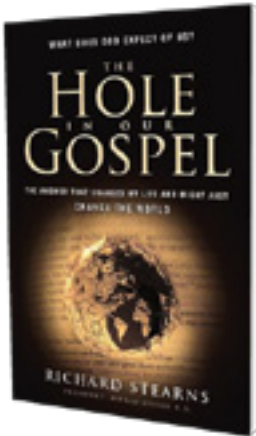


# A REVIEW OF *THE HOLE IN OUR GOSPEL*

BY RICHARD STEARNS, PRES. OF WORLD VISION U.S. — REVIEWED BY RON MERRYMAN



RICHARD STEARNS WRITES, “[God] is weary of seeing a shiny veneer of faith but no depth of commitment. *That is the hole in our gospel*, and until we fill it, ours is an empty religion, one that God despises” (pp. 184-85). To fill the hole, Stearns advises the church (i.e., Christians and local churches) to make the alleviation of social ills (poverty, hunger, squalor, disease, environmental issues, and injustice) a major priority. In fact, without such a major priority, there is a void, a hole, an inadequacy in the gospel that Christians propagate. Stearns’s “Good News” to the poor

focuses on handouts—not on the gospel of God’s saving grace in Christ.

In short, Stearns advocates that American Christians (“Christians” in the broad sense) should aggressively support an international social welfare system that would be somewhat of a rival or supplement to the United Nations UNESCO. Obviously, World Vision has such a system already in place, with 40,000 workers worldwide but lacking the funds to fill the hole.

To criticize any organization/movement that compassionately seeks to eliminate poverty, feed the poor, and correct the world’s injustices invites censure upon the critic—and double the censure when the organization claims Christian motivation.

This book is my only source of information on its author Richard Stearns, though I am quite familiar with the beginning, growth, and mission of World Vision. Richard Stearns, undoubtedly a brother in Christ, is no doubt a compassionate person who is highly motivated to alleviate all types of suffering in this world. But in seeking to encourage Christians to be more involved in his cause(s), the book that he has penned is based on false principles that he supports largely from misleading applications of Scripture. I have major concerns with Stearns’s premises and conclusions. Two of these follow:

1. First and foremost is the perverted, non-scriptural gospel advocated herein. To Stearns and World Vision (as with Mother Teresa), the gospel is so broad that it has no core message. In fact, the gospel message is swallowed up as if by a black hole in space and hence is lost and ignored. The title leads most evangelical Christians to look for a hole in their personal understanding of the gospel; instead Stearns submerges that message in the depths of social injustices, poverty, disease, etc., until its essential essence is totally lost.

In contrast, the Scriptures make the core message the first priority of the gospel! In 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, Paul

succinctly explains the gospel that he and the apostles preached. (Note: *it was a message of top priority to be preached, i.e., verbally communicated.*)

1 Corinthians 15:1-2a: *Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand...by which also you are saved....*

Note the order here. Paul says:

- A. “I declare to you the gospel;” (i.e., “I am reminding you verbally of what the gospel is”).
- B. “I preached (this) to you;” (“I am reminding you that on my initial visit to Corinth, I announced this message”).
- C. “Which also you received, and in which you stand, and by which you are saved.”

My point simply is this: the gospel according to God’s Word is an objective message to be delivered to human beings because only therein can they be saved from their sins. *Any organization that omits, subverts, or adds to the core message of the gospel, should not be promoting itself as “Christian.”* Stearns (World Vision) would have us replace the objective message with humanitarian efforts.

2. Another problem is the misuse and misapplication of Scripture throughout. Well-taught believers should immediately recognize these, but new and untaught Christians are most likely to buy into World Vision’s program (especially in view of the multiple endorsements that include such famous names as Madeline Albright, Luci Swindoll, Kay Warren, Bill Hybels, Charles Colson, Tony Campolo, Leighton Ford, et al.).

Note the distortions and misuses of God’s Word in the following quotes from the book:

(p. 15) “... the word *gospel* literally means glad tidings or good news. It is shorthand, meant to convey the coming of the kingdom of God through the Messiah. ... This new kingdom, characteristics of which were captured in the Beatitudes, *would turn the existing world order upside down*” (emphasis mine).

(p. 20) “The gospel... means much more than the personal salvation of individuals. It means *social revolution*.”

(p. 22) “This *whole gospel* is truly good news for the poor, and it is the foundation for a social revolution that has the power to change the world. And if this was Jesus’ mission, it is also the mission of all who claim to follow Him.”

Thus Stearns sees the gospel as *whole*, or entire, only when it includes social benevolence. Christians who follow this logic could do more social good by becoming lawyers and politicians than by preaching the core message of the gospel.

I believe that Stearns is guilty of the following:

- He has a shallow and superficial understanding of the gospel of the Kingdom, which was the initial message to Israel by John the Baptist, then followed up by Jesus. Israel rejected its King and, in so doing, His kingdom. All Kingdom promises and blessings are now in abeyance *until the King returns at His second advent*.
- Stearns also identifies Kingdom responsibilities with the church. The church is not the Kingdom and the Kingdom is not the church (although Roman Catholics would disagree, as might Richard Stearns).
- He appeals to naïve idealism and utopian speculation: In the first 11 pages, at least 12 times the author refers to “believers changing or transforming the world.” According to Stearns, not only *can* they do it, “they are called to do so...as did the 12 Apostles.” On p. 311, he asks, “What have you done to change the world?”

In this case, Stearns is guilty of false advertising. Not only did the Twelve *not* change the world, but each of them died mercilessly at its hands. Moreover, the Scriptures teach that even the core message of the gospel will not change the *world*—only individuals in the world. It is the judgment of God and the return of Messiah, prophesied in both the Old and New Testaments, that alone will change this world.

Besides that, Christians are not called by God to change the world! They are called to give witness (verbal testimony) to an accurate gospel.

The root meaning of *ekklesia*, from which we derive our word *church*, is “called-out ones.” “Called-out” from what? Called out from the world of human beings. God sees believers of this age as persons separated and unique to His Son. They are indeed the Redeemed. They cannot and will not change the *world*.

- Stearns also lays a guilt trip on local churches because they do not have the same passion for social benevolence as does World Vision.

## Conclusions .....

On page 336, the author names four objectives of World Vision. *Please note that not one word of the gospel preached by Paul and the Apostles is included.* Instead, World Vision describes itself as “...a Christian humanitarian organization dedicated to working with children, families, and their communities worldwide to reach their full potential by tackling the causes of poverty and injustice.”

Stearns preaches that by living lovingly, kindly, and generously, we will convert people (p. 18). The Apostle Paul would challenge this, perhaps commending him for these niceties but certainly rebuking him for not proclaiming *openly* the objective message.

That World Vision is dedicated to social amelioration is commendable, but for it to claim to be Christian and yet shun the only true gospel message is strange and even deplorable.

World Vision follows in the steps of other well-meaning social-humanitarian organizations like the Red Cross, the YMCA, YWCA, and the Salvation Army. Each of these started with a Christian message that, over time, was diluted and eventually discarded under layer upon layer of social helps.

It seems that no one in their right mind should criticize an organization that seeks to feed starving children of the world and eliminate poverty, but to include this—in fact to insist upon it—as an integral part of *the gospel* is simply not biblical.

World Vision is in reality an international social-welfare program. Stearns sees anything short of this as short on the gospel. Therefore, he sees the role of the church as that of an international distribution center to evenly dole out security (financial and physical). Sound familiar? Atheistic socialism desires the same end.

Christians who understand God’s Word should find it difficult to support the goals of this book.

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## CAN YOU FIND THE GOSPEL IN THEIR VISION?

### **About World Vision** (TAKEN FROM THE BOOK)

#### **WHO WE ARE:**

World Vision is a Christian humanitarian organization dedicated to working with children, families, and their communities worldwide to reach their full potential by tackling the causes of poverty and injustice.

#### **WHOM WE SERVE:**

Motivated by our faith in Jesus Christ, World Vision serves alongside the poor and oppressed as a demonstration of God’s unconditional love for all people.

#### **WHY WE SERVE:**

Our passion is for the world’s poorest children whose suffering breaks the heart of God. To help secure a better future for each child, we focus on lasting, community-based transformation. We partner with individuals and communities, empowering them to develop sustainable access to clean water, food supplies, health care, education, and economic opportunities.

#### **HOW WE SERVE:**

Since 1950, World Vision has helped millions of children and families by providing emergency assistance to those affected by natural disasters and civil conflict, developing long-term solutions within communities to alleviate poverty and advocating for justice on behalf of the poor.