person of Christ."<sup>35</sup> The very important phrase concerning the divine and human natures of Christ that came out of that council was, "two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation."<sup>36</sup>

### OUR TRINITARIAN GOD: THREE PERSONS, ONE SUBSTANCE

Theologians say that God is three persons and one substance or essence. Concerning "substance," McGrath explains:

"'Substance' is what the three persons of the Trinity have in common. It must not be thought of as something which exists independently of the three persons; rather, it expresses their common foundational unity, despite their outward appearance of diversity."<sup>37</sup>

Instead of saying that God is one substance and three persons, some theologians will say that God is one essence (Greek word, *ousia*) and three persons. Robert Lightner explains, "[Norman] Geisler gives this simple working definition of essence: 'What makes a thing what it is, and not something else. God's essence is what makes Him God and not anything else.'"<sup>38</sup> For instance, all who are reading this article are human. That is our *essence*.

As for God being three persons, church father Augustine speaks about this in his work, *On the Trinity*:

"In very truth, because the Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Father, and the Holy Spirit ... is neither the Father nor the Son, they are certainly three. ... Yet when you ask 'Three what?' human speech labors under a great dearth of words. So we say three persons, not in order to say that precisely, but in order not to be reduced to silence."<sup>39</sup>

Some modern Trinitarian authors have spoken of "persons" in the Godhead as being "centers of consciousness." David Wells, for instance, says, "God can be one in being and yet have three centers of self-consciousness within his being: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."<sup>40</sup>

In responding to some questions posed to him about what we mean about "persons" in the Trinity, Trinitarian specialist, J. Scott Horrell, replied:

“By persons, along with what we’ve seen in Scripture about each thinking, willing, even demonstrating emotion, we would say that each divine person is a center of consciousness. I think a very distinct wholly personal entity, yet spirit, and each present in the other.”<sup>41</sup>

### PERICHORESIS AND RELATIONSHIPS IN THE TRINITY

What Horrell mentioned above about “each [person being] present in the other” is a facet of the doctrine of the Trinity called *perichoresis* (the Latin term is *circumincession*). This refers to the mutual indwelling of each of the persons of the Trinity within the other.

For instance, after Philip asks Jesus to show them the Father, “Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me’” (John 14:9-11a).

One doctrinal dictionary defines *perichoresis*:

“A Greek word meaning ‘penetration.’ This theological term refers to the relationship and interaction of Jesus’ two natures, the divine and human. It also refers to the indwelling interpenetration, the relationship among the persons of the Trinity. See: John 10:38; 14:10-12; 17:21; 1 Corinthians 2:10-16.”<sup>42</sup>

Another theological source states, “Circumincession [*perichoresis*] also affirms that the action of one of the persons of the Trinity is also fully the actions of the other two persons.”<sup>43</sup>

Although the actions of all three persons of the Trinity are also involved in the actions of any of the persons, that doesn’t deny that a particular person in the Trinity may have a *primary* role in a particular activity. Theologian Gregg Allison wrote, “The Father has the primary

role in *creation*, the Son has the primary activity in *salvation*, and the Holy Spirit has the primary function in *sanctification*.”<sup>44</sup>

There are also differences in relationships within the Trinity. Again, Allison explains:

“[T]he Father eternally relates to the Son in a paternal relationship. This means that the Father always commands, supervises, and directs the Son, and the Son always submits to him and obeys what he says. This does not mean the Father is superior to the Son and the Son is inferior to the Father. My father (who is a great dad!), though older and much wiser than I am, is not superior to me, his son. And my son (who is a great son!), though younger and less mature than I am, is not in any way inferior to me, his father. Rather, it simply means that the two always relate to each other in a Father-Son relationship. This also means that the Son, who is generated by the Father, is eternally dependent for his existence on the Father. He did not create the Son, but the Father eternally puts the Son in possession of his being. Jesus himself affirms this: ‘For just as the Father has life in Himself, so also He has granted to the Son to have life in Himself’ (John 5:26). In some mysterious way, the Father grants the Son his eternal existence. In other words, an eternal characteristic of the Father in relationship to the Son is *paternity*, and an eternal characteristic of the Son in relationship to the Father is *generation*.”<sup>45</sup> Another point is that the Holy Spirit relates to the Father and the Son as one who proceeds from both of them; thus, an eternal characteristic of the Holy Spirit in relationship to these two is *procession*. The procession of the Holy Spirit means he is eternally dependent for his existence on both the Father and the Son; they did not create him, but he eternally proceeds from them both.”<sup>46</sup>

In support of the procession of the Spirit from both the Father and the Son, Allison cites John 14:26; 15:26;

and 16:7.<sup>47</sup> Eastern Orthodoxy insists that the Spirit proceeds only from the Father, rather than from both the Father and the Son, a distinction that is beyond the scope of this article.

Certain passages in the New Testament indicate Jesus is subordinate to the Father. For example, Jesus says, “My Father is greater than I” (John 14:28). One way to harmonize this is that, “This is a clear statement of Jesus’ *functional subordination* to the Father. ... It does not deny the simultaneous *essential equality* of Father and Son.”<sup>48</sup>

Similarly, in another note on John 5:16-30, this same resource states:

“Throughout this passage it seems as if Jesus went back and forth between claiming He was equal to God and saying He was subordinate to His Father. Actually, both were true. There was essential equality with functional subordination. All three persons of the Trinity are fully divine and united as one God in three persons, but they have distinct as well as overlapping roles. The Son never commands the Father; He only obeys Him.”<sup>49</sup>

One question that some evangelical theologians debate is whether the Son’s functional subordination was only for the period of redemptive history or whether His functional subordination to the Father also continues in eternity.

### A MYSTERY, BUT NOT A CONTRADICTION

Although the doctrine of the Trinity is, as stated, a mystery, it is *not* a contradiction. Theologian R.C. Sproul explains:

“The doctrine of the Trinity teaches that God is one in essence and three in person, so He is one in one sense and three in another sense, and that does not violate the categories of rational thought or the law of non-contradiction. Nevertheless, people continue to charge that the Trinity is irrational.”<sup>50</sup>

Later, he says:

“Likewise, when we come to the doctrine of the Trinity, we say,

based on the revelation of Scripture, that there is a sense in which God is one and another sense in which He is three. We must be careful to point out that those two senses are not the same. If they were the same, we would be espousing a contradiction unworthy of our faith. But they are different, and so the doctrine of the Trinity is not a contradiction but a mystery, for we cannot fully understand how one God can exist in three persons.<sup>51</sup>

Elsewhere, in an audio message, Sproul reminded his audience that, when it comes to the nature of the Lord Jesus, we have the opposite situation as one has with the Trinity, regarding persons and essence. Whereas, in the Trinity, there is one essence (God) and three persons; in the incarnation of Jesus, the situation is one person (Jesus) and two essences (Jesus has both a divine nature and a human nature); and that, “the human essence (or the human nature) of Jesus does not belong to the Trinity.”<sup>52</sup> And, although, like the Trinity, the incarnation of Jesus is a mystery, it also is not a contradiction.<sup>53</sup>

### THE MYSTERY OF THE TRINITY

It is easy to accurately *define* the doctrine of the Trinity. It is also not difficult to demonstrate biblically the basic doctrine of the Trinity. However, to accurately conceptualize the Trinity is impossible to do with our finite human minds and there seems to be no fully adequate analogies with which to represent it. Many concepts and analogies of the Trinity fail in at least one of two directions: modalism (one God variously acting in three different roles) or tritheism (three individual, separate gods).

In his large work, *On the Trinity*, Augustine (A.D. 354-430) wrote concerning the effort to grasp this doctrine, “For nowhere else is a mistake more dangerous, or the search more laborious, or discovery more advantageous.”<sup>54</sup> Hence, it is not surprising that a number of heresies are associated both with the doctrine of the Trinity and with the related doctrine of Christ. “Heresy” is noted by one theological dictionary as:

“Any teaching rejected by the Christian community as contrary to Scripture and hence to orthodox doctrine. **Most of the teachings that have been declared heretical have to do with either the nature of God or the person of Jesus Christ.** The term *heresy* is not generally used to characterize non-Christian belief. That is to say, systems of belief such as atheism or agnosticism, or non-Christian religions such as Buddhism or Islam are not technically heresy. The term *heresy* is generally reserved for any belief that claims to be Christian and scriptural but has been rejected by the church as sub-Christian or anti-scriptural.”<sup>55</sup>

### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Baptist theologian Millard Erickson has observed that Christians are not the only ones who have problems conceptualizing something:

“Yet the theologian is not the only one who must retain two polarities as he functions. Physicists have never finally and perfectly resolved the question of the nature of light. One theory says that it is waves. The other says it is quanta, little bundles of energy as it were. Logically it cannot be both. Yet, to account for all the data, one must hold both theories simultaneously. As one physics major put it: ‘On Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, we think of light as waves; on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, we think of it as particles of energy.’ Presumably, on Sundays physicists do not concern themselves with the nature of light. One cannot explain a mystery; he can only acknowledge its presence.”<sup>56</sup>

So, don’t worry that you can’t “wrap your mind around” the Trinity! It is an *unfathomable mystery*. Elsewhere, Erickson writes:

“In practice even orthodox Christians have difficulty clinging simultaneously to the several components of the doctrine. Our use of these several analogies [that he presents] suggests that perhaps in practice or in our unofficial theol-

ogy none of us is really fully trinitarian. We tend to alternate between tritheism, a belief in three equal, closely related Gods, and modalism, a belief in one God who plays three different roles or reveals himself in three different fashions.”<sup>57</sup>

Bible expositor Chuck Smith noted, “for us to try to *fully* comprehend [the Trinity] is a futile expenditure of mental energy.”<sup>58</sup> It is important to note that he emphasized the word “fully.”

In considering the doctrine of the Trinity, it is useful to remember Psalm 131:1, where David wrote, “LORD, my heart is not haughty, nor my eyes lofty. Neither do I concern myself with great matters, nor with things too profound for me.” Wise words, indeed, that I believe are very applicable regarding the mystery of the Trinity.

Anglican clergyman Peter Toon said:

“The Trinity is not primarily a doctrine, any more than the Incarnation is primarily a doctrine. There is a doctrine *about* the Trinity, as there are doctrines about many other facts of existence, but, if Christianity is true, the Trinity is not a doctrine; the Trinity is God. And the fact that God *is* Trinity — that in a profound and mysterious way there are three divine Persons eternally united in one life of complete perfection and beatitude — is not a piece of gratuitous mystification, thrust by dictatorial clergymen down the throats of an unwilling but helpless laity, and therefore to be accepted, if at all, with reluctance and discontent. It is the secret of God’s most intimate life and being, into which, in his infinite love and generosity, he has admitted us; and it is therefore to be accepted with amazed and exultant gratitude.”<sup>59</sup>

Therefore, “For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen” (Romans 11:36).

### Endnotes:

1. There are non-Christian religions that

- have triads of gods; and because a “triad” simply means “a group of three,” the Trinity can be called a triad. However, pagan triads differ from the Trinity in that they are three separate gods, rather than one God in three persons. Thus, pagan triads are categorically different from the biblical Trinity. For more on this, see Robert Morey, *The Trinity: Evidence and Issues*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: World Publishing, Inc., 1996, pp. 487-489.
2. Bill Bright, *A Handbook of Concepts for Living: A Compilation of the Nine Transferable Concepts*. San Bernardino, Calif.: Here’s Life Publishers, Inc., 1981, pg. 88.
  3. Chuck Smith, *Charisma vs. Charismania*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1983, pg. 11.
  4. David F. Wells, *What Is the Trinity?* Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2012, pg. 5.
  5. A “sura” in the Quran is like a chapter in the Bible.
  6. Ron Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures with Muslims*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 2002, pp. 98-99, italic in original. The fact that the Quran has Allah badly misunderstanding the biblical doctrine of the Trinity doesn’t support the Muslim’s view of the Quran as being the perfect Word of God.
  7. Joseph Smith, June 16, 1844, sermon in *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1978, Vol. VI, pg. 476.
  8. *Should You Believe in the Trinity?* Brooklyn, N.Y.: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1989. PFO critiqued this Watchtower booklet in M. Kurt Goedelman, “Heresy for a Mere Donation: A Look at the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ Latest Attack on the Trinity,” *The Quarterly Journal*, July-September 1990, pp. 1, 10-15. A book-length response to the booklet was Robert M. Bowman, Jr., *Why You Should Believe in the Trinity: An Answer to Jehovah’s Witnesses*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1990.
  9. Millard J. Erickson, *Making Sense of the Trinity: 3 Crucial Questions*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2000, pg. 42.
  10. Gregg R. Allison, *Getting Deep: Understand What You Believe About God and Why*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2002, pp. 79, 80; see also pg. 88.
  11. M. Turner and G. McFarlane in J.D. Douglas, editor, *New Bible Dictionary*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press USA, 1996, pg. 1209, s.v., “Trinity,” bold numbers and italics in original.
  12. Stephen Bullivant, *The Trinity: How Not to Be a Heretic*. Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 2015, pg. 47, italic in original. These same three numbered assertions about the doctrine of the Trinity are made on pp. 1, 4, 20, 29, 107; and in a somewhat amplified version on pp. 85-86, 90.
  13. R.C. Sproul, *What Is the Trinity?* Sanford, Fla.: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2011, pp. 10-11.
  14. Alister E. McGrath, *Understanding the Trinity*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990, pg. 120.
  15. *Ibid.*
  16. Earl D. Radmacher, Ronald B. Allen, and H. Wayne House, editors, *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Commentary*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999, pp. xlvi, xlvi, italics in original, bold emphasis added.
  17. Thanks to Dallas Theological Seminary professor, Dr. Ronald B. Allen for pointing out that this Old Testament verse reveals the Father and the Son.
  18. *The Holy Bible* (Giant Print Edition, New King James Version). Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1982, pg. 1402, study note on 1 John 5:8. Although the text note is for 1 John 5:8, it states that the omitted words include those cited above from 1 John 5:7.
  19. *Reasoning from the Scriptures with the Muslims*, op. cit., pg. 114, italics in original.
  20. F.L. Cross and E.A. Livingstone, editors, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, pg. 1394, s.v., “Trinity, Doctrine of the.”
  21. Millard J. Erickson, *God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1995, pg. 47, citing “Theophilus, *To Autolychus* 1.7; 2.18” and “Theophilus, *To Autolychus* 2.15.”
  22. Various sources give slightly different approximations as to the dates of Tertullian’s birth and death. Thus, it is important to note that the dates of his birth and death are approximations.
  23. *Ibid.*, pg. 64, italic in original, citing “Tertullian, *Against Praxeas* 3, 11, 12.”
  24. Nathan P. Feldmeth, *Pocket Dictionary of Church History*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2008, pg. 131, s.v., “Tertullian, Quintus Septimius Florens (c. 160-c. 225).”
  25. *Ibid.*
  26. Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*. Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2017, pg. 304.
  27. *Ibid.*, italics in original.
  28. *Ibid.*, italics in original.
  29. William G. Rusch, editor and translator, *The Trinitarian Controversy*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980, pg. 17.
  30. *Ibid.*
  31. *Ibid.*, pg. 20.
  32. *Ibid.*, pg. 21.
  33. *Ibid.*
  34. Stanley J. Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1999, pg. 24, s.v., “Capadocian fathers,” bracketed italics in original.
  35. *Ibid.*, pg. 31, s.v., “Councils of Nicaea, Constantinople, Chalcedon.”
  36. Sproul, *What Is the Trinity?*, op. cit., pg. 38; cf. pg. 58.
  37. *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, op. cit., pg. 304.
  38. Robert P. Lightner, *The God of the Bible and Other Gods: Is the Christian God Unique Among World Religions?* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1998, pg. 90, quoting from Norman L. Geisler, *False Gods of Our Time*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1985, pg. 18.
  39. Saint Augustine, *The Trinity*, translator Edmund Hill. Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 1991, pg. 196. Cited in *The Trinity: How Not to Be a Heretic*, op. cit., pg. 96.
  40. Wells, *What Is the Trinity?*, op. cit., pg. 5; cf. pg. 25.
  41. Personal correspondence from Dr. J. Scott Horrell of Dallas Theological Seminary, email dated April 10, 2000. Copy on file.
  42. Terry L. Miethe, *The Compact Dictionary of Doctrinal Words*. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1988, pg. 157, s.v., “Perichoresis.”
  43. *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*, op. cit., pg. 26, s.v., “circumcession.”
  44. *Getting Deep*, op. cit., pp. 82-83, italics in original.
  45. Sometimes this is expressed by saying that the Son is — to use a confusing term — “eternally begotten” by the Father.
  46. *Ibid.*, pp. 81-82, italics in original.
  47. *Ibid.*, pg. 82.
  48. Ted Cabal, general editor, *The Apologetics Study Bible*. Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2007, pg. 1603, from the study note on John 14:28, emphasis added.
  49. *Ibid.*, pg. 1580, study note on John 5:16-30.
  50. Sproul, *What Is the Trinity?*, op. cit., pp. 53-54.
  51. *Ibid.*, pp. 58-59.
  52. R.C. Sproul, “The Council of Nicaea.” From the audio tape series, *The History of Christian Theology - Part (A)*. Orlando, Fla.: Ligonier Ministries, 1988, tape #TH110.3, side 2.
  53. *Ibid.*
  54. *The Trinity*, op. cit., pg. 68.
  55. *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*, op. cit., pg. 58, s.v., “heresy,” italics in original, bold emphasis added.
  56. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1983, pg. 341.
  57. *Ibid.*, pg. 340.
  58. *Charisma vs. Charismania*, op. cit., pg. 11, italic in original.
  59. Peter Toon, *Our Triune God: A Biblical Portrayal of the Trinity*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, pp. 44-45, italics in original, quoting from Eric Mascall, *Whatever Happened to the Human Mind?* London: SPCK, 1980, pp. 117-118.

Jesus is identified in many ways: Word, Life, Light, Son; but He is never identified as the Father. Christians must *know* that while the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit cannot be *separated*, they are — and must be — *distinguished*. As Greg Sheryl clearly affirms in his article in this *Journal* (and as depicted in the cover artwork), the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all God; but they are distinct from One another: the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is not the Father.

The doctrine of the Trinity, and its proper understanding, is fundamental to the Faith and is essential for believers. Yet it is too often overlooked. As James White states, “the doctrine is *misunderstood* as well as *ignored*. It is so misunderstood that a majority of Christians, when asked, give *incorrect* and at times downright *heretical* definitions of the Trinity. For others, it is ignored in such a way that even among those who correctly understand the doctrine, it does not hold the place it should in the proclamation of the Gospel message, nor in the life of the individual believer in prayer, worship, and service” (*The Forgotten Trinity*, pg. 16, italics in original).

Perhaps pastors and Sunday school teachers are tempted to exclude a sermon or study of the Trinity because they suspect that it will be lacking, and only further confuse and not really help their members. But such thinking should be abandoned and replaced with a desire to, as White contends, “lead God’s people to a deeper knowledge of God’s truth” (*ibid.*, pg. 17).

—MKG

## NEWS UPDATES

(continued from page 3)

who heads up an apostolic prophetic ministry in Texas, exemplifies such prophecy.

In the June/July issue of Strang’s *Charisma* magazine, Pierce writes in his article, “A Modern-Day Passover,” that he “started prophesying in September 2019 that 2020 would be a ‘true Passover’ year.” He explains what that meant, saying, “I heard the Lord speak to me: ‘This will be a year that plague-like conditions will infiltrate the earth.’” In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, so far, so good with his retroactive prophecy.

But then, looking beyond the time he penned his article, his prophetic insight did not fare as well. He wrote, “The Lord then spoke: ‘Plague-like conditions will hit the earth. February, March and April will be hellish.’” However, on April 8-9 Passover would take place and those who “would acknowledge and honor His Blood would have the power to command the death grip to let go beginning at Passover. Death tolls would begin to decrease and would cease increasing.”

Unfortunately, for Pierce and *Charisma*, death tolls did not decrease following Passover. During the 11 weeks from the first coronavirus-related death in the United States until Passover, there were slightly fewer than 30,000 deaths. In the eleven weeks following Passover that number tripled with over 92,000 additional deaths being reported. Worldwide the numbers were even worse; up until Passover there were just over 100,000 deaths, but in the three months following Passover the figure escalated to more than one-half million deaths.

—MKG

## NON-PROFITS RECEIVE MILLIONS IN SMALL BUSINESS LOANS

Numerous churches and ministries throughout the country received at least \$7.3 billion in federal loans under the U.S. Small Business Administration Paycheck Protection Program. According to *Newsweek* magazine, “evangelical leaders tied to President Donald Trump and megachurches tied to scandals” were among those “pulling in some of the largest payouts.” The PPP loans were part of the CARES Act and were given from April through June to businesses, including churches and non-profit organizations, to keep their employees on payroll during the COVID-19 pandemic. As long as 75 percent of the money was used for payroll, the loans are forgivable and will not have to be paid back.

Among the ministries and churches receiving loans were Joyce Meyer Ministries, Willow Creek Community Church, and City of Destiny. *Newsweek* indicated that both Joyce Meyer Ministries and Willow Creek were approved for between \$5 and \$10 million in loans. City of Destiny, the Florida-based church run by Paula White-Cain, received between \$150,000 and \$350,000.

*The Dallas Morning News* revealed that the Potter’s House (founded by T.D. Jakes) and the Trinity Broadcasting Network were also among others who received loans. No amounts were given, but were stated to be loans in the “top range.” The newspaper also said that Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship, pastored by Tony Evans, received funds and noted that the church “acquired the 157-acre Golf Club of Dallas in May; the club is adjacent to the church’s educational center.”

Scientology branches in New York, Washington, D.C., and Belleair, Florida, received small business loans of \$150,000 to \$300,000, according to a full list of recipients released by the U.S. Treasury.

Other organizations receiving funds included various Planned Parenthood centers and the American Atheists. The New Jersey-based atheists group, which advocates for separation of church and state, took issue that the loans had been given to churches and religious groups, calling it “an unprecedented giveaway.”

—MKG



# Books in Review

## THE MOST MISUSED VERSES IN THE BIBLE

by Eric J. Bargerhuff

Bethany House, 172 pages, \$12.99

Most Christians are aware that the Bible in the hands of a cultist such as one of Jehovah's Witnesses is deceptive and harmful because of the way Scripture is misused and distorted to agree with what they teach. But author Eric Bargerhuff, a pastor, warns us that Christians should be aware that, even for the child of God, "if mishandled and used inappropriately, the Bible can turn into a *dangerous book*" (pg. 14).

He admonishes believers to "resist the temptation to make a passage 'work' how we want it to work or 'make it say' what we want it to say" (pg. 163). To assist in this safeguard, he offers a collection of 17 Scripture passages that he sees as the most misused verses in the Bible and which he places "into their proper context so that they can be interpreted and applied correctly" (pg. 16).

Several of his selected misused verses will be familiar to the discerning Christian: "Do not judge, or you too will be judged" (Matthew 7:1); "Money is the root of all evil" (1 Timothy 6:10); "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13); and "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38).

However, his essays also encompass others that are less suspected. For example, he includes one of the most beloved verses in the Bible, Romans 8:28. Although most Christians realize that while all things work together for good, not all those things *are* good. And while Bargerhuff stresses that aspect, he further emphasizes, "Paul says this is a promise for Christians only. ... So Christians should be careful in using this verse as a promise for a friend or a loved one who is not a believer" (pg. 66). Another, perhaps unfamiliar, verse is Proverbs 4:23 ("Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life"). This verse, he claims, is often cited as a way for Christians to avoid being open to and invested in the lives of others.

Not all of the selected verses are completely corrupted. There are those he sees as the "Right idea, wrong verse."

Along this line, he specifically mentions "lifting up the name of Jesus" (John 12:32) and by similarity his essay on "where two or three are gathered" (Matthew 18:20).

The chapter on Exodus 21:23-25 ("an eye for an eye") not only provides a careful exposition of the verses, but has sobering application for our present day with all the ongoing civil unrest. However, as Bargerhuff points out, misuse of this verse is not limited to our day and time. He tells us that Jesus Himself had to "correct the misuse of the verse" as He established "a significant new way of thinking and relating for anyone who is tempted to use this as grounds for personal retaliation" (pg. 121).

Bargerhuff's study on "the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well" (James 5:15) is deeply personal as he relates his own life experiences with his ailing father. Along with an elder from his father's church, they applied "this verse to his situation" and "prayed for his spiritual strength and potential healing right then and there" (pg. 125). But, he then writes, "Three days later, my father was dead" (ibid.). His subsequent study of the Scriptures confirmed what he had missed, "James has more spiritual issues in mind here rather than physical ones" (pg. 131). It is here that he speaks against the standard Word-Faith pretense, cautioning, "let's be careful of telling someone that their loved one is still sick or may have died because they did not have enough faith to make the healing happen. We don't have God's perspective on that, and besides, how is that helpful during someone's time of grief? It seems pretty insensitive to me" (pp. 129-130).

One more chapter addresses another Bible passage that is commonly misused by those in Word-Faith camps — John 14:13-14 ("ask for anything in My name") and a further chapter is specific to Jehovah's Witnesses in their attempt to discredit the deity of Jesus Christ — Colossians 1:15 ("the firstborn of all creation"). (A slight gaffe appears in an endnote for this chapter, where it is stated that Charles Taze Russell taught that Jesus returned in 1914. Russell believed that Christ returned in 1874. The 1914 date was adopted by the Watchtower Society more than a decade after Russell's death.)

The final chapter, his "conclusion," is an exhortation for Christians to "handle with care" the Word of God by briefly outlining some hermeneutical principles in order to use "Scripture appropriately."

This volume is easy to read and loaded with sound and helpful biblical insights allowing the Christian to stay off the "trail of confusion."

—MKG

**Editor's Note:** The publications featured in PFO's *Books in Review* section are available from **Personal Freedom Outreach** (P.O. Box 26062, Saint Louis, Missouri 63136). Please add \$3.00 to the price listed for shipping and handling. Due to occasional price changes by the publishers, the retail amounts listed are subject to change without notice. These publications are also available to those who help to financially support the work of PFO. Please see our funds appeal flyer for details.