

The Seeker-Friendly Way of Doing Church

T. A. McMahon

The “seeker-friendly,” or “seeker-sensitive,” movement currently taking a host of evangelical churches by storm is an approach to evangelizing through application of the latest marketing techniques. Typically, it begins with a survey of the lost (referred to by a leading church in this trend as the “unchurched,” or “unchurched Harry and Mary”). This survey questions the unchurched about the things their nearby place of worship might offer that would motivate them to attend. Results of the questionnaire indicate areas of potential changes in the church’s operations and services that would be effective in order to attract the unchurched, keep them attending, and win them to Christ. Those who have developed this marketing approach guarantee the growth of the churches that conscientiously follow their proven methods. Practically speaking, it works!

Two churches are seen as models for this movement: Willow Creek Community Church (near Chicago), pastored by Bill Hybels, and Saddleback Valley Community Church (south of Los Angeles), pastored by Rick Warren. Their influence is stunning. Willow Creek has formed its own association of churches, with 9,500 members. Last year, 100,000 church leaders attended at least one Willow Creek leadership conference. More than 250,000 pastors and church leaders from over 125 countries have attended Rick Warren’s Purpose Driven Church seminars. More than 60,000 pastors subscribe to his weekly email newsletter.

We visited Willow Creek Community Church not too long ago, and it seems to have spared no expense in its mission to attract the masses. Looking past the swans gliding across a mirror lake, one sees what could be mistaken for a corporate headquarters or a very upscale shopping mall. Just off the sanctuary is a large bookstore and an extensive eating area supplied by a food court with five different vendors. A jumbotron screen allows an overflow crowd or those enjoying a meal to view the proceedings in the main sanctuary. The sanctuary itself is spacious and high tech, complete

with three large screens and state-of-the-art sound and lighting systems for multimedia, drama, and musical presentations.

While impressive, Willow Creek is not unique among mega-churches with a reach-the-lost-through-whatever-turns-them-on mindset. Mega-churches across the country have added bowling alleys, NBA regulation basketball courts with bleachers, exercise gyms and spas, locker rooms, auditoriums for concerts and dramatic productions, and Starbucks and McDonald’s franchises—all for the furtherance of the gospel. Or so it is claimed. Although it’s true that such churches are packing them in, that’s not the whole story in evaluating the success of this latest trend in “doing church.”

The stated goal of seeker-friendly churches is reaching the lost. Though biblical and praiseworthy, the same cannot be said for the *methods* used in attempting to achieve that

Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein.

Jeremiah 6:16

goal. Let’s begin with marketing as a tactic for reaching the lost. Fundamentally, marketing has to do with profiling consumers, ascertaining what their “felt needs” are, and then fashioning one’s product (or its image) to appeal to the targeted customer’s desires. The hoped-for result is that the consumer buys or “buys into” the product. George Barna, whom *Christianity Today* calls “the church’s guru of growth,” claims that such an approach is essential for the church in our market-driven society. Evangelical church-growth leaders are adamant that the marketing approach can be applied—and they have employed it—without compromising the gospel. Really?

First of all, the gospel and, more significantly, the person of Jesus Christ do not fit into any marketing strategy. They are not “products” to be “sold.” They cannot be refashioned or image-adjusted to appeal to the felt needs of our consumer-happy culture. Any attempt to do so compromises to some degree the truth of *who Christ is* and *what He has done for us*. For example, if the lost are considered consumers and

a basic marketing “commandment” says that the customer must reign supreme, then whatever may be offensive to the lost must be discarded, revamped, or downplayed. Scripture tells us clearly that the message of the Cross is “foolishness to them that are perishing” and that Christ himself is a “rock of offense” (1 Cor 1:18; 1 Pt 2:8). Some seeker-friendly churches, therefore, seek to avoid this “negative aspect” by making the temporal benefits of becoming a Christian their chief selling point. Although that appeals to our gratification-oriented generation, it is neither the gospel nor the goal of a believer’s life in Christ.

Secondly, if you want to attract the lost on the basis of what might interest them, for the most part you will be appealing to and accommodating their flesh. Wittingly or unwittingly, that seems to be the standard operating procedure of seeker-friendly churches. They mimic what’s popular in our culture: top-forty and performance-style music, theatrical productions, stimulating multi-media presentations, and thirty-minutes-or-less positive messages. The latter, more often than not, are topical, therapeutic, and centered in self-fulfillment—how the Lord can meet one’s needs and help solve one’s problems.

Those concerns may be lost on increasing numbers of evangelical pastors but, ironically, not on some secular observers. In his perceptive book *This Little Church Went to Market* (see resource materials), Pastor Gary Gilley notes that the professional marketing journal *American Demographics* recognizes that people 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.’” (pp. 20-21)

There’s another item that many pastors seem to be missing in their excitement over “growing your church through attracting the lost.” Although numbers seem to rule in this seeker-friendly mania (an amazing

841 churches in this country have reached the “mega” category, with 2,000 to 25,000 weekend attendees), few have realized that the sizeable increase in church attendance is *not due to the influx of the unchurched*. During the last 70 years, the percentage of this country’s population attending church has been relatively constant at about 43 percent. A spike of 49 percent in 1991 (years prior to today’s initial seeker-sensitive enthusiasm) gradually declined, returning to 42 percent in 2002 (www.barna.org). From where, then, do those mega-churches, which have outfitted themselves to accommodate the unchurched, get their members? Mostly from smaller churches that aren’t interested in or that can’t afford the fleshly attractions. And what of the supposed horde of unchurched Harrys and Marys who have been assembled? They constitute a very small part of mega-church congregations. During his year of researching Willow Creek, G.A. Pritchard, in his book *Willow Creek Seeker Services* (Baker Book House, 1996), estimated that the targeted unchurched made up only between 10 and 15 percent of the 16,000 or so who attended weekend services!

If this percentage is typical among seeker-friendly churches, which likely is the case, a rather disturbing situation has developed. Thousands of churches here and abroad have completely restructured themselves as *outreach centers* for the unchurched. This, by the way, is not biblical. The church is for the maturing and equipping of the saints, who then *go out* to reach the lost. Nevertheless, seeker-sensitive churches have turned to entertainment and conveniences in order to attract Harry and Mary and make them feel comfortable in their new church environment. In order to keep them coming back, they have avoided the thorough teaching of Scripture in favor of positive, uplifting messages designed to make them feel good about themselves. As unchurched Harry and Mary continue to attend, they get only a vague hint of biblical truth that might bring conviction of sin and true repentance. Worse yet, they get a *psychologized view* of themselves that undermines that truth. However, as grievous as that situation is, it doesn’t end there.

The vast majority of those who attend seeker-friendly fellowships profess to be believers. Yet most were drawn to those churches by the same worldly allurements that were meant to entice the unchurched, and they continue to attend, being fed the same biblically anemic diet created for the wooing of unbelievers. At best, they receive the skimmed milk of the Word; at worst, pabulum contaminated with “profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called” (1 Tm 6:20). Certainly a

church can grow numerically on that basis, but *not* spiritually. Furthermore, there is no opportunity for believers to mature in the faith in such an environment. In defense of seeker-sensitive churches, some have argued that mid-week services are set apart for discipleship and getting into the meat of Scriptures. If that indeed is the case, it’s a rare exception rather than the rule.

As we’ve noted, most seeker-friendly churches focus much of their time, energy, and resources on accommodating unchurched Harry and Mary. Consequently, week after week, the entire congregation is subjected to a diluted and leavened message. Then, on Wednesday evening, when a fellowship is usually reduced to quarter or a third of its normal size, would it be reasonable to assume that this remnant is served a nourishing meal featuring the meat of the Word, expositional teaching, and an emphasis on sound doctrine and discipleship? Hardly. We’ve yet to find a seeker-friendly church where that takes place. The spiritual meals offered at mid-week services are usually support group meetings and classes for discerning one’s spiritual gifts or going through the latest psycho-babble-ized “Christian” bestseller

**Blessed is the man that walketh not
in the counsel of the ungodly, nor
standeth in the way of sinners....**

Psalm 1:1

such as *Wild at Heart* rather than the study of the Scriptures.

Perhaps the most insidious aspect of the seeker-friendly approach to doing church is an attempt to impress the unchurched by looking to and quoting those regarded as the experts in solving all their mental, emotional, and behavioral problems: psychiatrists and psychologists. Nothing in the history of the church has undermined the truth of the sufficiency of God’s Word for “all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (2 Pt 1:3) more than the introduction of the pseudo-science of psychotherapy. Its thousands of concepts and hundreds of methodologies are unproven, contradictory, unscientific, and thoroughly unbiblical, as we’ve documented in our books and in previous articles. Pritchard observed that at Willow Creek “Hybels not only teaches psychological principles, but often uses the psychological principles as interpretive guides for his exegesis of Scripture... King David had an identity crisis, the apostle Paul encouraged Timothy to do self-analysis, and Peter had a problem with boundary issues. The point

is, psychological principles are regularly built into Hybels’ teaching” (p. 156).

During my own visit to Willow Creek, Pastor Hybels gave a message that began with Scripture and addressed the problems that result when people lie. However, he mustered his chief support regarding the harmful consequences of lying from psychiatrist M. Scott Peck, the author of *The Road Less Traveled* (Simon & Schuster, 1978), who declared in that book (pp. 269-70), “God wants us to become Himself (or Herself or Itself)”!

Saddleback Community Church likewise is entrenched in the psychotherapeutic. Although claiming to be Christ-centered rather than psychological, it has one of the largest conglomerations of Alcoholics Anonymous-based 12-Step recovery programs in the country. The church sponsors more than a dozen support groups, such as Adult Children of Chemically Addicted, Codependency, Co-Addicted Women in a Relationship with Sexually Addicted Men, Eating Disorders, and so forth. Each group is normally led by someone “in recovery” from the “addiction,” and the resource materials for understanding the “disorder” include books mostly authored by psychiatrists and psychologists (www.celebraterecovery.com).

Although “in denial” about his use of “pop psychology,” much of it permeates Rick Warren’s work, including his seven-million bestseller, *The Purpose Driven Life*, which is largely about self-fulfillment, promotes *Celebrate Recovery*, and is sprinkled with psych references such as “Samson was co-dependent” (p. 233).

The overriding message from psychologically driven Willow Creek and Saddleback is that the Word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit are insufficient for delivering a person from a habitual sin and for transforming his or her life into one that is fruitful and pleasing to God. Again, what these churches say and do is exported to hundreds of thousands of church leaders around the world.

A large part of the evangelical church has developed a pleasure-laden, cruise ship mentality, but it will result in a spiritual Titanic. Seeker-friendly church pastors (and those tempted to climb aboard) need to get on their knees and read the words of Jesus to the church of the Laodiceans (Rv 3: 14-21). They were “rich, and increased with goods,” yet failed to recognize that in God’s eyes, they were “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” Jesus, standing outside their church, where they had unwittingly displaced Him, offers them *His counsel*, the truth of His Word, which alone will enable them to live their lives for *His pleasure*. There can be nothing better here on earth, and for all eternity. **TBC**

Quotable

This age of novelties would seem to have discovered spiritual power in brass bands and tambourines....The tendency of the time is towards bigness, parade, and show of power....Jesus said "Preach the gospel to every creature." But men are getting tired of the divine plan; they are going to be saved by the priest...by the music...by theatricals.... Well, they may try these things...but nothing can ever come of the whole thing but utter disappointment and confusion. God dishonored, the gospel travestied, hypocrites manufactured by the thousands, and the church dragged down to the level of the world.

C.H. Spurgeon

The Church of God has gone into the entertainment business! People must be amused, and as the church needs the people's money, the church must supply the demand and meet the craving! How else are godless hypocrites to be held together? So the picture show and entertainment...take the place of the gospel address and the solemn worship of God. And, thus, Christless souls are lulled to sleep and made to feel "religious" while gratifying every carnal desire under the sanction of the sham called the church! And the end? What an awakening [in eternity]!

H.A. Ironside

Q&A

Question: Are there any more prophecies to be fulfilled before Jesus can rapture the church?

Answer: No, and there never were. Jesus taught that He could come at any moment: "Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh" (Mt 24:44); "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning...like unto men that wait for their lord..." (Lk 12:35,36). So did Paul: "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour..." (Phil 3:20); "...ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven..." (1 Thes 1:9,10); "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ..." (Ti 2:13); "...unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time..." (Heb 9:28).

Obviously, if believers were to watch, wait, look for, and expect Christ at any moment, there could never have been any signs that had to be fulfilled before the Rapture. The signs are for the Second Coming—and they are very much in

evidence today, which means that the Rapture must be close.

Question: What significance did September 11 have in Bible prophecy?

Answer: There are some who attempt to tie this event in with the fall of Babylon the Great in Revelation 18. If that is true, then we have all missed the Rapture, because the events of Revelation 18 take place afterwards. The destruction of the World Trade Center and the attack on the Pentagon drew nations together in a coalition to oppose terrorism worldwide. Another step was thereby taken in preparation for the coming one world government. The memorial services that followed 9/11 featured Muslim, Buddhist, Sikh, and Hindu clerics together with Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish clergy. Even evangelical leaders participated officially in the memorial services. The impression was given that all were praying to the same God. These services were another step in the direction of the coming world religion.

There was no specific significance, however, that could be identified in Bible prophecy.

Question: In your Q&A of Dec. 2003 (re: Phil Johnson/John MacArthur) you wrote, "Refute my reasoning if you can, but don't call me a liar." As an avid reader of about everything you write (except *What Love Is This?*—I'm a Calvinist), I made marginal notes. One reads, "Dave's right, MacArthur's Calvinism is not consistent." But later, I also wrote, "Dave doesn't understand Romans 4:16, It is by faith that it might be by grace." My friend and mentor, Dave, I cannot tell you how much I appreciate you and your work...but you are mistaken about Calvinism. Please allow me to help you a bit: 1) Man is as spiritually dead as a dog is physically and cannot respond to any kind of stimuli. Man is totally depraved. 2) But God loved and chose some whom He would save. 3) Those whom He loved, He would grant to be born again. Faith and repentance are inseparable graces granted simultaneously with the new birth. There you have it. I have tried to refute your reasoning. P.S. You are right to challenge these pseudo-Calvinists concerning their claims that God loves everyone, even if He doesn't choose [to save] everyone.

Answer: I don't understand Romans 4:16? No, I understand it well. Paul points out that Abraham was justified *without* works *before* the law as proof that salvation is not by works but by God's grace. That "it is of faith, that

it might be by grace," simply reflects the fact that grace and works are mutually exclusive (Rom 11:6) as are faith and works (4:5).

Instead of what Paul clearly says, amazingly in 4:16 you claim to find Calvinism's peculiar definition of total depravity, its idea that God doesn't love all, and its teaching that God must sovereignly regenerate the spiritually dead so that He can then give them faith to believe. There is nothing even remotely related to such doctrines in Romans 4:16 or anywhere else in Scripture.

You declare that "faith and repentance are inseparable graces granted simultaneously with the new birth." How do you find that in Romans 4:16? It is neither there nor anywhere else in the Bible—nor in Calvinism! *Granted simultaneously?* On the contrary, Calvinism claims God must first regenerate the spiritually dead, and only then can He give them faith to believe the gospel: "Therefore all men...without the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit...are neither able nor willing to return to God..." [Synod of Dort]; "The Reformed view of predestination teaches that before a person can choose Christ...he must be born again...one does not first believe, then become reborn..." [R.C. Sproul, *Chosen by God*, p. 10]; "A cardinal point of Reformed theology is the maxim, 'Regeneration precedes faith' [Sproul, *Chosen*, p. 72]." A.W. Pink insists, "A man is not regenerated because he has first believed in Christ, but he believes in Christ because he has been regenerated." I could quote many others declaring the same. Do you have another Calvinism?

Contrary to Calvinism, the Bible repeatedly puts faith first: "...that *believing* ye might have life" (Jn 20:31); the Galatians had *become* "the children of God *by faith* in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:26); "Being born again...by the word of God...which by the gospel is preached unto you" (1 Pt 1:23-25), "them that believe to the saving of the soul" (Heb 10:39), etc., etc.

Of course, the new birth is "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God"—but it is to those who "received him...believe[d] on his name" (Jn 1:11-13).

You say, "God loved [some] and chose some whom He would save." You deny that God loves all, that He would have all men to be saved, and that He offers salvation to all by grace through faith. You misrepresent and malign the God of the Bible and make Him less loving than we must be!

You err in equating spiritual death with physical death. The physically dead can't believe, but they can't sin either. The spiritually dead *can* sin and also can hear and believe: "The hour...now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live" (Jn 5:25); "he that

believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live..." (Jn 11:25), etc.

Question: Please comment on this new bestseller, *The Da Vinci Code*. It claims the Bible was collated by Constantine and a vote of the Council of Nicea, which did away with the gospels that spoke of Christ's humanity and embellished gospels to make him godlike. The Council voted to establish Him as "Son of God." The Dead Sea Scrolls prove that the modern Bible was compiled and edited by men who possessed a political agenda to promote the divinity of the man Jesus Christ [in order] to solidify their own power base. The "Holy Grail" was revealed by Da Vinci in his painting of the Last Supper when he painted Mary Magdalene on Jesus' right. The "secret" that is being hidden is that Jesus was married to Mary and they had a child. The "Priory of Zion" secret society claims this is a royal bloodline that still exists. They worship the female deity, Mary Magdalene. My concern is that young Christians could be misled and the bias of non-Christians against the church and Bible strengthened.

Answer: This is sensational nonsense, which many are more willing to believe than the truth. There was no vote at the Council of Nicea concerning the books of the Bible. They were simply quoted by both sides. The Old Testament had been settled centuries before Christ, and no vote was needed for the New Testament. It was not until the Third Council of Carthage 72 years later that the first council declaration in this regard would be made. Christians knew and agreed by consensus upon the New Testament.

Yes, the Council of Nicea did put down the heresy of Arius, who denied that Jesus was God. But they settled the matter from the Bible and not by Constantinian edict. The Old Testament itself proves Christ's deity. Among the Dead Sea Scrolls was almost a complete copy of Isaiah, which turned out to be exactly the same as the copies the church already had—and it clearly declares Christ's deity. No one could tamper with the Old Testament, of which we have the Septuagint dating back prior to 200 BC—and it agrees with the New Testament. The historical and prophetic accuracy of the Bible and its doctrinal unity from Genesis to Revelation proves it has never been revised in any way.

That Da Vinci painted a woman into the Last Supper is disputed—but what would it matter if he did? He wasn't there and is not the authority. "Holy Grail" is more nonsense and sensationalism. That Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene is

more of the same. You put your finger on the obvious bias—denying Christ's deity while elevating Mary as goddess.

Prove that this book is foolishness? It contradicts the Bible, which we know is the truth, and therefore it must be false. The Bible is filled with historical and prophetic proofs for which there is not enough space to recite here.

Question: In Hebrews 6 it says, "if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance..." Doesn't the word "again" mean that they had already fallen away and repented at least once? Yet I've heard you say that this passage is one of the strongest for *not* falling away! Can you explain?

Answer: The phrase, "to renew them again unto repentance," does not mean that they have fallen away and are being *renewed* again. The "again" refers to being saved after having fallen away. That this could not happen even once, however, let alone multiple times, is clear from the phrase, "...impossible for those who were once enlightened...if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance..." (4-6).

The author doesn't say "when they shall fall away," but "if." Why would it be *impossible* to get saved again if salvation could be lost? Two reasons are given: 1) "they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh"; and 2) "put him to an open shame."

In other words, if the crucifixion of Jesus 1,900 years ago was not enough to keep one saved, and if salvation could be lost, then Christ would have to be crucified again for one to be saved again. Furthermore, if Christ purchased salvation at a price we could never pay, then gave it to us to keep, He would be held up to "open shame" for such folly, which would be like giving a fortune to a two-year-old for him to keep.

This section about "falling away" is proved to be hypothetical—something that could never happen. Look at the way it ends: "But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak" (v. 9). In other words, falling away does not accompany salvation.

News Alert

www.telegraph.co.uk, 24/01/2004:

The latest religious phenomenon to hit the US is one that is being viewed as the most significant since the advent of televangelism in the 1980s, writes Oliver Poole.

An advertisement for the Saddleback Church invites congregants to attend "God's Extreme Makeover"—a revival of Christ in their hearts named after the

latest television fad, in which volunteers undergo plastic surgery.

Leaflets at the door to the main hall proclaim "You Can Bring Your Coffee Into Any Venue." The thousands inside are able to sing along to spiritual songs—not traditional hymns—from the words on giant karaoke screens suspended above a light rock band.

This is the United States' latest religious phenomenon. As Americans like going to shopping malls for all their consumer needs in one spot, so self-styled "megachurches"....offer a one-stop spiritual supermarket. At the Saddleback Church in Lake Forest just outside Los Angeles County, there are not only four main Sunday services but 18 small ones.

A cafe sells food and drinks. Baptisms are conducted at a pool to one side where "warm water" is promised. There are picnic spots and walks through manicured gardens in addition to church softball and basketball teams. Parties are held for singles to meet fellow believers.

At Saddleback's 11:30 am Sunday service there is talk of love and togetherness. The pastors wear microphone headsets and chinos, use slang in their sermons and certainly avoid anything that resembles "thee" or "thou."

Eddie Gibbs, a professor at the Fuller Theological Seminary, has described it as a conscious process to "remove every obstacle that keeps people from coming into the Christian Church." Reed Cougeau, 49, said, "It makes you feel good about yourself."

Rick Muchow, the church's Pastor of Greater Arts—which means that his guitar leads the singing—defends the approach adopted. The church's target market is the thirtysomethings, many now with young children, who are seeking to return to religion. Having grown up in an era of consumerism they are looking not only for God in a church, but also a variety of facilities.

"We are trying to get the people in so that we can then process them towards a greater understanding of the faith, which we do through smaller discussion groups for those that want to further examine their spiritual path," he said.

"Don't forget Christ used user-friendly language. He spoke to his followers in parables." [TBC: 1) *On the contrary, Matthew 13:10,11 indicates that parables were not intended to be "user friendly."* 2) *The maxim, "That which brings them in, keeps them in," applies here. If people are attracted to a church because of its worldly goodies, that insatiable appetite has to be continually fed. On the other hand, if they are drawn in because of God's Word, that's hunger every pastor should delight in helping to satisfy.*]

Dave & TA's Itinerary

Mar 4-7 Dave & TA	Calvary Chapel of the Triad Prophecy Conference Kernersville NC (336) 996-6880
Mar 12-14	Fairhaven Bible Chapel San Leandro CA (510) 568-2488 reg: www.fairhavenbc.org/hunt info: www.fbc-sl.org
Mar 15	Calvary Chapel San Jose San Jose CA (408) 269-8331
Mar 26-28	Apex Baptist Church Apex NC (919) 362-6176
Apr 3-4	Bear Lake Bible Chapel Apopka FL (407) 869-0198
Apr 17-18	Calvary Church Port Orchard Port Orchard WA (360) 876-7288 veronicaw_calvarypo@hotmail.com
Apr 23-25 Dave & TA	Heritage Bible Church Terrytown LA (504) 392-4900 toll free (866) 68 GRACE www.heritagebiblechurch.com
Apr 29- May 9	Tirane, Albania & other locations Georg Sturm + 355-68-223-1763 GEOSTURM01@aol.com
May 24-25	Niagara Falls Prophecy Conf. Midnight Call Niagara Falls, CANADA (800) 845-2420 (803) 755-0733

Letters

Dear Dave and T.A.,

You asked for feedback on the radio ministry. As you are not on a station in my area, I have been receiving it [on tape] monthly for the last couple years. I find the tapes to be very useful. They work in very well with my commute and exercise time. As a family physician, I have especially found your discussions on psychology and New Age medicine to be very instructive, and [they] help keep me on the straight and narrow course. ML (MI)

Dear Mr. Hunt,

I recently purchased one of your books, *A Cup of Trembling*, in a U.K. charity shop. I have never before bought any book concerning religion; in fact I was dubious, thinking I'd probably never read more than a few pages. However, I found it extremely compelling. I am in the process of reading it for the third time. I have scoured bookshops and charity shops in the hope of finding more of your books—unfortunately, to no avail. I am neither Jewish nor a practicing Christian.... Maybe it is the troubled times we now find ourselves in, with the threat of terrorism literally on our doorstep.... *A Cup of Trembling* has had such an impact on me. It has awakened and stirred something deep within myself, which I have not felt since

early childhood. Your book has taught me much regarding Judaism and about Christianity. I feel like I have just woke up after 47 years. I have been walking around with my eyes closed and trusting that everybody—governments and churches—wants to find a solution for a peaceful Israel. Your book has given me answers, but I thirst to know more. MN (England)

Dear Brothers,

Thank you for years of helps. I've been stressed by discomfort in "megachurch." Trying to describe [it], I come up with "Christian Lite," but am I just old and critical? There are lots of good aspects, but my spirit is not at peace.... I see too much reliance on dynamic pastors.... music that stirs the flesh and becomes hypnotic, going over and over the lyrics; "mission money" really means building fund; financial statement only on request; Alpha Course is main evangelism tool.... Does Christ hold rightful place? I see extreme dedication to the church, but to Christ? I don't hear it.... It feels "American"—*fun*, 90 percent contemporary music, assigned sermons, about ten pastors for different groups, sports teams—no prayer meetings, no Sunday night services.... Starbucks coffee and relaxed dress code, but pushing modesty. It "feels" like a guru worship scene. JS (MD)

Dear Berean Call,

Please remove me from your mailing list. I've been disappointed in Dave ever since he wrote such a scathing criticism of Calvinists—believers in the doctrines of sovereign grace—of whom I am one. JH (TX)

Dear Folks at Berean Call,

With so much false teaching right in our churches... it is a comfort to know you are there. I have learned so much from Dave's book *Occult Invasion* that I bought a copy for my son to use as a witnessing tool. LL (NJ)

Dear Dave Hunt,

The excess in everything in this enlightened age leaves those of us who refuse to be "politically correct," [and who] rely on the God of the Scriptures, very much in the minority. I applaud your uncompromising stand. By naming names, you are a watchman on the wall—to ones like me, who want to be warned. SH (AZ)

Dear Dave,

Thank you for writing *A Woman Rides the Beast*. It has helped me to focus on the simplicity of salvation.... I am almost ashamed to admit that I did not recognize Satan's work in trying to keep us from believing that Jesus' sacrifice was 100 percent sufficient. Even as people of the reformed faith, it seems we want to hang

on to favorite sins, or think we can earn brownie points with God by doing the right things. Gratitude needs to be our driving force. Satan's only job is to get between our salvation and Christ. Either we believe or we don't. Either Christ's sacrifice is sufficient or it's not. As the Bible says, anything more or less is from the father of lies. As we see the buds on the fig trees become tender, we must stand together as Christian people to expose Satan and his work. Thank you again for your research and work. Thank God for your talents. TD (Canada)

TBC Notes

Lights, Camera, Salvation?

Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* had not reached most theatres at the time of this writing. Yet, the excitement it has created among well-known Christian leaders who have previewed the film and are very enthusiastic about it is amazing. One article that addressed such enthusiasm began with this comment: "For years it was an article of faith for many Christians that the most powerful vehicle for bringing nonbelievers to Jesus was a Billy Graham crusade. Now, they expect it will be a Mel Gibson movie."

Not having seen it as yet, we can offer nothing definitive. We shall see it as soon as it arrives here in Bend and follow that with our review.

In anticipation of reviewing the film, here are a few of the issues we will consider and which we encourage you to contemplate if you've already seen it: 1) How does presenting "Jesus" on the screen square with the Second Commandment (Ex. 20:4)? 2) Is the film (as John Paul II said, "It is as it was.") visually true to the Word, or is it "adding to" the Scriptures? 3) Will the emphasis on Christ's physical sufferings (the Catholic gospel?) divert people away from the *biblical* gospel (His suffering on the Cross the wrath of and eternal separation from God due us, to completely expiate our sins)? 4) To what degree is Mel Gibson's extremely conservative Catholicism reflected in the film? 5) Is this motion picture event another (albeit highly significant) inducement for the rapidly developing market-oriented, entertainment-hungry, ecumenically prone evangelical church?

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SAMPLES AND CRITICISMS OF THE *Let Us Entertain You • Make You Feel Good About Yourself • Never Offend You • Keep It “Lite” • Meet Your Felt Needs • We’re Your Therapist • Build Your Self-Esteem • Make You Happy • Tickle Your Ears • Be Positive • Make You Comfortable • Focus On You • Don’t Rock The Boat • Feed You Fuzzy Bible Translations • Forget Being A Berean • Meet Your Consumer Needs • Dialogue To Consensus • Bible’s Neither Authoritative Nor Sufficient • Doctrine Is Too Divisive • We’re All Brothers and Sisters In Christ • We Do It Your* **WAY OF DOING CHRISTIANITY**

“An undisputed historical fact is that I am the founder, really, of the church-growth movement in this country...I advocated and launched what has become known as the marketing approach in Christianity.” – Robert Schuller, as quoted in *Willow Creek Seeker Services* by G.A. Pritchard

“In seminary I took the equivalent of a total quality management course where I learned how to survey the congregation: ‘What do you think and how do you feel?’...[However, we]’re accountable to [the Word of God], as is, not how do we feel or think about it.” – Dean Gotcher, The Institute of Authority Research

“*The Beverly Hillbillies Bible Study*: This is a church-growth tool that also helps with the perpetual problem of recruiting outstanding Sunday School teachers. I highly recommend it.” – King Duncan, Editor, *Dynamic Preaching* (Also available: *The Mayberry Bible Study* with Andy, Barney, Opie, and all your old friends; *The Bonanza Bible Study*; *The DVD Bible Study*, starring the *Dick Van Dyke Show*)

[From a brochure to attract teens to a national evangelical youth convention] “Examine your own spiritual journey. [Prayer] labyrinths were a feature of many medieval cathedrals. At the convention you’ll have the opportunity to experience a contemporary version of a labyrinth [used by Catholic occultists and mystics]...Don’t miss this opportunity for spiritual reflection.” – *Group Magazine*, 11/1/01

“In *An Invitation to Christian Yoga*, author and Episcopal priest Nancy Roth offers yoga as an ancient but contemporary path to deepening the Christian experience of prayer and contemplation.” – *Cowley Publications*

“A three-year odyssey will end today when a Pentecostal congregation in Detroit and its pastor take the remarkable step of joining the Catholic Church.” – *Detroit Free Press*, 4/1/01

“Houston’s new Family Life Center at Brentwood Baptist Church features a 74,000-square-foot facility housing an NBA regulation-size basketball court with retractable bleachers, a volleyball court, a weight and exercise room, a full locker room with showers, a full-service kitchen, and a McDonalds restaurant. The 1,000-seat Fellowship Hall has a portable stage for drama and music productions.” – www.century-builders/portfolio/completed/brentwood/html

“Worldly marketing methods may seem to yield large numerical results for a time but will also produce gradual spiritual compromise and eventual disintegration.” – Henry Morris, *The Defender Study Bible*

“James Davison Hunter [in *The Public Interest*] concludes that today’s secular worldview is influencing...the moral educational curricula at churches and synagogues around the nation, and he finds that the old categories of sin, repentance and redemption are out, and the therapeutic language of self-esteem and self-love are in. Hunter cites Dr. James Dobson, of Focus on the Family, a professional psychologist, as an example of this melding of psychological beliefs into Christian moral education....” – *Jewish World Review*, 3/29/00

“An inaugural prayer luncheon sponsored by The Washington Times Foundation was one of the largest and most diverse inaugural religious gatherings of clergy and lawmakers in memory. The Rev. Robert Schuller...marveled at the ‘myriad’ of different religious groups praying in the same room and complimented each for its own ‘spiritual pilgrimage.’ Commenting on the apparent unity, Schuller added, ‘...the only way I can explain it in my theology is [that] Jesus Christ has really diversified His investment portfolio.’” – *The Washington Times*, 1/20/01

“The National Council of Churches is asking congregations in its 36-member denominations to host open houses for their Muslim neighbors...The open houses are part of a growing religious movement to...foster interfaith understanding.” – *Associated Press*, 5/1/02

“Different schools of therapy offer visions of the good life and how to live it, and those whose ancestors took comfort from the words of God and worshiped at the altars of Christ and Yahweh now take solace from and worship at the altars of Freud, Jung, Carl Rogers, Albert Ellis...and a host of similar authorities.” – Psychologist Bernie Zilbergeld in *The Shrinking of America: Myths of Psychological Change*.

“They never dreamed they’d hear an Anglican priest impersonate and sing like Elvis,” Rev. Dorian Baxter says. “They really went berserk. Through Elvis, I have reached many people and brought them to Christ.” – *Christian News*, 2/19/01

“Classical theology has erred in its insistence that theology be ‘God-centered,’ not ‘man-centered.’” – Robert Schuller, *Self-Esteem: The New Reformation*

“If I had my way, there would be 100,000 Willow Creek Churches in this country. With God’s blessing, perhaps we can make some headway toward that goal.” – George Barna, *Marketing the Church*
