

Consumer Christianity

Part I

T. A. McMahon

What do I mean by consumer Christianity? Generally, it is any attempt to build the kingdom of God or build up the individual Christian (or attract the potential convert to Christianity) by means and methods that appeal to the flesh, i.e., the deceitful and self-serving heart of man. It had its beginning in the Garden of Eden when Satan manipulated Eve into disobeying God while believing she was enriching herself (Gn 3:1-6).

More specifically related to what's taking place today, consumer Christianity is an endeavor to help Christian churches grow in size and become more effective through the application of business principles, marketing strategies, and management concepts. It characterizes the most popular venture in Christendom today, which should seem rather odd, if not disturbing, to anyone who has an understanding of both "consumerism" and "Christianity." Why? Because these terms are antagonistic to one another.

Consumerism in the business sense is a concept based upon customer satisfaction, which is the key to any successful commercial enterprise. The product or service must be tailored to the wants and perceived needs of the customer, or there is no sustainable profit. The consumer rules, because where there is no customer, there is no profit and, therefore, no business. God rules in biblical Christianity. It is His revelation to humanity regarding "all things that pertain unto life and godliness" (2 Pt 1:3). Simply put, biblical Christianity encompasses all that is necessary for mankind to know and do in order to be reconciled to Him, to please Him daily, and to live with Him for all eternity. It is not a business endeavor and, in fact, has no relationship to business or its associated marketing concepts.

Any attempt to enhance the practice of biblical Christianity by means of business principles is, at best, adding futile methodologies to God's Word. At worst, such an attempt rejects the sufficiency of the Scriptures in favor of works of the flesh, quenches the Holy Spirit, and subjects

one to the deceptions of, the service of, and in the end, the bondage of the god of this world. In any case, it leads to spiritual destruction in the church and has eternal consequences.

Consumer Christianity is at the heart of the church-growth movement, and its deadly effect is found among all denominations (as well as pseudo-Christian cults). Many evangelical churches have committed themselves wholeheartedly to a marketing approach aimed primarily at attracting the lost, who are viewed as potential customers. As unbelievers attend the church and mix with new and long-standing members, the consumer concept unavoidably spreads to the entire congregation. This inevitably effects the preaching, music, Sunday School programs, etc., which in turn produces a biblical shallowness throughout the congregation.

More often than not, the business approach has been successful in adding numbers to a church. Tens of thousands

Bible tell us to make the truth more acceptable by feeding it to the lost in diluted or entertaining forms? And is it really the gospel that saves if it's altered to cater to non-Christians? If any believer even remotely thinks so, I fear that the thinking of the world has grievously influenced his understanding of the Bible.

Certainly, pastors ought to know better, yet in most cases where consumerism has infected a church, they have been instrumental in implementing it. The pastors to whom I am referring here, and am most concerned about, are those who consider themselves to be biblical, who sincerely want to see souls saved, and who honestly want to fulfill their calling and ministry in a way that is pleasing to God. How could such a shepherd of the sheep be drawn into consumer Christianity?

The process often develops subtly. Let's say a pastor loves his church members and wants them to be happy. He also wants them to grow spiritually, and he is always looking for ways for new sheep to be added to his flock. When conflicts arise or growth expectations are not realized, solutions to such problems are often sought from others who have been seemingly successful regarding those issues. The recommended remedies almost always involve some form of accommodation.

For example, a very common church conflict today is that of different tastes in music, which is usually resolved by establishing separate services—one with traditional hymns and one featuring contemporary songs. As that alteration seems to satisfy most members, many pastors are encouraged to add more souls to their church by combining the attraction of contemporary music with seeker-sensitive (appealing and non-threatening) messages presented in a convenient and casual Saturday evening service. Innovative programs are then formulated to sustain the interest of would-be converts and motivate the rarely active church members, with particular emphasis on entertaining activities to attract the youth and keep them coming.

Pastors tell me that they reluctantly glean ideas from the world in order to compete with the world that they might reach the lost in order to save them from the world. They're aware of the irony of that approach but argue that it's the only way to avoid preaching to empty pews. The preaching, by the way, is often shortened

BLESSED IS THE MAN THAT WALKETH NOT
IN THE COUNSEL OF THE UNGODLY, NOR
STANDETH IN THE WAY OF SINNERS, NOR
SITTETH IN THE SEAT OF THE SCORNFUL.

—Psalm 1:1

of pastors across the U.S., and thousands more internationally, have been influenced by high-profile ministries and have put to use their various marketing methodologies for soul-winning and church growth.

Is that the biblical way to win souls and effect growth in the church?

To some biblical Christians the answer is an obvious "No!" But to increasing numbers who also claim to hold to the Bible as their authoritative and all-sufficient source of God's truth, "No" has given way to "Possibly...Perhaps..." or "Let's be careful not to throw the baby out with the bath water!" Well, let's strain the water to see if there is indeed a baby to rescue.

Is consumerism supported by the Scriptures? Did God shape His Gospel to gratify the worldly desires of humanity? Are there some things in the Bible that should be strategically avoided in order not to put off "potential" believers? Does God's Word reflect a concern that people might take their "business" elsewhere if their felt needs aren't being met? Does the

and supplemented by visuals, skits, and music productions.

This is a path that, though seemingly harmless at first, leads to the broad road of consumer Christianity. Although we empathize with pastors who feel compelled (some even coerced by church politics) to go down that thoroughfare, it is paved with biblical compromises and headed for a spiritual dead end.

This church-growth enterprise is hardly new to Christianity. It is a chronicle of doing things man's way rather than God's way. Fourth century Emperor Constantine has yet to be equaled in successful strategies for "growing the church." He professed to have become a Christian and induced half of the Roman Empire to do likewise. This era of compromises made by the Emperor (the self-appointed "Vicar of Christ"/"Bishop of bishops") in order to draw in new converts is characterized by Will Durant in *The Story of Civilization* as a time in which "the world converted Christianity."¹ Another historian writes, "Far from being a source of improvement [over the persecution the Christians previously suffered], this [political] alliance was a source of 'greater danger and temptation'....[I]ndiscriminately filling the churches [with pagans]...simply washed away the clear moral landmarks that separated the 'church' from the 'world.'"²

One millennium later, Martin "Luther saw and felt [religious] Rome utterly abandoned to money, luxury, and kindred evils," writes Edwin Booth. "He was stunned and unable to understand it."³ Nevertheless, he and others did something about it. The clarion call of the Reformation was "*Sola Scriptura*!" and, although "Scripture alone" wasn't followed entirely, God's Word and His way were restored as the authority and rule of life for millions deceived by the devastating compromise that became the Roman Catholic Church.

Consumer Christianity has never been a one-way affair. It takes both a deal maker and a deal taker. Tetzels, the sixteenth-century Dominican monk and the "P.T. Barnum" of the sale of Indulgences, was a master manipulator. Even so, his job was made all the easier by "indulging" the self-serving natures of his Catholic customers. Both rich and poor alike were willing to pay anything to avoid the flames of Hell and Purgatory.

Protestantism has had its own share of both spiritual rip-off artists and consumers ripe for the picking. Whereas Tetzels' "fund raising" was instrumental in building St. Peter's in Rome, the "health and prosperity" evangelists of the twentieth century (many still going strong today) helped build Trinity Broadcasting Network

into the largest religious television network in the world. By distorting and turning the biblical doctrine of faith into a power anyone can use to obtain wealth and healing, these con men and women have personally amassed fortunes at the expense of the biblically feeble and illiterate, as well as from those "...whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things" (Phil 3:19).

During the last fifty years, those most susceptible to the schemes of religious charlatans were professing Christians who had an affinity for spiritual *experiences* rather than *sound doctrine*. They were usually found among the Pentecostals and Charismatics. Most thoughtful, doctrine-conscious Christians seemed to be immune to the "seed faith" come-ons of an Oral Roberts or the blasphemous "Holy Spirit" power displays of a Benny Hinn, two leaders among a host of other "signs and wonders" promoters.

However, spiritual gullibility has found fertile soil—or, more pointedly,

AND THE WORLD PASSETH AWAY,
AND THE LUST THEREOF: BUT HE
THAT DOETH THE WILL OF GOD ABIDETH FOREVER.

—1 John 2:17

a widening swamp—among those who traditionally have fostered biblical discernment. Although the seductive methodologies are slightly different, the basis for an effective spiritual deception is the same: no Christians, evangelical or otherwise, are impervious to "...all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life..." (1 Jn 2:16). Furthermore, the only safeguard against such deception—the reading of and obedience to the Word of God in the power of the Holy Spirit—is being systematically diluted throughout the evangelical church.

Church history has demonstrated the necessity of adhering to God's Word; when that takes place, holiness and fruitfulness follow. When biblical Christianity is adulterated (by adding the methods of men) or abandoned altogether, man's religious distortions prevail, leading the professing church into spiritual anemia and blindness: "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prv 14:12). There is also a correlation between the depth of a church's reliance upon the Scriptures and its acceptance of heretical beliefs and practices. As a church reaches a shallow state with regard to biblical understanding, the ability of its members

to discern false teaching becomes practically impossible.

Consumer Christianity's most deadly effect is what it does to the presentation of the gospel of salvation, the only hope a person has to be reconciled to God. It is nearly always a subtle sales pitch featuring all the wonderful things God has for mankind: He loves them so much and desires to have them spend eternity with Him, and they are significant and of infinite worth. This then becomes the reason for Christ's sacrifice on the cross. That mixture of truths and self-indulging distortions is followed by a brief "sinner's prayer" being repeated by those who were persuaded by the enticing offer. This method has become so commonplace that it's difficult for some Christians to recognize any problem, let alone realize how misleading it is with regard to a person truly being saved.

How so? Let's start with someone who is genuinely saved and work backwards. Everyone who is born again by the Spirit of God has a new heart, one filled with God's love, for Him and for others, as well as for His teachings. He or she is a new creation, and although not perfect in these things, there resides within that person a heart that desires to please God rather than self.

One explicit example of this is found in Luke 7:36-50, involving the woman of sinful reputation who entered the home of Simon the Pharisee, where Jesus was invited to dine. She washed His feet with her tears, dried them with her hair, and kissed them repeatedly. Jesus declared of her that she loved much because she was forgiven much.

These passages teach how essential *conviction of sin* is in coming to Christ. The self-righteous and self-serving Pharisee had little or no conviction of sin and therefore sought no forgiveness. The woman, on the other hand, gave no thought to herself or the disdain with which she was regarded by the dinner guests. Her thankfulness that Jesus would and did cleanse her of her sins compelled her to die to self and live for Him.

The gospel according to consumer Christianity, on the other hand, must make its appeal *to self*, emphasizing things (both true and distorted) that meet the felt needs of the lost. This seriously restricts all but a hint of any biblical doctrines that would bring about conviction of sin. What's the problem? Jesus came to save sinners, not consumers.

In the next newsletter, we will further examine how some of today's consumer-oriented concepts and methods are taking hold in the evangelical church while perverting long-established teachings and practices based on the Word of God. **TBC**

Quotable

The world is perishing, the church is failing, Christ's cause is suffering, Christ is grieving on account of the lack of wholehearted Christians bearing much fruit. [Are] you ready to be His disciple in His own meaning of the word...? Let our desire be nothing less than perfect cleansing, unbroken abiding, closest communion, abundant fruitfulness—*true* branches of the true Vine.

Andrew Murray, The True Vine, p. 75

Leading a man to Christ is only the start of the process: we must ensure that the man is grounded in Scripture, loved, and encouraged in the faith...a major part of spiritual growth is precisely a good grasp of doctrine. Without it you will be swayed and confused by each new idea... But more than this, sound doctrine is a splendid avenue to a deeper knowledge of God himself, for doctrine concerns the nature and purpose of God....

George Verwer (founder of Operation Mobilization), No Turning Back, p. 59

**From subtle love of softening things,
From easy choices, weakenings,
Not thus are spirits fortified,
Not this way went the Crucified.
From all that dims Thy Calvary,
O Lamb of God, deliver me....
Let me not sink to be a clod:
Make me Thy fuel, Flame of God.**

Amy Carmichael

Q&A

Question: President Bush recently said of someone who had just died, "May God rest his soul." What did he mean?

Answer: The only rest for the dead is in heaven—and whether one will be there or not is determined prior to death. If the person is not in heaven, he will never be at rest, and it is too late to ask God to "rest his soul"! If he is in heaven, then it is an insult to ask God, who has given him rest, to rest his soul. Maybe this is the politically correct thing to say, but it isn't biblically correct.

Question: We have a rare difference of opinion concerning your assertion that Old Testament saints are a part of the Church resurrected at the time of the Rapture. Certainly, they are saved by faith alone in the shed blood of Christ.... However, they are, as John the Baptist described himself, "friends of the Bridegroom" (John 3:29). The Church,

Christ's Bride, was born on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). At the Wedding Feast of the Lamb, He will have many "friends" in attendance.

Answer: I appreciate your position, but there are serious problems with it. Old Testament saints could only be resurrected at the Rapture:

1) We know that their souls and spirits were in "Abraham's bosom" (Lk 16:22), or "paradise" (Lk 23:43), until Christ took them to heaven (Ps 68:18; Eph 4:8; Heb 6:20). They will still be there when Christ resurrects the dead saints at the Rapture. I find no basis for thinking that Christ will leave their souls and spirits unclothed in heaven (2 Cor 5:1-9) and not bring them with Him to rejoice in their resurrected bodies. The Bible makes no such distinction between Old and New Testament saints. At the Rapture, "them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him" (1 Thes 4:14). I can't imagine that Abraham, who, Christ said, "rejoiced to see my day...and was glad" (Jn 8:56), or John the Baptist, who declared Him to be "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29), did not die with faith in Christ, looking forward to redemption through Him.

2) Thus they must be among "them which sleep in Jesus," whose bodies Christ will resurrect at the Rapture. If not, they would never be resurrected, because the only other persons who are resurrected are those who died as martyrs at the hands of Antichrist (Rv 20:5,6).

3) The only time the bodies of those whose souls and spirits are now in heaven could be resurrected is at the Rapture of the church, caught up to heaven with them. Then why wouldn't they be part of the church?

I don't think that John's describing himself as the friend of the bridegroom was intended to distinguish between himself and the church, but between him and Christ. As for "he that is least in the kingdom of heaven/God" being greater than John the Baptist (Mt 11:11; Lk 7:27, 28), surely that can't mean that John (and the other prophets) are not in the kingdom of heaven/God. Rather, it refers to the difference between Old Testament prophets and saints (while they lived upon earth) upon whom the Holy Spirit came but could also leave—and the simplest believer since the Cross, who is permanently indwelt with and empowered by the Holy Spirit and Christ.

Question: In *The Purpose Driven Life*, Rick Warren tells us that "when the disciples wanted to talk about prophecy, Jesus quickly switched the

conversation to evangelism....He said in essence, "The details of my return are none of your business. What is your business is the mission I've given you. Focus on that...! What we *do* know for sure is this: Jesus will not return until everyone God wants to hear the Good News has heard it...(Matthew 24:14). If you want Jesus to come back sooner, focus on fulfilling your mission, not figuring out prophecy" (pp 285-6). Warren seems to avoid the subject of prophecy and biblical teaching concerning the last days. Do you get this impression?

Answer: It seems so. He misapplies Scripture in a number of ways to support his thesis. First of all, Matthew 24:14 doesn't say (as Rick implies) that the Rapture cannot occur until "everyone God wants to hear the Good News has heard it" [a Calvinist idea]. It says, as he quotes, "Then *the end* will come"—and surely the Rapture is not "the end" (1 Cor 15:24-28). So it isn't true that we can hasten the Rapture by preaching the gospel more diligently, though we should. Of course, "Speculating on the exact timing of Christ's return is futile...." But Rick uses that true statement to seemingly do away with all prophetic teaching—which certainly involves much more than the Rapture, and never involves "the exact timing" thereof.

He supports his downgrading of prophecy with Matthew 24:36, "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." It was 33 verses earlier, however, that the disciples asked Christ what would be the signs of His future coming, the destruction of the temple, and the end of the world. Neither on this occasion nor at any other time did Christ "switch the conversation" from prophecy to evangelism. In fact, Christ responds to the disciples' questions with a *lengthy teaching on prophecy* that involves this entire chapter and the next! Prophecy is the major emphasis of the Bible.

It seems that the Lord has greatly blessed and used Rick Warren, and no doubt he is sincere. But instead of allowing the Bible to teach him and his followers, he often imposes upon it his own ideas. We hope that he will reconsider and turn from such tactics. To that end, we sent him a copy of this Q&A as proposed before it was published, so that he could inform us of any misconceptions we may have and could make the proper corrections if any were needed. (We never received a response.)

Question [representative of several]: In the newest edition of *What Love is*

you make a very interesting claim on page 264: “The Dead Sea Scrolls, as well as comments from early church writers, indicate that the first 15 chapters of Acts were probably written first in Hebrew. The Greek would be a translation. Some scholars claim that going back to a ‘redacted Hebrew’ version, based upon word-for-word Greek-Hebrew equivalents, would render Acts 13:48 more like ‘as many as submitted to, needed, or wanted salvation, were saved.’” I’d like to know where the Dead Sea Scrolls refer to the Book of Acts, and which early church writers and conservative Christian scholars were of the opinion you express.

Answer: I offer no footnotes for this brief paragraph because the source or sources are not important. The phrases, “were probably written” and “some scholars claim,” show that I am not presenting my own opinion gathered from personal research. I am only stating (as something of possible interest for anyone who may wish to pursue it further) that certain people believe this idea. My argument, however, is in no way dependent upon such opinions.

Yet James White treats this paragraph as of major importance and has even attempted to recruit critics to confront me about this in my meetings. Certainly, any basis for the idea that the first 15 chapters of Acts were originally written in Hebrew is tenuous at best—but that doesn’t matter. The fact that some people (including some scholars) believe this to be the case is all that I stated, but it is clearly not relevant to my arguments. It was not wise to include this brief speculative statement and it will be deleted from the next printing.

The three pages I devote to Acts 13:48 offer many solid reasons for rejecting this verse as evidence that certain persons are predestined to salvation and the rest of mankind is predestined to eternal torment. A multitude of scriptures refute this Calvinist theory. None of the many reasons I put forth for my understanding of this passage rests in even the remotest sense upon the opinion of certain persons that the first 15 chapters of Acts may have been originally written in Hebrew.

Thus it is rather sad that James White has spent so much time refuting a casual statement upon which I place no essential importance, while avoiding the major scriptures and arguments I set forth. This is a continuation of the same *modus operandi* to which I called attention in my closing argument in our co-authored

book, *Debating Calvinism*:

White relies on a few passages whose interpretation is arguable. His strongest case that God predestined only an elect to salvation comes from Acts 13:48 and 2 Thessalonians 2:13. Yet his interpretation does not fit God’s character as so clearly established throughout all of Scripture.

Hundreds of scriptures (I have cited scores of them) declare in the clearest terms that God loves and desires the salvation of all. Some of these White explains away by interpreting “world” as “elect,” and “all men” as “all *classes* of men.” “Whosoever” suffers a similar fate—along with God’s love. But dozens of scriptures to which I called his attention won’t allow such mishandling, so he didn’t respond to them in this debate—nor did he refer to them in *The Potter’s Freedom*.

White claims to go by all of Scripture, but he repeatedly cites the same few texts....Pointing to God’s sovereignty as justification for His predestination of multitudes to damnation whom He *could* save, White refuses to consider the hundreds of scriptures in which God pleads with Israel and all mankind to repent and turn to Him.

How can God be sincere in pleading with and offering salvation to those whom He has from eternity predestined to eternal torment? Spurgeon, whom I am accused of misunderstanding and misquoting, said, “Now, was God sincere...? [U]ndoubtedly....He sent his prophets, he entreated the people of Israel to lay hold on spiritual things, but they would not....”

White selectively offers Paul’s quotation of Psalm 14 in Romans 3, that none seek after God, as proof of man’s *inability* to seek God. Yet he sidesteps scores of exhortations for men to seek God, assurances that if they sincerely seek they will find Him, and the many examples of those who have sought and found.

White has no rebuttal for Christ’s exhortation to “strive to enter in at the strait gate” (Lk 13:24), for the prodigal’s repentant “I will arise and go to my father” (Lk 15:18), for good ground being an “honest and good heart” (Lk 8:15), for faith being attributed to individuals (Mt 9:22; 15:28; Mk 10:52; Lk 7:50; 17:18, etc.), etc.

Non-Calvinists can assure all men, “God loves *you*, Christ died for *your* sins.” We know that all are saved eternally who believe His promise to “whosoever will”!

Years ago, White accused me of maligning Calvin by reporting his unChristian conduct in Geneva and said he would refute such “calumnies.” I’m still waiting, as I am for any Calvinist to explain how God could be said to love those whom He *could have saved* but for whom the Father didn’t even send the

News Alert

Excerpts from: *St. Petersburg Times*, 1/10/2005: CHURCH’S HUMMER PRIZE TOO WORLDLY?—Rodney Howard-Browne’s Revival Ministries International will give away a yellow, 2003 H2 Hummer during its Winter Campmeeting, which began Sunday and runs through Jan. 16.

The Campmeeting at the River will double as a celebration of 25 years in the ministry for Howard-Browne. He began pastoring in his native South Africa when he was 18 and calls himself the “Holy Ghost bartender.” Howard-Browne is known for spells of holy laughter, where followers are so drunk with the Holy Spirit they fall on the floor in hysterics.

“I think it’s an excellent idea,” said Randy White, televangelist and senior pastor of Without Walls International Church, one of the fastest growing congregations in Tampa with 18,000 members. “If this were MTV or any other secular market or organization, there wouldn’t even be anything written about it. I applaud Rodney.”

White said that his church has given away homes and paid electric bills for a full year to those attending his services. “It’s a bait on the hook to get people in to hear the message,” he said.

White said churches in the Tampa Bay area have to compete with nearby amusement parks and beaches. Concerts offer million-dollar pyrotechnics, he said.

“We’ll have a candle,” White said. “It’s just sad where the church hasn’t stepped up.” White plans to have Rhythm and Blues songstress Mary J. Blige at Without Walls for the Super Sunday service on Super Bowl Sunday. White says he’s working to get hip-hop stars Usher and Mace to also attend a service. Churches, he said, should be on the cutting edge.

“What would Jesus do?” asked White, pausing to recite a Bible text from John 14. “If you live right, you get a mansion. That’s a pretty good incentive. It’s better than a Hummer.”

“It’s a great idea. Ingenious,” said Randy Brummit, pastor of Brandon Assembly of God with about 400 members. “If I could give away a car a week, we would.”

Endnotes

- 1 Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization* (Simon and Schuster, 1950), Vol. III, 657.
- 2 Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (University of California Press, 1967), 213.
- 3 Edwin P. Booth, *Martin Luther: the Great Reformer* (Barbour Publishing, Inc., Urichsville, Ohio).

Dave & Tom's* Itinerary

Feb 20-27	Cuba Info: The Berean Call (541) 382-6210
March 19	Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa Men's Pancake Breakfast Santa Ana, CA (714) 979-4422
April 1-3	Horizon Christian Fellowship South Greenwood, IN (317) 859-9099
April 9-10	Meadow Grove Baptist Church Brandon, MS (601) 825-5704
April 22-24	Northside Baptist Church Waterloo, ON, Canada (519) 664-2611
April 29-30	Last Days Bible Conference *TA McMahon Calgary, Alberta, Canada (403) 948-5401

Letters

Dear Dave,

I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for your biblically sound, well-reasoned exposés of the wildly popular "Purpose Driven" phenomenon and the whole "seeker-sensitive" movement. I am stunned and grieved as I watch the rapid apostasy engulfing the professing church and believe this movement to be the capstone of the pyramid of false doctrines that have permeated the church, which seems to be the preparation of the "church" to embrace the false messiah who is lurking in the wings waiting to usher in his Utopian kingdom. The embracing of Latter Rain ideals...blended with...the self-centered drive of those seeking their "purpose" has done more to hasten full-blown apostasy than all the cults combined....The grey area is rapidly vanishing, with those refusing and repudiating these heresies increasingly marginalized or shut out altogether....Thank you for continuing to provide those of us who stay in the battle [with] reasoned answers to guide us as we study to show ourselves approved and prayerfully hope to persuade and snatch from the fire those made a prey by the many deceivers. LS (CA)

Dear Rev. Hunt,

I thank God for someone out there who is not afraid to publish the truth about that devil religion that is set to take the world and destroy Israel. We know it can never happen, but our world leaders are ignorant of what is going on, the President of the

U.S. included. Jesus will sit on David's throne. HM (prisoner, GA)

Mr. Hunt,

Please cancel my subscription to *The Berean Call*. I can no longer tolerate your false accusations against good Christians such as Rick Warren and his 40 days of purpose program. I have read all of your books and attended many of your seminars over the years and you have been accurate in exposing false teaching in the past, but you are wrong in this case. I am a fundamental Christian in leadership and know the truth. Mr. Warren is totally accurate in his teaching, and his programs are leading many into a solid relationship with Jesus. Having read Mr. Warren's books and gone through his program it is very obvious that you are attacking him unjustly and have become a tool of the enemy in dividing the body of Christ. You are misleading many and I will not be part of your ministry any longer. I pray you seek the truth and seek to build rather than destroy the work of Jesus. LL (CA)

Dear Bro. Tom,

I can remember as an RC [Roman Catholic] kid during the fifties watching Bishop Fulton J. Sheen on TV. Imagine my surprise to see his old programs being aired on TBN. Do evangelicals understand that this is a false gospel of works? The traditions of the RC Church preempt the teaching of the Bible, and the RC Christ is a savior spelt with an "s" because he cannot save completely, and the seven sacraments are needed to complete the job! MW (NY)

Dear Bereans,

Our first edition of the large print *Berean Call* arrived, and how I do appreciate the new format and your thoughtfulness....Thank you so much for your ministry to Catholics. God loves them—every one, and thank you also for *The Berean Call*. MM (Canada)

Dear Mr. McMahon,

Thanks for the encouragement and discernment. It's getting hard to stand for the Word. My church is now offering Cleansing Streams, Alpha Courses...healing rooms, and now Purpose Driven Bible classes! Our pastor let this come in a little at a time....This "purpose driven" baloney, I feel, is the "icing on the cake" of the one-world church. It can't be stopped, but as Ephesians 6 says, I will stand. So thanks for your newsletters. They are a breath of sweet fresh air of common sense and proper discernment of the Word. LS (MI)

Dear Dave Hunt and friends at TBC,

We were on your mailing list off and on thru the years, would get mad and ask to be removed. We thought you were very arrogant in thinking you were so right and everyone else was wrong. It seemed everyone was in error, and that was so hard for us to swallow. Yet in our hearts, we knew something was wrong but just couldn't accept [it]. It really wasn't the issue of a pride thing "who was right" and "who was wrong." It was, "Do we want to obey the Word of God or not?" Thank you for your dedication and your faithfulness to contend for the faith. I hear the passion and the concern in Dave's voice when he teaches, his deep desire for the souls of man....I am not sure where we would be if it weren't for you all being there. God is so faithful. LV(AZ)

TBC Notes

The Perils of Publishing

As many of you may be aware, TBC has begun publishing some of Dave Hunt's books (and one of mine). This is a venture in which we had little choice. The controversial nature of Dave's out-of-print books (which we consider important enough to get back into print) as well as his new books has progressively limited his "marketability," according to the view of his previous publishers.

Therefore, in the hope of continuing to keep Dave's books available, TBC has taken on publishing responsibilities. We are making some headway, although we've taken a wave or two over the bow. We apologize to all those who pre-ordered the expanded version of *What Love Is This?* and received their copies much later than we had intended, due to printing delays beyond our control. We now no longer will take orders *until* the books or other resources have completed the manufacturing process.

Likewise, if you hear about other exciting projects of ours that are in the works but have production and completion schedules that are tentative at best, keep checking our website for updates.

Pray for wisdom and grace for us in all facets of our new endeavor, especially in distribution.

T.A. McMahon
Executive Director

This is the second in a series of excerpts from a critique of Rick Warren's *The Purpose-Driven Life* by T. A. McMahon. (The critique is available in its entirety on our website at www.thebereancall.org. If you don't have access to the internet, write to us at PO Box 7019, Bend, OR 97708 or call us at 1-800-937-6638 and request a free copy.)

Although Rick Warren seems to the reader to be applying the Scriptures, his preference for paraphrase Bible versions throughout the book is definitely counterproductive to understanding the Word of God. In addition, his encouragement to memorize Scripture verses (normally a good thing), when applied to the paraphrase verses he lists, is not a memorization of God's Word at all, but rather someone's subjective interpretation of the Scriptures. That's not good (p. 11).

RW dabbles in Catholic contemplative prayer techniques, which border on the occult and Eastern meditation, quoting Catholic mystic Brother Lawrence and his book *Practicing the Presence of God* (p. 88).

Furthering the problem of opening the door to the pantheism ("God is in everything") of Eastern mysticism, RW quotes Ephesians 4:6 from *The New Century Version*: "He rules everything and is everywhere and is in everything" (p. 88). The KJV reads: "One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all [i.e., believers]."

RW presents prayer mantras verging on "vain repetitions": "One way is to use 'breath prayers' throughout the day, as many Christians [actually Catholic mystics] have done for centuries. You choose a brief sentence or a simple phrase that can be repeated to Jesus in one breath: 'You are with me.' 'I receive your grace.' 'I'm depending on you.' 'I want to know you.' 'I belong to you.' 'Help me trust you.' Pray it as often as possible so it is rooted deep in your heart" (p. 89).

On page 90, we have another example of doublespeak. After endorsing Catholic mysticism and contemplative meditation techniques, RW confuses the reader by giving a definition of biblical meditation (also on page 190), which is the antithesis of contemplative meditation.

On page 101, RW says, "To 'worship in truth' means to worship God as he is truly revealed in the Bible." While we would agree, sadly, TPDL seems to be prohibiting that for its millions of readers.

RW on various translations and paraphrases: "It is so much easier to offer clichés in worship instead of making the effort to honor God with fresh words and ways. This is why I encourage you to read Scripture in different translations and paraphrases. It will expand your expressions of worship"

(p. 104). In addition to the problems with paraphrases already noted, the use of such a "Bible" makes it nearly impossible to be a "Berean" (Acts 17: 10-11) or to recognize sound doctrine. Why? Because it is not a literal translation of the meaning of the words from the Hebrew or Greek but rather an *interpretation by an individual* of what he believes God is saying. Using *The Message* for example, you cannot read a verse and say, "This is what God's Word says." The best you can say is, "This is what Eugene Peterson says that God's Word says." In order to be a Berean (who searched the Scriptures daily to see if what the Apostle Paul was teaching them was true), one would have to have a literal translation of the Bible and compare it with what Peterson wrote.

On page 120, RW says, "*Baptism doesn't make you a member of God's family; only faith in Christ does that....The only biblical condition is that you believe.*" Although what he says is biblically true, nevertheless Purpose-Driven Life seminars for the purpose of growing churches are offered to and held at Roman Catholic Churches whose congregations *must* believe that Baptism is necessary for their salvation or be condemned to hell. How does he reconcile that? How do *they*?

RW says, "*Relationships must have priority in your life above everything else....God says relationships are what life is all about*" (p. 124,125). Jesus took another view of "relationships" in Luke 12:51-53. His truth transcends temporal relationships (John 17:17).

RW quotes Mother Teresa favorably on page 125. Why? She also believed that Baptism and good works were necessary for her to be saved.

Page 137: "*You become a Christian by committing yourself to Christ, but you become a church member by committing yourself to a specific group of believers.*" No. The church *is* the Body of Christ, of which one becomes a member when he or she is born again.

"God blesses churches that are unified. At Saddleback Church, every member signs a covenant that includes a promise to protect the unity of our fellowship" (p. 167). Will God truly bless a church that requires a member to sign a covenant in contradiction to His Word? (Matthew 5:33-34).

(continued next month)