

# The Discerner

"Hereby know of truth and the  
we the spirit spirit of error"

Volume 22, Number 3

July • Aug • Sept 2002

## AN INTERDENOMINATIONAL HERESY-EXPOSING QUARTERLY

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## EDITORIAL

*By William A. BeVier*

This issue of THE DISCERNER is opened with an article reminding us what Religion Analysis Service is about and why it exists. When RAS was started in 1946 its founder, E. B. Jones, had recently been converted to Christ from Seventh-Day Adventism. He realized others needed a ministry such as RAS.

Our second article in this issue sets forth the principle that the Roman Catholic Church, in spite of its current difficulties, has not and will not make changes in the institution.

Our last article in this issue presents two parts of a four-part series of articles by Pastor Gary Gilley, senior pastor of the Southern View Chapel in Springfield, Illinois. After careful research, Pastor Gilley presents the issues facing the evangelical church today by what has been called the “market-driven” or “seeker-friendly” movement. This series also is available in book form from RAS titled This Little Church Went to Market (\$10.00). Another book by the author is I Just Wanted More Land – Jabez (\$11.00). We thank Pastor Gilley for making the series available in this way to the readers of THE DISCERNER. We plan to present Parts III and IV in our next issue.

We conclude this issue with the reviews of two new books available from RAS.

Summer is frequently not an active time for many ministries and for a variety of reasons, income declines. This has been true of Religion Analysis Service this summer.

In closing, if your subscription expires with this issue (XXII-3, Volume 22, Nr. 3), we trust you will respond by renewing (\$5.00 per year in the U.S.).

Please pray for RAS. In these days many Bible-believing ministries are under attacks, and RAS is no exception.

# What Makes a Cult a Cult?

*By William A. BeVier*

An old adage in education is the Latin phrase repetio mater studiorum (roughly in English “repetition is the mother of learning”). This is ascribed to the 5<sup>th</sup> century Roman philosopher Boethius. Because we have a tendency to forget, or really never learn something the first time we hear it, this is a true adage for many people.

Religion Analysis Service for over 55 years has been a ministry presenting the cults and other aberrations of biblical Christianity. But what is a cult? It seems we need to keep reminding ourselves.

All too frequently we hear of someone being referred to as belonging to a cult or being cultic. Just what is meant by that and is it a legitimate description in all cases?

Most every standard work on the cults begins by giving the author’s definition and the boundary in which the word is used, e.g., Walter Martin, The Kingdom of the Cults, Anthony Hoekema, The Four Major Cults, Ruth Tucker, Another Gospel, and the older work by J. K. Van Baalen, The Chaos of the Cults. In fact, there is no total agreement in how to define the word. A dictionary definition is almost useless because the writers do not have a biblical perspective.

A cult should not be confused with a denomination (a particular group within a larger classification, as Baptists are a denomination of Christianity), a schism (a break off from a larger group, though some cults in practice may be identified here), a sect (a group within a denomination, sometimes causing a schism), or a heresy (a Greek word meaning a choice or opinion, which has come to mean false or erroneous doctrine). None of these should be confused with a religion, such as Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, etc. Religions may be greatly influenced by other groups, as Islam by an aberrant Christianity and Judaism, and Buddhism by Hinduism, but they are still to be considered distinct. Many do not know the influences of Judaism and Christianity on Mohammed and Islam, but dozens of references to personages and events in the Bible in the Koran reveal this is true.

It should also be recognized that there are different types of cults. For example, some are neo-Christian cults, as Mormonism; some are Hindu and Eastern religious cults, as the New Age Movement; some are occultic, witchcraft, satanic cults, as Wicca and witches' covens; some are spiritualistic and psychological cults, as Transcendental Meditation and Transcendentalism.

In 1989 the Attorney General of the State of Rhode Island ruled witches' covens are religious organizations and entitled to tax exempt status as non-profit organizations. It is remembered that the early colonists, probably unwisely, but following what they thought was Old Testament teaching, burned what they thought were witches in New England. Times have changed.

Probably our Founding Fathers did not include witchcraft and covens in their concepts of "freedom of religion" or separation of "church and state."

But none of the terms in the opening paragraphs are a cult by definition, at least not as used by Religion Analysis Service.

The definition I have come to accept is a group or individual holding a non-biblical position or view on either the Person or the Work of Jesus Christ or both. I believe this to be supported by Scripture and a proper understanding of the Person and Work of Christ are essentially what makes a person a Christian.

To illustrate, the Person of Christ deals with who He is as revealed in Scripture. I believe the Apostle John clearly states this in his epistle 1 John. First John 4:1-3 reads:

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but test the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world. By this know you the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God; and every spirit that confesses not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God; and this is that spirit of antichrist, of which you have heard that it should come, and even now already is in the world.

And again in 1 John 4:14: "And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son, Savior of the world."

In spite of these clear statements of Scripture, it took some theologians four-five centuries (councils of Nicea, Ephesus, Constantinople), to finally decide Jesus Christ is the incarnated Son of God (God/Man). We shouldn't be surprised that some modern non-theologians (cult leaders) have trouble accepting this as

stated in Scripture. Even Satan recognized Jesus Christ as God (Mt. 5:3, Greek text, “Since you are the Son of the God....”)

The Work of Christ has to do with His death for sins, burial, resurrection, and appearances to witnesses. The Apostle Paul defines this as the Gospel (the “Good News”) in 1 Corinthians 5:1-5. He wrote:

Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also you have received, and in which you stand; by which also you are saved, if you keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless you have believed in vain [context that follows shows the issue was the reality of Christ’s resurrection – no salvation without it]. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures; and that He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve,...

Paul also affirms there is only one Gospel and any other purported to be brings condemnation. See Galatians 1:6-9 where he wrote:

I marvel that you are so soon removed from Him who called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach another gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed [Greek: anathema]. As we said before, so say I now again, if any one preach any other gospel unto you than that you have received, let him be accursed [anathema].

Paul had no doubt there is only one true Gospel and any departure from it brings condemnation.

A review of the book of Acts reveals the Gospel of 1 Corinthians 15:1-5ff is what the early church proclaimed. See Acts 1:22; 2:22-24, 30-32; 3:15-26; 4:1-2, 8-12, 33; 5:19-32; 10:38-43; 13:28-38; 17:2-3, 18-19, 31-34; 23:6-8; 24:14-21; 25:18-19; 26:6-8, 22-23. They preached no other message to unbelievers.

The Work of Christ is His death for sins according to the Old Testament Scripture, e.g., Psa. 22; Isa. 53, His burial (proof of His death), His resurrection according to the Scripture, e.g., Psa. 16:10, then His appearances to witnesses, proof of His resurrection.

Anything more or less than these historical and biblical facts is cultic.

Most cults go beyond perverting either the Person or Work of Christ. They frequently have an extra-biblical revelation or authority and look to a human who received or receives direct revelation from God outside the Bible.

Some examples are the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints (Mormons). They look to Joseph Smith, Jr., “Prophet, Seer, Revelator,” and such writings as the Book of Mormon and Doctrines and Covenants. The Seventh-Day Adventists have Ellen White, The Great Controversy (now retitled America in Prophecy, 1988) and her other writings. Christian Science has Mary Baker Eddy and Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures. Jehovah’s Witnesses have Charles Taze Russell, Studies in the Scriptures, “Judge” Joseph Rutherford, and continuing revelation in “The Watchtower” and “Awake” publications. We might add the Roman Catholic Church with its infallible Pope and appeals to “Tradition” (which according to the Council of Trent, 1545-63, has precedent over Scripture), plus the New Age Movement with its gurus, ascended masters, and avatars.

It is one thing to identify the cults and their leaders. Then what are we to do? Some sources state there are as many as 2,000 “cults” in this country alone. Some have very few members and are benign (ingrown and no harm to others), others are large in numbers, wealthy, and actively seeking to “evangelize,” gain followers. Some even have posed dangers to the lives and safety of others, e.g., Scientology.

Many cults and their leaders refer to the Bible, God, and Jesus. We need to remind ourselves of the admonition of Walter Martin: “The Jesus of the cults is not the Jesus of the Bible.” Using the same words does not mean the cultists mean the same thing as the Bible. Here is where we need the Spirit of discernment.

What can we do as Christians? The first thing, truly know the content of the Bible, God’s written revelation to the human race, the TRUTH. I have been told that when bank tellers are trained they are permitted to touch only genuine money. The idea is that if they ever encounter counterfeit currency on the job, it won’t feel right to them and be recognized for what it really is. Here is a lesson for us. Christians need to know the Bible well, so we can recognize the counterfeits when we encounter them. Paul in 2 Corinthians 11:14-15 states that even Satan trans-

formed himself into an “angel of light,” and “it is no great thing for his ministers to be transformed as the ministers of righteousness....”

The second thing we should do, when we are prepared, is study the cults so we can better reach with the true Gospel, God’s Good News, those who are involved. Each cult has its own peculiarities, and one approach is not suitable for all. We need to minister not only to those who are in the cults but to unsuspecting who are in danger from the cults.

There are a number of sources for information to help us. Of course, I recommend Religion Analysis Service. We have in stock over 600 different items of literature pertaining to the cults and other aberrations of Christianity. We also are prepared to provide council and information about the cults. We do research where we can, but we do not do deprogramming.

Some of the other ministries, which provide help in these areas, are:

Spiritual Counterfeit Project  
John Ankerberg Evangelistic Association  
Christian Research Institute  
Watchman’s Fellowship  
Specialized ministries, such as Utah Mission  
(Mormons), Equippers (Jehovah’s Witnesses), etc.



# No New Surprises in Roman Catholicism

*By Jo Ann BeVier*

**W**hy are people shocked by scandal in Roman Catholicism? For years there have been books and articles written and testimonies given as to corruptness in the hierarchy of the Roman Church. Needless to say, this is true of other churches and individuals in ministry, which stems from the sinfulness of the human nature. Scripture points out that we are sinners by birth: Psa. 51:5; Isa. 53:5; 1 Cor. 15:21, 22; Rom. 3:9-12; Eph. 2:1; Col. 2:13.

However, where leaders of churches and people are involved, we know this leads to destruction, wrecking of lives, defamation of character, and perversion of the truth, Rom. 1:18.

For centuries there have been warnings of the fallacies within Roman Catholicism: worship and infallibility of the popes, holding to tradition over the Scriptures, penance, confession, sacraments, absolute obedience of adherents, etc. Some of the books written were very graphic concerning the shameful practices regarding priests and nuns but they were generally dismissed as heresy or lies to bring scandal upon the church. They were squelched or only taken seriously by “sensationalists” or monger seekers (according to the Church of Rome).

Some of these writers who sounded the alarm in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were: John Dowling, History of Romanism, 1881; Reverend Isaac J. Lansing, Romanism and the Republic, 1890, among many others.

There are many other facets in the Roman Church that have been a shame, i.e., the inquisition, the Crusades, the St. Bartholomew Massacre, the alliances and participation with the Nazis and other enemies of Christians and Jews. But we would direct your focus on the present dilemma, that of the priesthood and the cases of sexual abuse (or sodomy), pedophilia, and other sexual immorality.

Pope Gregory VII, in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, imposed the unnatural law of priestly celibacy, in spite of the vehement protests

of the priests. The vast majority had wives and legitimate children. The decree, making priestly marriage a wrong and priestly celibacy a virtue, has honeycombed the Roman Catholic Church with corruption. Pope Gregory VII and his “infallible” successors, in imposing priestly celibacy, were actuated by political rather than virtuous motives. In 1907 three thousand French priests signed and sent a petition to Pope Pius X praying for the abolition of priestly celibacy. This appeal was consigned to the papal wastebasket.

Historically, it appears that it was no secret in the minds of the political and Roman Catholic leaders, or in the minds of the masses, that clerical celibacy contributed to the moral depravity of the priests. Scripture says in 1 Cor. 7:8, 9 “But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them to remain even as I am; But if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.”

An anonymous writer in 1844 wrote:

The celibacy of the clergy tends still more directly to the destruction of morality. The history of the church abounds with evidence that where the clergy have been confined by their rules of discipline to a life of celibacy, they have been the most industrious promoters of licentiousness.

Also the historical work Lives of the Popes, by Roman Catholic writer Ludwig Pastor, states:

There is unmistakable evidence of the revival of the horrible vice of the Greeks (i.e., sodomy).... It made its way into the lower ranks also.... Many of the monasteries were in a most deplorable condition. The three essential vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience were in some convents almost entirely disregarded.

These sins among the clergy are nothing new and in spite of feigned outrage they will be largely ignored, just as they always have been.

Let’s look at the priesthood:

### The Priesthood

The idea of a priest is that of a mediator between God and man. Man, in his fallen estate (as in Adam sin entered in) has no right to approach God. He is a sinner, guilty before God. He is alienated until someone undertakes to act as his repre-

sentative (mediator) before God.

In Israel, priests offered sacrifices before God in behalf of the people. These priests had wives and families. In the Old Testament priests were a type, or shadow, of the Great High Priest who was to come. With the coming of Christ, the offices of prophet, priest, and king were fulfilled in Him. This is set forth in Heb. 9:11, 12, 14, 24 and 8:1, 2. This is the New Testament change in the priesthood that the sacrificial work has been fulfilled and Christ alone is our true High Priest. The human priesthood as an order of men has been fulfilled and abolished. Now we are sons of God through faith in Christ (1 John 3:1-2) and we have direct access to the Father (Heb. 4:16) without the mediation of any earthly priest. We as believers approach God, not in our own merits, but through the merits of Christ who made the perfect sacrifice for us.

The Church of Rome teaches there are many mediators, i.e., the priests, Mary, a host of saints, and angels and it is right to pray to them. The Bible declares there is "one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5).

There is really no New Testament authority for a clerical priesthood. In Heb. 9:12, 26; 10:10, 42 we read that Christ's sacrifice was "once-for-all." Therefore, the continuing priesthood in the Church of Rome is absolutely unscriptural and unchristian. There is probably no other doctrine in Scripture that the Roman Church has so turned upside down as that of the priesthood. The function of no New Testament minister or official resembles that of a priest of the Roman Church. Also, the titles of "archbishop," "cardinal," or "pope" are not in the Bible.

The loyal Roman Catholic must heed what the priest says, for priestly dignity is above all. The priest dictates to the people concerning their church, school, marriage, children, family affairs, political activities, what literature they should read, etc. The priest may inquire about any of these things in the confessional. This influence continues from birth to death. His word is not to be questioned. This control was written about as follows:

You who have never been under this influence, who have had from childhood been allowed freedom of speech, liberty of conscience, and who see no distinction between your clergy and laity, you cannot, you never will understand the

influence that the Roman Catholic priests have over the laity of their own nationality (Margaret Shepherd, My Life in the Convent, p. 46).

The priest's training is one of constant indoctrination. As stated by a former priest:

The daily programme of life is so well thought out by the Roman Church that individuality is gradually destroyed and one's personality is so shaped that one conforms to a pattern designed by the Roman Church... (Hugh Farrell, Far From Rome, Near to God, 1994, p. 31).

There are the choices of being either a secular priest under the authority of a bishop (as a parish priest or a chaplain in an institution), or a religious/monastic priest who is under the authority of a vicar of his order and who has taken the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. A secular priest is not required to take the vow of poverty.

No matter what the moral character of a priest, his prayers and ministrations are to be declared valid and efficacious because he is in a holy order ("ordained"). The Council of Trent (1545-1563) declared that, "Even those priests who are living in mortal sin exercise the same function of forgiving sins as ministers of Christ." This declaration was necessary at that time, in the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, because of the general and well-known immorality of the priests. The priest's acts are supposed to be valid regardless of his personal character (Lorraine Boettner, Roman Catholicism, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishers, 1963).

In his 50 Years in the Church of Rome Charles Chiniquy, a former priest, states that the confessional, a required part of Roman Catholic life, was the source of destruction of many Catholic women and priests. Further, he urged husbands and fathers to stop sending their wives and daughters to confession.

Perhaps some of the most shocking of all this sin in the Roman clergy are reports in the media. Two of these reports are given as examples.

Kansas City, MO, Jan. 30 – AIDS has quietly caused the deaths of hundreds of Roman Catholic priests in the United States although other causes may be listed on some of their death certificates. The "Kansas City Star" reported in its Sunday editions. In the first part of a three-part

series, the newspaper reported that its examination of death certificates and interviews with experts indicated several hundred priests had died of AIDS-related illnesses since the mid-1980's and hundreds more are living with HIV, the virus that causes the diseases. The death rate of priests from AIDS is at least four times that of the general population, the newspaper said... (AP, 2000).

And again:

Los Angeles, June 21, 2002 – More than 100 people in the nation's largest Catholic diocese have complained to authorities in recent months of sexual abuse by priests.... Authorities said complaints in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles surfaced after the priest abuse scandal emerged in Boston in March, then erupted nationally (AP, 2002).

This dilemma is spread from British Columbia across the country to Sioux City, Iowa. Our hearts are grieved and we know God's is from His Word: Lev. 18:22; "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination." Lev. 20:13; "If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination." Rom. 1:27, 28b: "Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.... God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting."

The following books were used as reference or are recommended for this article:

Lorraine Boettner, Roman Catholicism, classical work on the subject.

Malachi Martin, Keys of This Blood, former Jesuit and professor.

Richard Bennett and Martin Buckingham, editors, Far From Rome, Near to God, testimonies of 50 converted RC priests.

Charles Chiniquy, 50 Years in the "Church" of Rome, a former priest.

Bartholomew F. Brewer, Pilgrimage from Rome, a former priest.

Wilson Ewin, Under the New World Order, former director of Quebec Baptist Missions, ministry to Roman

Catholics in Canada.

Excerpts from “The Kingdom Alert,” July, 2002, Part 1, and many others on our shelves at Religion Analysis Service (please see our Catalog).

Organizations active in this ministry: Conversion Center, PO Box 31688, Raleigh, NC 27622; and Grace Bible Mission, PO Box 1414, Lee’s Summit, MO 64063, Rev. Lyle Murphy. These organizations minister to priests and nuns in particular. We’re sure there are others available.

# The Market-Driven Church: A Look Behind the Scenes

*By Gary E. Gilley*

## Part I – The Market-Driven Church

The church, as observed throughout its history, reminds me a lot of a duffer's golf swing. She is constantly going from one extreme to the next, over correcting, coming up short, searching, and frustrated. Occasionally, she gets it right and drives one down the middle, but repeating that feat is rare and soon she is slicing again.

Take the church growth movement for example. Having watched a large segment of the church become content with short yardage and lousy scores, some decided that there had to be a better way. The church was not penetrating society; she was not pulling in the masses; she was not making a significant impact for the gospel. It was not that the church leaders didn't care, it was, it seemed, that they lacked the "know-how," the tools, to effect change. The gospel was still "the power of God for salvation" (Romans 1:16), but it was being rejected out-of-hand by too many. What was needed, apparently, were new methods to reach the lost, new techniques to promote the church, new packages for the gospel message. People, we were told, were not rejecting the gospel or Christ; they were rejecting our out-of-date, unappetizing forms, philosophies, and methods.

It is these pronouncements that we want to examine. We will say up front that the church growth (or market-driven, or seeker-sensitive) experts have gotten some things right. They are calling for excellence rather than shabbiness; aggressive evangelism rather than indifference; direction and purpose rather than aimlessness; innovation and creativity rather than traditionalism; dedication rather than slothfulness. In all of these things we commend them. On the other hand, much like my golf swing, they have over corrected in important areas. These areas demand careful probing and biblical realignment.

While we will examine the writings of various individuals who speak for the market-driven movement, we will focus on the two flagship churches: Saddleback Valley Community Church in Orange County, California, and Willow Creek Community Church

near Chicago. These churches serve as the models that are reshaping the way we “do church” today. As a matter of fact, many refer to these churches and their clones as “new paradigm churches.” Churches all over the world, even those who would claim to reject the church growth movement, are imitating the many methods promoted by Saddleback and the “Creekers.” Others have written about church growth, but these two churches have made it “work,” and for their success they are idolized and adored by the modern evangelical community.

## **The New Paradigm**

There are numerous things about the market-driven church growth movement that are disturbing. But at this point, we need to ask some questions: What exactly is a new paradigm church? How do they work? How do they differ from more traditional churches? What are they doing right? Why are they growing? And what can we learn from them?

First, we must distinguish between **megachurches** and **new paradigm** churches. Megachurches are defined as those with average worship attendance of 2,000 or more, but these behemoth churches come in all shapes, stripes, and forms. Some are centers of great preaching and teaching, some are charismatic, and others are little more than social clubs. New paradigm churches, on the other hand, are identified by a philosophy of ministry *intentionally designed* to effect numerical growth. In their church growth methodologies, more attention is paid to market strategy, business techniques, and demographics than to New Testament instruction. Read the leading literature from the pens of the church growth experts (e.g., *The Purpose Driven Church*, by Rick Warren of Saddleback; *Marketing the Church*, by George Barna; and *Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry*, by Lee Strobel) and you will find bucket loads of marketing techniques and only passing references to the book of Acts (the divinely inspired “church growth” manual), or to any other Scripture for that matter.

An interesting article, just the type that shapes the new paradigm system, is found in *American Demographics* magazine (*American Demographics*, April 1999, “Choosing My Religion,” pp. 60-65, by Richard Cimino and Don Lattin). Several statements from the article are worth quoting since *American Demographics* seems to have its finger on the pulse of Americans’ wants and desires. According to this article, people today claim they are:

...into spirituality, not religion.... Behind this shift is the search for an experiential faith, a religion of the heart, not the



head. It's a religious expression that downplays doctrine and dogma, and revels in direct experience of the divine – whether it's called the "Holy Spirit" or "cosmic consciousness" or the "true self." It is practical and personal, more about stress reduction than salvation, more therapeutic than theological. It's about feeling good, not being good. It's as much about the body as the soul.... Some marketing gurus have begun calling it "the experience industry" (Ibid., p. 62).

"Congregants," the authors believe, "care as much about a church's childcare services as its doctrinal purity, pay more attention to the style of music than the pastor's theological training" (Ibid). If these things are true, how should the church react? Church marketing consultant Richard Southern encourages us to have:

...an essential paradigm shift in the way church is done, putting the needs of potential customers before the needs of the institutional church. Baby boomers [the inevitable target of new paradigm churches] think of churches like they think of supermarkets, they want options, choices, and convenience.... Numerous surveys show that Americans are as religious as ever – perhaps more than ever.... But what is on the decline in Americans' loyalty to particular denominations or traditions.... In 1958 only 1 in 25 Americans had left the religious denomination of their upbringing. Today, more than 1 in 2 have left or switched.... Protestant megachurches have become the evangelical answer to Home Depot, marketing such services as worship, childcare, a sports club, 12-step groups, and a guaranteed parking place (Ibid., p. 63).

The natural outcome of church leaders who pour over such literature is that they begin to use "computerized demographic studies and other sophisticated marketing techniques to fill their pews" (Ibid., p. 62). And the good news is that it does not matter what a given church believes, for "anyone can learn these marketing and outreach techniques. You don't have to change your theology or your political stance" (Ibid.).

Springing from this fountain of demographic "truth" is a whole industry of experts to teach church marketing techniques. One such expert is Christian A. Schwarz, who is the director of the Institute for Natural Church Development. Schwarz claims that between 1994 and 1996, his organization conducted "the most comprehensive research project about the causes of church growth that has ever been conducted in the Christian church....

More than 1000 churches on all five continents took part in this study” (*The ABC’s of Natural Church Development*, by Christian A. Schwarz).

From this mountain of research Schwarz has observed eight characteristics of church growth. These are: empowering leadership, gift-oriented ministry, passionate spirituality, functional structures, inspiring worship, holistic small groups, need-oriented evangelism, and loving relationships. Some of these qualities we will examine more closely later, but at this juncture there are two things that draw our interest. Schwarz claims that these principles work in any type of church anywhere in the world, and secondly, that if all characteristics are present these principles **will work every time**. “Every church in which each of the eight quality characteristics has reached a certain level... is a growing church. There is qualitative value – which can be shown in exact statistical terms – beyond which a church will always grow” (Ibid., p. 23).

One quality especially important to today’s growing churches is enthusiastic worship services. Schwarz asks his readers:

Is the worship service an inspiring experience for those who attend it? It is this area that clearly separates growing from non-growing churches. People who attend inspiring worship services unanimously declare that the church service is – and for some Christians this is almost a heretical word – ‘fun’” (Ibid., p. 14).

Growing churches are creating an atmosphere, an environment of fun. So fun has replaced holiness as the church’s goal. Having a good time has become the criterion of an excellent, growing church, since fun and entertainment is what church consumers want. Yet Scripture references encouraging churches to become havens of fun are, as one may suspect, sadly lacking.

Which church was a growing church in the book of Revelation – the church of Laodicea (Rev. 3:14-22), which saw itself as rich and wealthy and in need of nothing; or the church at Smyrna (Rev. 2:8-11), that was described as poor, in tribulation, and facing great persecution? God said of the Laodicean church that He would spit them out of His mouth, but of the Smyrna church that they would receive the crown of life. The obviously growing church did not please God, while the struggling one did. This is something worth pondering as we press on.

## Who's the Leader of Our Gang?

Trying to identify new paradigm churches, as far as doctrine or denomination is concerned is like trying to nail Jell-O to the wall – it is a slippery proposition at best, and impossible at worst. They must be identified on the basis of philosophy of church growth, as outlined above. Setting the agenda for new paradigm churches is Willow Creek and their quasi-denomination, the Willow Creek Association (WCA). The WCA is a loose association of hundreds of churches that have shown an interest in the method and philosophy of church growth as espoused by Willow Creek Community Church. All members of WCA claim to be evangelical, but are as diverse as Presbyterian, Lutheran, Baptist, Methodist, and Pentecostal. In many communities, both evangelical and liberal churches are members of the WCA. The new paradigm churches are united not by doctrine, but by philosophy, a philosophy based on market-driven principles.

But is a market-driven church so bad? After all, a lot of people seem to be getting saved and they're really "packing 'em in." Rick Warren puts positive spin on new paradigm philosophy in his very popular book *The Purpose-Driven Church*. Describing the ministry of Saddleback Valley Community Church, Warren ably demonstrates that many church growth principles are simply common sense on the one hand and purposeful, aggressive leadership on the other. – Churches should pay attention to cleanliness and attractiveness, where people are going to park, and how new people are going to feel walking through our doors. We should strive for excellence and do our best to communicate God's truth. And we should want to grow – in the right ways. Warren states: "Every church needs to grow warmer through fellowship, deeper through discipleship, stronger through worship, broader through ministry, and larger through evangelism" (*The Purpose-Driven Church*, p. 48).

Who could argue with that? And who would debate the need for churches to know why they exist (their purpose), channeling their energies in that direction rather than wandering aimlessly as many do? And what about evangelism? Warren and the new paradigm churches are geared to reaching the lost. While many churches are wasting precious energy fussing over the color of the drapes in the foyer, the Saddlebacks and Willow Creeks are focusing their attention on bringing "Unchurched Harry" and "Saddleback Sam" to Christ. You can't help but admire that kind of emphasis. To this end, Willow Creek, in particular, has made it

a passion to understand the unsaved around them (Unchurched Harry and Mary) in order to more effectively communicate the gospel.

Willow Creekers know Harry's interests and passions, his goals and his hang-ups. They understand how his mind works and are doing all they can to make Christianity relevant. Churches that are growing are doing so primarily because they are focusing attention on the lost and visitors. They are churches that have not become in grown and comfortable. None of these things are wrong; the problems are in the details. Having detoured around the Bible, the new paradigm churches often look to other sources to develop their systems.

Perhaps no single source carries as much weight in the "seeker-sensitive" church than George Barna and his Barna Research Group. Barna, the church counterpart to George Gallup, has ignited a number of fires in Christian circles with his books such as *The Frog in the Kettle* and *Marketing the Church*. In his more recent book, *Church Marketing, Breaking Ground for the Harvest*, Barna declared that he, and his types, have won the ideological battle over the issue of marketing the church (pp. 13, 14). That is, only a few old-fashioned stick-in-the-muds still question the validity of the market-driven strategy.

Barna defines marketing as:

...a broad term that encompasses all the activities that lead up to an exchange of equally valued goods between consenting parties... activities such as advertising, public relations, strategic planning, audience research, product distribution, fund-raising and product pricing, developing a vision statement, and customer service are all elements of marketing. When these elements are combined in a transaction in which the parties involved exchange items of equivalent worth, the marketing act has been consummated (p. 19).

Barna assures us that churches sell (or market) their product the same way Wal-Mart sells shoes and Sears sells tools. But what is the church's product? What are we trying to peddle to consumers? This has to be thought through carefully, for unlike shoes and tools that have great attraction for some consumers, the gospel is repulsive – foolishness, to the unsaved (1 Cor. 1:18-23).

How do we market such a product? By changing the package. Note the subtle bait and switch in Barna's philosophy: "Ministry,

in essence, has the same objective as marketing – to meet people’s needs. Christian ministry, by definition, meets people’s real needs by providing them with biblical solutions to their life circumstances” (p. 21).

By repackaging ministry, including the gospel message, as we will see, Barna has made it attractive. If we can convince people that Christ died to meet their needs, they will line up at our doors to buy our product. But is this the gospel message? Has Barna merely repackaged, prettied-up, the gospel “product” or has he gutted it of its purpose and value? An important question upon which so much hinges – a question worthy of much consideration in Parts II-IV.

## **Part II – The Little Church Went to the Market**

David Wells bemoans concerning the new paradigm church:

Much of it... is replete with tricks, gadgets, gimmicks, and marketing ploys as it shamelessly adapts itself to our emptied-out, blinded, postmodern world.... There is too little about it that bespeaks the holiness of God. And without the vision for any reality of this holiness, the gospel becomes trivialized, life loses its depth, God becomes transformed into a product to be sold, faith into a recreational activity to be done, and the Church into a club for the like-minded (*Losing Our Virtue*, p. 180).

Damaging accusations – are they true?

The standard rhetoric coming from new paradigm churches is that they teach the same message, the same gospel, as the more traditional evangelical churches, and that they differ only in methodology and the philosophy of ministry. Lee Strobel (former Teaching Pastor at Willow Creek Community Church) writes:

Objections [to the market-driven church] generally relate to the method that’s used to communicate the Gospel, not the message itself, and consequently we’re free to use our God-given creativity to present Christ’s message in new ways that our target audience will connect with (*Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry and Mary*, p. 168).

This is simply not the case. While some of the methods may disturb us, it is their message that is of real concern.

In Part IV of this series, we will demonstrate that while the new paradigm churches have dressed their gospel in the gown of conservative evangelicalism, it is in reality a masquerade, a cos-

tume that disguises a gospel message that would have been unrecognizable only a few years ago. For now, we need to examine the methodologies for which the new paradigm churches have become famous: their market-driven strategies. After all, that the new paradigm churches are most often known by the handle of “market-driven” is not without reason. We have chosen not to use this label exclusively, because these churches are unique in other ways as well, but their market-driven approach is certainly their outstanding feature.

### **What Is a Market-Driven Church?**

Some within the market-driven church would cringe at being called such. They would rather be hailed “purpose-driven” (so Rick Warren’s influential book *The Purpose-Driven Church*), or “seeker-sensitive” (a.k.a. Bill Hybels). But others, such as George Barna (the most highly regarded marketing researcher in evangelicalism), pull no punches. In works such as *Marketing the Church* and *A Step-by-Step Guide to Church Marketing*, Barna outlines for pastors who have not had the privilege of a graduate course in marketing (*A Step-by-Step Guide to Church Marketing*, p. 15), just how it is to be done in the church. As to the debate within evangelical circles concerning marketing, Barna declares it to be over and the marketing gurus have won (pp. 13-14).

If this is true (and as one visits churches all over the country from liberal to conservative and observes their mimicking of market-driven principles, one would have to agree that Barna has a good case), what exactly has been won (or lost, depending upon your view)?

Barna defines marketing as “a broad term that encompasses all of the activities that lead to an exchange of equally valued goods between consenting parties.” Barna moves on to give supposed examples of marketing in Scripture, including examples of marketing the gospel (cf., pp. 20, 23, 77). Unfortunately, in order to support his marketing strategy from Scripture, he must twist its meaning. For example, Barnabas is given as an example of a marketing strategy (p. 23). Barna writes: “Barnabas successfully tackled a tough marketing or PR assignment when he overcame the early disciples’ fear of Paul, convincing them he was no longer a persecutor of the church” (Acts 9:26, 27) (p. 23). Jesus also owed His fame to marketing, according to Barna (p. 23), because word of mouth is “the world’s most effective advertising.” By his definition, all proclamation of any Christian message is an act of marketing. He is then saying that all churches market, but some do

not know it; the new paradigm churches simply have taken marketing to a new level.

But the marketing philosophy is a very different approach from the methods found in Scripture – to spread the good news. Is the gospel marketable by Barna’s definition? Is the gospel the “exchange of equally valued goods between consenting parties”? Hardly. The gospel is offered by grace (undeserved favor) and received by faith. In the exchange, God gets us; we get Him (equally valued goods?). In the exchange we receive the righteousness of Christ, He takes our sins upon Himself (equally valued goods?). When the “product” is Christ the market process breaks down in its very definition.

But is Christ the product of the market-driven approach? Barna would say yes, but note his explanation: “Ministry, in essence, has the same objective as marketing: to meet people’s needs. Christian ministry, by definition, meets people’s real needs by providing them with biblical solutions to their life circumstances” (p. 21). Although not so stated, I am certain if questioned Barna would say we meet people’s real needs by bringing them to Christ (please keep in mind that “ministry” to the new paradigm churches, which have become evangelistic centers, means their efforts to bring Unchurched Harry to Christ). But, is the purpose of the gospel to meet the felt-needs of people? Is that why Christ came? (See Part III). We strongly protest such an understanding of the gospel.

The gospel is not bringing people to Christ in order to meet their felt needs. **According to Scripture, the gospel is the good news that lost sinners can be forgiven of their sins and receive the righteousness of Christ in exchange.** This is the real need of humanity, the need for which Christ died. The new paradigm church would have no problem agreeing that Harry’s true need is salvation from sin. But they do not believe Harry will respond to such a gospel unless we dress it up with other enticing offers. Felt needs is the porthole, they believe, through which Harry is reached in order that his true spiritual need is met. According to their marketing research, Harry is not interested in truth (Lee Strobel, *Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry and Mary*, p. 56); therefore, he does not react well to “Thus sayeth the Lord” (Ibid., p. 50). And Harry is not interested in the future (including heaven) (Ibid., p. 57); therefore, reaching him through concern in his eternal destiny is futile. What Harry is interested in is feeling better about himself. He is asking, “What

can help me deal with my pain” (Ibid., p. 56); he is interested in “his marriage, his friendships, his career, his recovery from past pain and so on” (Ibid., pp. 58, 59). Unchurched Mary, for her part is attracted to churches, “Where women have access to leadership and influence” (Ibid., p. 76), (i.e., an equalitarian approach). If we are to reach this generation, we must then “market” the gospel as something that works (i.e., relieves pain and provides happiness).

“The most effective messages for seekers are those that address their felt-needs” (Ibid., pp. 213-214). However, this approach is not drawn from Scripture; it is drawn from market research and the latest in pop-psychology. No one denies that there are many benefits to the Christian life, but these benefits must not be confused with the gospel. The gospel is not about helping Harry feel better about himself and his circumstances; it is about his rebelliousness against a holy God who will ultimately condemn him to hell if he does not repent and trust in Christ for the forgiveness of his sins. The distinction between the market-driven approach and the Biblical approach lies largely in understanding this fundamental difference.

## **Market Evaluation**

Given the obvious fact that market-driven methodology works (almost all of the biggest and fastest growing churches in America have hopped aboard the market-driven train), and granted that we are a pragmatic people who worship at the feet of the goddess success, what serious flaws could be found in the movement? Below are some things to consider.

### ***Big is good, small is bad; or where have all the people gone?***

Most churches in America are small. Fifty percent of churches average fewer than 75 attendees on any given Sunday, and only 5 percent attract more than 350, according to Barna’s surveys. These statistics are not denied; it’s their interpretation that is in question. Church growth gurus use these figures to prove that the church has lost its edge – she is not making a significant impact on society. But is this the case? David Wells shares his thoughts:

A century ago, in 1890,... the average Protestant church had only 91.5 members, not all of whom would be in attendance on any given Sunday; a century before that, in 1776, the average Methodist congregation had 75.7 members. It seems to be the case that our churches today are about the same



size as they have always been, on average, and the supposition that we are now experiencing drastic shrinkage needs to be clearly justified before it can be allowed to become the premise for new and radical strategies (*God in the Wasteland*, p. 78).

As a matter of fact, church attendance in 1937 averaged 41% of the population, whereas it was 42% in 1988, (close to 50% in the late 50s and 43% in 1999 according to *Christianity Today*, July 10, 2000, p. 20), leading Wells to comment, “Barna’s efforts to make megachurches the benchmark of normality and then to argue that churches of conventional size are failures is simply unwarranted and wrongheaded” (*God in the Wasteland*, p. 79).

It doesn’t take a mathematician to realize that if the *percentage* of Americans going to church has remained constant, yet megachurches are popping up almost weekly, then the giant churches are largely being populated by folks funneling in from small churches. Just as Wal-Marts are killing mom and pop department stores, chain restaurants and groceries are doing the same in their respective venues, and the Mall has demolished “downtown,” so the megachurches are doing a number on the small church. But large does not necessarily mean better, and when all the numbers are tallied, overall church attendance (on a percentage basis) is not increasing despite the methods championed by these megachurches.

### ***Who needs God, we have a program?***

We are certainly in danger of reductionism, but when such faith can be held in the marketing methodology little room is left, or needed, for faith in God. In what has to be one of the most blatant examples of the self-sufficiency of marketing is the claim that the salvation of souls has a price tag. Barna suggests that a church might set an objective to “lead 50 baby busters to Christ this year, for under \$5000 in program expenditures” (Barna, p. 170). So for \$100 per head, we can bring people to Christ. The need for prayer and trust in a sovereign God becomes questionable when we can statistically figure what it costs to bring a soul to the Lord. In Barna’s defense, this “souls/dollars” strategy is not new. Both Charles Finney and Billy Sunday could predict to the penny what it cost to win a soul. Their cost however ran between \$2 and \$3 a head – quite a bargain as compared to today. But of course, if you factor in inflation, you can apparently still win a soul pretty inexpensively.

Or take the church-growth consultant who boldly claims that

“five to ten million baby boomers would be back in the fold within a month if churches adopted three simple changes: 1. Advertise. 2. Let people know about “product benefits.” 3. Be nice to new people (See *Dining with the Devil*, Os Guinness, p. 38). The belief in the omnipotence of marketing techniques is changing the nature of the church.

### ***The Consumer is King***

The premise of all marketing is that the consumer must be pleased; he must be kept happy; he must be given what he needs, or had been programmed to think he needs, if we are to succeed. This premise works very well for say, McDonald’s, but can it be adopted by the church? Certainly it can, but is not the church, and more importantly, the gospel message, altered and distorted in the process? Listen to these words by Wells:

The fact is that while we may be able to market the church, we cannot market Christ, the gospel, Christian character, or meaning in life. The church can offer handy childcare to weary parents, intellectual stimulation to the restless video generation, a feeling of family to the lonely and dispossessed – and, indeed, lots of people come to churches for these reasons. But neither Christ nor His truth can be marketed by appealing to consumer interest, because the premise of all marketing is that the consumer’s need is sovereign, that the customer is always right and this is precisely what the gospel insists cannot be the case (Wells, p. 82).

Even the liberal *New Yorker* sees a problem with today’s audience-driven preaching,

The preacher, instead of looking out upon the world, looks out upon public opinion, trying to find out what the public would like to hear. Then he tries his best to duplicate that, and bring his finished product into the marketplace in which others are trying to do the same. The public, turning to our culture to find out about the world, discovers there is nothing but its own reflection. The unexamined world meanwhile, drifts blindly into the future (As quoted by Guinness, p. 59).

### ***But What if the Consumer Changes?***

The following two quotations are worthy of pondering: “He who marries the spirit of the age soon becomes a widower.” “To be always relevant, you have to say things which are eternal” (Guinness, p. 63). What happens when the fickle consumer changes his interests, or develops new wants, as he inevitably

will? Will today's cutting edge pastor suddenly find himself stampeded by the herd tomorrow? In order to avoid such a tragedy, must he keep his ear to the ground of modern marketing techniques? Will he become slave to polls and surveys? And how does all of this affect his use of the Scriptures? We don't have to have a crystal ball to answer these questions, all we have to do is look behind us.

The church has always fought, and too often lost, the battle with its age. Parallels with today are plentiful. For example, the "Downgrade Controversy" of Spurgeon's time ultimately led to the liberalization of the evangelical churches of England. In our own country, we think back to the early nineteenth-century changes that came about through the revivalism movement, best known by some as "Finneyism." Guinness sees this as an important precedent, because as in our time, the change was not "so much from Calvinism to Arminianism as from theology to experience, from truth to technique, from elites to populism, and from an emphasis on 'serving God' to an emphasis on 'servicing the self' in serving God" (Guinness, p. 27).

Some are still alive who experienced the great Fundamental/Modernist battle of the first half of the last century, in which the big names of the church invited us to court the spirit of the age. The fad was so popular that almost every major denomination in America eventually married that spirit and moved away from Biblical Christianity. It was at that point the new fundamentalist denominations, churches, schools, and associations were formed. It is these very institutions that are now flirting with the spirit of the age. The results are predictable.

Origen, in the third century, taught that "Christians are free to 'plunder the Egyptians' but forbidden to 'set up a golden calf' from the spoils" (Guinness, pp. 30, 31). Easily said, but as history has proven, almost impossible to implement.

Michael S. Horton summarizes things well:

By the time we are finished, we have entirely transformed the communion of saints. We did not even have to officially jettison the Bible, as the modernists did earlier this century. We did not have to say that Scripture failed to provide answers for the modern world or speak to the real needs of contemporary men and women, as the liberals said. All we had to do was to allow the world to define the church instead of allowing the Word to define it (*The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, edited by John H. Armstrong, "Recovering the Plumb Line," by

Michael S. Horton, p. 254).

## Summary

When we speak of marketing the church, we are not referencing such things as advertising church events, providing excellence in church programming, being kind to visitors, or providing ample parking. No one is arguing the importance and value of such things. Marketing, as defined by the new paradigm churches, goes much further, because its focus is on what the consumer (Unchurched Harry) wants and thinks he needs, rather than on what God wants and what He says Harry needs. In other words, market-driven churches are built upon the foundation of polls, surveys, and the latest marketing techniques, instead of upon the Word of God. In order to market a church to the unsaved, the consumer must be given what he wants.

Since unsaved consumers do not desire God, or the things of God, they have to be enticed by something else. Thus, the temptation then arises for a church to change, or at least hide, who they are so that they appeal to Unchurched Harry. Additionally, the church is tempted to alter its message to correspond with what Harry wants to hear and thinks he needs. The end result is a felt-need gospel that appeals to Harry's fallen nature in an effort to entice him to come to Christ, the ultimate felt-need supplier, so that he is fulfilled and feels better about himself. But:

Can churches really hide their identity without losing their religious character? Can the church view people as consumers without inevitably forgetting that they are sinners? Can the church promote the gospel as a product and not forget that those who buy it must repent? Can the church market itself and not forget that it does not belong to itself but to Christ? Can the church pursue success in the market place and not lose its biblical faithfulness? (David Wells, *Losing Our Virtue*, p. 202).

The answers to these questions are self-evident

(To be continued in the next issue.)

## **BOOK REVIEW**

Reasoning from the Scriptures with Muslims

Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2002. 342 pp

By Ron Rhodes

*Reviewed by Rev. Ervin D. Ingebretson*

Since the horrific events of September 11, 2001 there has been a heightened interest in the religion of Islam. The perpetrators of this devastating attack were devout believers in the religion of Islam whose guide book is the Quran [sometimes spelled “Koran”] and whose god is called Allah. Their commitment to their religion extends even to suicide. Does the religion of Islam support such militant activity?

The interest in the doctrines of Islam is peaked by the increase in the number of the Muslim people in our communities – perhaps a next-door neighbor of a co-worker. There has been phenomenal growth of Islamic converts in this nation and in the world. This is reflected in the unusual number of mosques being built in the United States. The author mentions the efforts of Muslims throughout the world to funnel money into the United States to promote population growth in their religion.

Because of this significant growth the author, Ron Rhodes, is concerned with presenting the doctrines of the Islamic religion and the biblical doctrines of Christianity to encourage believers to understand the differences and to meet the criticisms from Muslims by “Reasoning from the Scriptures.” His purpose in writing is to encourage and to aid a clear Christian witness to Muslims.

Some doctrines raised by the author where major differences occur are views of God, the Trinity, Jesus as the Son of God, the Holy Spirit, the cross, sin, and salvation. He presents each doctrinal issue with Islamic criticisms and challenges, always answering with strong biblical verification.

After each topical discussion he offers a series of strategic questions one might ask a Muslim in helping to

clarify the understanding of the Bible. With this object in mind, the author cautions against using stereotypes or undue force in compelling a Muslim to believe the Bible. Muslims are intensely loyal to their commitment and do not convert to Christianity easily. However, the author makes a strong plea for more active witness to Muslims by Christians.

The author has presented a viable tool in witnessing to Muslims. It is non-threatening yet forceful in dependence upon the Scriptures. It is highly recommended.

This is one of a series of books by Dr. Rhodes with the general title "Reasoning from the Scriptures with...." Religion Analysis Service stocks this book.

The price is \$12.99, plus P&H.

## **BOOK REVIEW**

### The Battle for Truth

Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2001. 384 pp

By David A. Noebel

*Reviewed by William BeVier*

**T**he author is president of Summit Ministries in Manitou Springs, Colorado. The book is revised and enlarged from an earlier book titled Understanding the Times in 1995. The subtitle of the book is "Defending the Christian Worldview in the Marketplace of Ideas."

In the book the author makes comparisons between Secular Humanism, Marxist/Leninism, Cosmic Humanism, and Biblical Christianity in the ten areas of: theology, philosophy, ethics, biology, psychology, sociology, law, politics, economics, and history. With each major section of the book the author gives a chart comparing the four Western worldview models. The last one is followed by a 34-page conclusion. Notes are given at the back of the book (an inconvenience for serious readers). A 2-page listing of "For Further

Reading” concludes the book.

In all, the book has 43 chapters, including the Conclusion.

Writing as a Christian, Noebel affirms that Christianity is superior in all ten areas of the four worldviews presented.

Each of the other worldviews (Secular Humanism, Marxist/Leninism, and Cosmic Humanism) is the enemy of biblical Christianity and is repeatedly attacking Christianity. We, as Christians, need to know the Bible well in order to withstand these attacks on our minds and souls and need to know something of these other worldviews in order to help others escape from them.

Noebel identifies Cosmic Humanism as being the same as the New Age Movement. Noebel acknowledges that Secular Humanism and Marxist/Leninism have much in common. He terms one the mother and the other the daughter, Secular Humanism producing Marxist/Leninism. He considers Cosmic Humanism (the New Age Movement) little more than a Spiritualized Secular Humanism.

Noebel sees a scarcity of well-grounded Christians who can lead the struggle against the other three erroneous worldviews.

Throughout the book Noebel provides sidebars of short, significant statements from a variety of sources. These add interest to the book.

The book is good reading for a person seriously concerned about the three worldviews presented as the enemies of Christianity

The book sells for \$12.99, plus P&H.

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