

# Magazine

## Presbyterian Church

Randy Blackaby

### “Homosexual Ordination Threatens to Further Split Declining Presbyterian Church”

The Presbyterian Church is poised to split as division over ordination of homosexuals creates two camps in an already liberal and divided denomination. An August 2001 survey of 2,150 pastors, non-pulpit clergy, elders and lay members by the Presbyterian Panel, the research arm of the church, found that seventy-three percent expect a split along liberal-conservative lines.

This comes as the denomination has suffered significant declines in membership for the past forty years. Current membership in the Presbyterian Church in the USA is about 2.4 million, a fifty-seven percent decline since 1983 when membership was 4.2 million.

If division occurs, it will not be the first in modern history. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, a group of less than 25,000 today, formed in 1932 as conservatives were upset that evangelism was being minimized and ecumenical elements were teaching that faith in Christ is not the only means to salvation. Another group formed in the early 1970s after a rift over church support of the National Council of Churches, involvement in social issues, liberal theology, ordination of women, support of abortion and other issues. That group is the Presbyterian Church in America, today numbering less than 250,000.

That further division is likely was recently demonstrated. About half of the presbyteries at an October 2001 meeting of the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly voted to include “gracious separation” from the denomination as a future option if the church doesn’t back away from efforts to grant gays and lesbians equal rights in the church.

Robert H. Bullock Jr., writing as editor of *Presbyterian Outlook*, even speculated about “death for the denomination if current trends

continue.”

Back in 1993 the church’s General Assembly voted seventy-two percent in favor of continuing a ban on ordination of homosexuals. By 2000, however, church leaders were almost evenly divided. More recently there has been discussion of making such ordination a “local option” for individual presbyteries.

“One side says we understand scripture to say homosexual behavior is sinful, the other says it is a gift from God. Those are pretty disparate positions,” said Bob Davis at the 212th General Assembly in 2000.

More conservative Presbyterians cite biblical condemnations of homosexuality and urge therapy to change sexual

*continued on p. 118*

### Special Issue — The Bible and Contemporary Churches



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# The Church of God

Steven F. Deaton

According to Frank S. Mead and Samuel S. Hill the “Church of God is the ‘denominational’ name of over two hundred conservative Protestant groups.”<sup>1</sup> These churches are overwhelmingly Pentecostal and Premillennial. A notable exception is the Church of God (Anderson, Indiana), which is neither Pentecostal nor Premillennial.<sup>2</sup> Numerous summaries of various groups can be found in the Mead-Hill book. We will focus on three of the more prominent ones, the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee), its first cousin the Church of God of Prophecy, and the Church of God in Christ.

## A Divided Church

**The Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee).** It began with eight people in 1886 and was initially known as the “Christian Union.”<sup>3</sup> In 1923 a dispute arose over A.J. Tomlinson’s teaching about theocratic government. A split occurred with most rejecting Tomlinson’s ideas. They followed F.J. Lee, while the others continued to view Tomlinson as “general overseer” and started the Church of God of Prophecy. The church believes in justification by faith, baptism of the Holy Spirit, foot washing, tongue speaking, divine healing, and the premillennial coming of Christ. They condemn the use of alcohol and tobacco and oppose membership in secret societies. They now claim to have over seven million members world wide.

**The Church of God of Prophecy.** As noted above, this denomination shares a common background with the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee). They believe in Holy Spirit baptism, speaking in tongues as the initial evidence of Spirit baptism, the premillennial return of Christ, foot washing, and total abstinence from alcohol and tobacco. They state their membership grew from 262,000 in ninety countries to 560,000 in one hundred twenty countries from 1990 to 2000.<sup>4</sup> An annual general assembly meets at its headquarters in Cleveland, Tennessee.

**The Church of God in Christ.** This is the largest Pentecostal denomination in the world with an estimated membership of eight million in 1997.<sup>5</sup> C.H. Mason and C.P. Jones founded this group in 1897 when they were rejected by the Baptists for an overemphasis on Holiness. Mason claims the name was divinely revealed to him. They have presiding, assistant presiding and state bishops, district superintendents, pastors, evangelists, deacons, and departmental presidents.

## A Conservative But Charismatic Church

Doctrinally, Churches of God generally claim to believe in the verbal inspiration of the Bible, the Godhead, the virgin birth of Jesus, and the aton-

*continued on p. 120*



# The Community Churches: People Pleasers

Bobby L. Graham

The community churches that have begun over the last twenty-five years are an obvious response to the disaffection of many Americans with organized religion. For various reasons many had been turned off by what they saw and perceived in mainstream Protestant religion and were looking for something different. Coming at a time when the Ecumenical Movement of the 1960s and early 1970s had little steam, this trend toward the combining of people from different religious traditions/groups by surveying and then meeting their needs/desires seemed destined to success. Suddenly the megachurches that quickly developed offered religion for the masses. If the novel and the trendy appeal to people, they are prime candidates for the changes advocated in the community church movement.

Perhaps it all began with Willow Creek Community Church, begun in 1975 in a Chicago suburb with fewer than two hundred people. In twenty years the number had mushroomed to about 21,000 members. Its success in drawing numbers has become the model for religious leaders and business leaders alike. By polling the neighbors, the people at Willow Creek sought to capitalize on the prevalent disaffection with current churches by a novel strategy. They offered exciting, relevant, and unpredictable sermons, services, and programs (from children to seniors), not the staid, formal ones the people complained about. They also downplayed the typical denominational emphasis on doctrine/creed (though some groups stress doctrine more than others) and money and tried to avoid leaving people with a feeling of guilt. By offering them what they wanted and making them feel good while they were there, they hit on a winning combination. What had been a bore and a chore became party time (showtime religion prevailed in a casual environment), even being advertised as such in some places. Contemporary worship with its tolerance of females in leadership roles, swaying arms and clapping to the music, and use of drama/dramatic readings took the place of whatever had failed to please. The varied needs of the people, all the way from A to Z (plumbing class to financial planning), became the proper concern and focus of the community church, named thus because of its significance seen in its offered programs and fare, as well as the driving force behind the architectural design of the community-church plant. Typical of this kind of group is the use of small groups or cells, which meet apart from the whole group at various times for interaction in varied activities. By this approach both the visitors and the members perceived they were wanted, important, and worthwhile without too much obligation on their own part.

*continued on next page*

- Presbyterian Church**  
Randy Blackaby . . . . . front page
- The Church of God**  
Steven F. Deaton . . . . . 2
- The Community Churches: People Pleasers**  
Bobby L. Graham . . . . . 3
- The Charismatic Movement**  
Jason Hardin . . . . . 6
- The Methodist Church**  
Paul R. Blake . . . . . 9
- The Nazarene Church**  
Jay Horsley . . . . . 12
- The Christian Church/Disciples of Christ**  
Russell Dunaway . . . . . 16

### The Current Scene

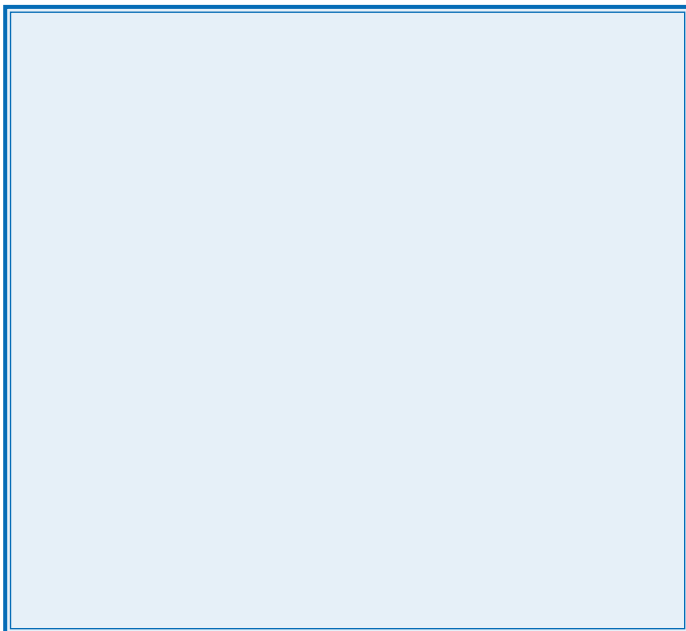
What began at Willow Creek has been repeated in similar form many times in more recent years. The following ad appeared in the *Huntsville Times* for a number of weeks:

- Church the Way You Want It
- Scheduling problems?  
Saturday 7 pm & Sunday 10 am
- Boring Sermons?  
Every message is practical & beneficial in daily life.
- Church too rigid?  
Be yourself, dress the way you like, you're accepted the way you are.
- Hate those Offerings?  
No long manipulation offerings.
- Bad experiences in Church?  
We don't want to control you, just serve you.
- Church not relevant?  
We are active in meeting real needs in our community.
- Hate those hypocrites?  
We don't claim to be perfect and we don't expect you to be.
- Want purpose?  
We are a worldwide organization committed to making people whole and helping them live their dreams.

### Impact of Huntsville

A church for people who love God and are sick of religion!

Truly the ad expresses what many people feel and what religious leaders have succumbed to offer them. By following the pragmatic approach, "truth for the New Age"



emerges in painless and exhilarating fashion. Change no longer has to hurt. Religion no longer has to cost me something, or at least much. Truth no longer has to bind or constrict. You see: I am on the throne and Christ is off. No use worrying about such trivialities as the first-day-of-the-week Lord's supper, Sunday offerings, irrelevant doctrines, rigid rules for personal conduct, other scriptural patterns, and pie-in-the-sky-by-and-by sermons.

"Ministry has married marketing philosophy and this is the monstrous offspring. It is a studied effort to change the way the world perceives the church. Church ministry is being completely revamped in an attempt to make it more appealing to unbelievers. Provide non-Christians with an agreeable, inoffensive environment. Give them freedom, tolerance, and anonymity. Always be positive and benevolent. If you must have a sermon, keep it brief and amusing. Don't be preachy or authoritative. Above all, keep everyone entertained. Churches following this pattern will see numerical growth, we're assured; those that ignore it are doomed to decline. The whole point is to make the church 'user-friendly'" (John MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel* 45-46).

### Let's Be Honest!

Do you really believe that we can just imagine away God and his will, as found in his word? When Jesus comes again for the final judgment, who will be on the throne? Will it be the Lord of glory or the man whose innovation we have here described? Whose "well done" will mean the most and carry the most weight on that awesome day?

These modern Jeroboams, sometimes calling themselves "radical restorationists," venture into the jurisdiction of the divine and arrogate to themselves rights never intended for humans (Jer. 10:23), frequently approving their decisions by their own reasoning (Isa. 55:8-9). When men exclude God and the influence of his word of truth, their vain reasoning is prompted only by their own selfish desires, rooted only in their own idle speculations, and validated only by their own human standards (Rom. 1:21). Do they not trust the Lord enough to follow his plan?

Trust in Jehovah with all thy heart, And lean not upon thine own understanding: In all thy ways acknowledge him, And he will direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes; Fear Jehovah, and depart from evil: It will be health to thy navel, And marrow to thy bones (Prov. 3:5-8).

Without the guiding star of Christ, the compass of the Spirit, and the chart of divine inspiration, they sail through uncharted waters into the whirlpool of progressivism. Such venturing is the result of their disregard of the Lord's warning in 2 John 9: "Whosoever goeth onward (*proago* — to advance, go forward, progress) and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the teaching,

the same hath both the Father and the Son.” The verse itself indicates the kind of progressivism forbidden is that which fails to remain in the teaching of Christ, inclusive of all that he personally taught and authorized his emissaries to teach. Appeals to “hold fast to the form (pattern, BLG) of sound words” and not even to “think beyond what is written” are not empty words for people trusting God (2 Tim. 1:13; 1 Cor. 4:6). It is inconceivable that the “one faith” of the New Testament has become so mongrelized that it now finds expression in the thousands of faiths extant in denominationalism (Eph. 4:4-6). It is more accurate to explain the current scene as one developed by numerous departures from the faith (1 Tim. 4:1).

### People of the Book

Members of the body of Christ have been affected and effected by such influences and forces swirling around them. Congregations, chiefly some among the institutional groups, have drifted into a general Protestant identity; but some brethren professing to be “conservative” have been flavored by the syrupy sweetness of the believe-little, blend-in, please-everybody approach. Adherence to the New Testament pattern has been shaken. Scriptural nomenclature has been weakened. Amalgamation/syncretism has been advanced. Purity of heart, life, doctrine, and practice are being compromised. “The Book” no longer underlies our faith and practice; now we “bow” to many books. The Max Lucados, Rubel Shellys, Edward Fudges, and Carl Ketchersides have had their impact; but the Devil has been among God’s people since Eden. We have coveted the approval of “the nations around us.” We can recover ourselves and restore our faith to the New Testament standard if we wish to. The following essentials must lead the way:

1. If walking by faith in all that we undertake is requisite, then the essence of faith is to think God’s thoughts after him and to follow God’s plan (Rom. 10:16; 2 Cor. 5:7).

2. Belief in the inspired Scriptures as complete is anti-thetic to any notion of Holy Spirit leading apart from the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

3. Only the gospel of Christ is God’s power unto salvation (Rom. 1:16; Matt. 28:19-20; 1 Cor. 1:21), having the capacity to filter all comers through its true portrait of Christ and his authority/teaching, thus drawing the right kind of heart to Jesus Christ. He is the stumbling stone, the rock of offense (Isa. 28:16; Matt. 21:44; 1 Pet. 2:8); apart from this elect stone no one is elected by God.

4. Obedience, instead of being an outdated word, is the lifeline of the believer (Rom. 6:17; 1 Pet. 1:22).

5. Acceptable worship/service has always been prescribed by God; there is no exception to this rule. Nothing lacking divine authority is ever right in God’s service; and

only the authorized has God’s sanction and sanctification, lifting it from the level of the common to that of the holy (Gal. 1:6-8; Rev. 22:18-19).

6. Not even the area of expediency sanctions the unauthorized; only that already authorized has an area of expediency.

7. Areas of scriptural silence remain off-limits for acceptable belief/practice, lest we add to the divine plan (1 Cor. 4:6).

The church of the Lord is a community of saved people who have submitted themselves to Christ, and each local congregation is composed of some of those people. No one ever became a follower of Jesus Christ by meeting his own felt needs, as personally defined; and no one can remain in his favor by pursuing the same route (Matt. 16:24-26; Heb. 5:9). The only acceptable “community” church is one that honors Christ by submission to divine authority, inclusive of its attention to the souls of its own community. Catering to the varied “needs” and desires of people is the path to pleasing people, not God.

For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ” (Gal 1:10).

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# The Charismatic Movement

Jason Hardin

**All that one has to do to see the “Charismatic Permeation” of the twenty-first century is to turn on the television. The “religious” airwaves are dominated by the movement. . . . Modern-day Christianity, as painted on television, centers largely on personal religious experience and divinely inspired powers manifested in the forms of healing, prophecy, and tongues.**

In our examination of The Bible and Contemporary Churches, the “Charismatic Churches” stand prevalently on the forefront of the twenty-first century, not only as an enormously thriving branch of denominationalism, but as the foundation of a movement that has permeated both the Catholic and Protestant denominations around the world. The “Charismatic Movement” has ingrained itself deeply into the consciousness of contemporary religion.

## History

In its own words, the International Pentecostal Holiness Church claims,

One of the most significant developments in recent Christianity is the appearance of many “Pentecostal” denominations throughout the world during the past century. Beginning in the United States and spreading rapidly to most nations of the world, they now comprise a major “third force” in Christendom whose phenomenal growth has commanded the attention of the world.

The fundamental faith of the church is that God’s power to redeem man and society is resident in Jesus Christ, Son of the Father, who sent the Holy Spirit into the world as the agent of salvation. It is this faith — that God’s power is directly available to everyone to save, cleanse, empower, and heal — that gave the Pentecostal Holiness Church its birth.

The theology and heritage of the church flow from many sources. Basically, Pentecostal Holiness Church people look to the Day of Pentecost as the beginning of the early Christian church that ultimately produced the denomination. The atmosphere of the Upper Room (Acts 2), with the “sound of a rushing mighty wind,” the “cloven tongues as of fire,” the speaking forth in “other tongues as the Spirit gave utterance,” and the dynamic public witness that followed, has inspired the church to perpetuate the power of Pentecost in this generation ([www.iphc.org](http://www.iphc.org)).

The Charismatic Churches look to a blending of two great religious movements as the ultimate seeds of their formation:

**1. The Holiness Movement.** When American Methodism was formed in the eighteenth century, Charles Wesley promoted an agenda to “reform the continent and spread scriptural holiness over these lands.” For over a century, the “holiness cause” was promoted by Methodist preachers and churches throughout the nation. However, as the church grew larger and wealthier, the “holiness testimony” tended to fade as a distinctive teaching and experience in the church. Despite attempts to renew the holiness message in the Methodist church both before and after the Civil War, the trend away from “holiness theology and experience” was clearly estab-

lished by the end of the nineteenth century.

The last major “holiness revival” among the Methodists and other mainline Protestant churches came after the formation of the National Holiness Association in Vineland, New Jersey, in 1867. But the resulting revival failed to bring the majority of the American church back to the “holiness cause.” When the Southern Methodist Church rejected the “holiness movement” in 1894, more than twenty-five “holiness groups” were formed in the United States dedicated to the promotion of “holiness preaching and living.”

## 2. The Pentecostal Movement.

During the last years of the nineteenth century, there arose a conviction among many in the “holiness movement” that a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit was the great need of the church. A general attitude of seeking for “deeper and further spiritual grace” seemed to permeate the movement as the new century was about to dawn. This cry for a “New Pentecost” echoed throughout both Europe and America.

The precise origin of “Pentecostalism” is traced to Topeka, Kansas and the Bethel Bible College conducted by Charles Fox Parham, a “holiness evangelist” who began his ministry as a Methodist pastor. In 1901, after being instructed by Parham to read the book of Acts, Agnes Ozman, a student at Parham’s school, claimed to have received “the baptism in the Holy Spirit accompanied by speaking in tongues.” When others at the school had a similar experience, Parham concluded that “glossolalia” (speaking in tongues) was evidence of Holy Spirit baptism. He then embarked on a series of revival meetings in Missouri and Kansas, establishing loosely organized “Apostolic Faith Missions.”

The “Pentecostal Movement” received worldwide attention in 1906. William Joseph Seymour, a disciple of Parham, led a revival on Azusa Street

in Los Angeles, California. It lasted from 1906 to 1913, during which tens of thousands were reported to have “received the baptism in the Holy Spirit.” The Azusa Street Mission became the center of Pentecostalism in the United States and the springboard for its worldwide expansion. The “Pentecostal experience” spread rapidly as “holiness people” by the thousands were reported to have received the “Pentecostal baptism in the Holy Ghost with the apostolic sign of speaking with other tongues.”

From its inception, Pentecostalism has included a diverse assortment of churches and associations. In an effort to develop some measure of doctrinal uniformity and cooperation between various independent Pentecostal churches, a “General Convention of Pentecostal Saints and Churches of God in Christ” was called for April 1914 in Hot Springs, Arkansas. A creed was issued, and an organization called the assemblies of God was formed, along with a general council to oversee it. This moment is historically recognized as the inauguration of Pentecostal denominationalism. Ever since, the self-proclaimed goal of Charismatic churches has been to recreate “the atmosphere of the book of Acts and restore the *charismata* (Greek, “gifts”) as “holiness people by the thousands receive their own personal Pentecost.”

Pentecostal and Charismatic churches are among the fastest growing denominations worldwide. A Gallup Poll in 2000 found 19% of adult Americans (over 29 million) called themselves “Pentecostal” or “Charismatic” Christians. One-sixth of the “Charismatics” claimed to have spoken in tongues. According to David Barrett, editor of *World Christian Encyclopedia*, Pentecostals and Charismatics number about 150 million worldwide.

### “Charismatic Permeation”

In the early 1960s, “Neo-Pentecostalism” captured the interest of people

in nearly every major denomination. Suddenly, the world began to hear about charismatic Lutherans, Episcopalians, Baptists, Presbyterians, Catholics, and others. According to Gallup, 18% of Catholics have come to call themselves “charismatic,” with 2% claiming to have spoken in tongues. Even some formerly faithful gospel preachers began in the 1960s to claim that they too had experienced the gift of tongues. Students and some faculty members at several “brotherhood colleges” were among those who made such claims.

All that one has to do to see the “Charismatic Permeation” of the twenty-first century is to turn on the television. The “religious” airwaves are dominated by the movement. The Oral Roberts, Jimmy Swaggerts, Jim Bakkers, and Kenneth Copelands of the world have given rise to Pat Robertson, John Hagee, Benny Hinn, and Joyce Meyer, all of whom, to one degree or another, have ties to the Charismatic movement. Modern-day Christianity, as painted on television, centers largely on personal religious experience and divinely inspired powers manifested in the forms of healing, prophecy, and tongues.

An excellent example of how Neo-Pentecostalism has permeated “traditional Protestantism” is the Kempsville Presbyterian Church ([www.kpc.org](http://www.kpc.org)). The catch phrase within their advertisements is, “We’re Not Your Typical Presbyterian Church.” In their own words:

We’re well aware of our differences and believe that they are a gift from God. To begin with, KPC is a charismatic Presbyterian church. We embrace the gifts of the Holy Spirit such as prophecy and healing. We firmly embrace the power of the Holy Spirit working in our midst, just as he did in the New Testament Church. We believe the power of God both changes and authenticates His Word.

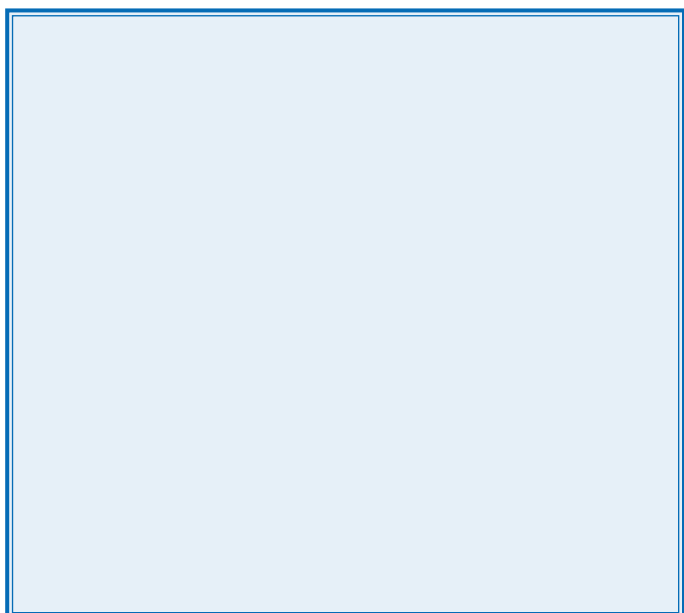
Because we are a charismatic church, we are also a worshipping

church. To us, worship is a verb. We believe in actively praising God through exuberant praise and heartfelt worship. Biblical expressions of worship (such as dance, kneeling, clapping, the lifting of hands, silence, and even shouting) are part of our regular worship expression.

Beyond a shadow of a doubt, Neo-Pentecostalism has changed the twenty-first century religious landscape. Perhaps the greatest manifestation of this change is in music. The charismatic world has given us “Christian jazz,” “Christian rock,” “Christian rap,” and “Christian heavy-metal.” “Jazzy” church music can be found almost everywhere today. *Charisma* magazine, in February 1994, made the observation that “Today, praise music has entered the mainstream. Songs that were only sung in charismatic churches a few years ago are now heard throughout mainline and non-charismatic churches.”

In the February 10, 1992 issue of *Christian News*, it was observed,

Billy Graham crusades, once noted for the heart-warming traditional Christian music of George Beverly Shea, now feature hard rock music and charismatic-style “praise” choruses. Every week we receive reports of rock concerts held on the campuses of evangelical and fundamentalist Christian colleges, including Biola, Wheaton, Liberty, and Moody. As an illustration of how expansively the jazzy Pentecostal music has permeated non-Pentecostal circles, consider the following description of the 1992 National Religious Broadcasters conference, the participants of which include a very wide representation of professing Christians: “The lyrics of much of the music were doctrinally flimsy. There was a soft rock version of Handel’s *Messiah*, and a Black NRB concert had the people standing, dancing in the aisles, and emitting high-pitched ecstatic gibberish.



Rick Warren, in his immensely popular Purpose Drive Church notes, “Saddleback [Church] is unapologetically a contemporary music church. We’ve often been referred to in the press as ‘the flock that rocks.’ We use the style of music the majority of people in our church listen to on the radio” (285). Where did Warren get such inspiration? Not from his Southern Baptist roots.

### Conclusion

We would all do well to learn the definition of ecumenism. Most simply defined, it is a “movement promoting unity among Christian churches or denominations.” It is the call of our age. At one time, one could drive down Main Street of any given town and find Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Catholic church buildings. Ours is now a day of clever disguising and blending. What could be more appealing than to tear down the walls of division and simply establish “Community Churches” throughout? And within these Community Churches, Neo-Pentecostalism is the fuel of the future.

The question remains, however, to what extent do we destroy barriers? Reflect on the “Beliefs” section of “Living Water Fellowship” of Mill Creek, Washington as you ponder that question:

Have you gone to churches and felt unwelcome or unaccepted because you didn’t quite fit in? Have you been looking for a place you can be yourself and have a relationship with God? Welcome Home! Living Water Fellowship invites you, your family and friends to become part of our church family. Whether Single or Partnered, Living Water Fellowship exists to bring the unconditional love of Jesus Christ to all people regardless of age, race, or sexual orientation.

We believe in the baptism of the Holy Spirit to empower and equip believers for service, with the accompaniment of Supernatural Gifts. We believe in the God-given ministries of apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Pastor and Teacher.

We believe that a person’s sexual orientation in no way disqualifies him or her from fellowship in the kingdom of God. All people are welcome to be part of the church and believe in these tenets of faith regardless of being heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, or transgendered.

Brethren, we must hold fast to the anchors of God’s abiding word if we are to successfully navigate these storms of religious confusion. Let us remember and diligently teach our children that God’s kingdom is not a place to “be yourself” (Gal. 2:20). If I “don’t quite fit in” the narrow gate of his kingdom, it is up to me, not him, to change (Matt. 7:13-14).

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# The Methodist Church

Paul R. Blake

The Methodist Church in the twenty-first century consists of a multitude of sects, special interest groups, and subdivisions identifying themselves by various doctrines and private interpretations of Scriptures and disagreements over the intents and meanings of the writings of the founders of Methodism. However, there are a few fundamental similarities among the many denominations that claim heritage in the Protestant preaching of John Wesley. Perhaps the most prominent universal characteristics of the Methodist Churches have been and continue to be: (1) a willingness to adapt to meet contemporary social needs and cultural interests, (2) an ecumenical spirit of fellowship across doctrinal and denominational boundaries, and (3) an absence of regard for the authority of Scripture.

These traits have been evident in Methodism since it was originated by John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield. Together they formed the “Holy Club” in 1725, which stressed “inward religion, the religion of the heart” combined with an insistence on strict discipline in scholastic as well as spiritual matters. Outsiders gave this club the mocking title of “Methodists” in 1729. The Wesleys were social reformers for the common man from the start. John Wesley declared to the Anglican Bishop that the world was his parish, and set out to serve people disaffected by the Church of England. He preached in coal mines and outside of barrooms. Charles Wesley took the melodies of drinking songs and combined them with his religious poetry to make hymns for the working class converts to this new denomination. The Anglican Church, out of which they had come, considered them to be radicals.

John Wesley was persuaded to attend a Bible study on May 24, 1738, in Aldersgate Street, where he heard a lesson from Luther’s commentary on Romans. There, Wesley writes, “I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins.” The Aldersgate experience was a turning point in Wesley’s life; from then on he threw himself into the movement that was begun

thirteen years earlier, but with a new emphasis on experiencing a confirmation of sanctification directly from the Holy Spirit. By 1739 the aggressive and highly disciplined Methodist movement was spreading quickly through missionary efforts, “lay” preaching, bands, and societies.

## Methodist Denominations

In the United States, a number of Methodist denominations currently exist. Some were generated by disputes over doctrinal issues, while others developed from social agendas. The Methodist Protestant Church opposed the national episcopacy and separated itself from mainstream Methodism in 1828. The Wesleyan Methodist Church, organized in 1840, was motivated by the work of Orange Scott, an advocate for the Abolitionist movement. In 1860, doctrinal and social issues created the Free Methodist Church under the direction of B.T. Roberts. In 1844, the Methodist Episcopal Church Southern was formed over the emancipation controversy. The history of Methodism is a study in religious division over social, economic, and even race issues. The African Methodist Episcopal Church was formed in 1816, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church was created in 1820, and the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church came into being in 1870. These denominations were all composed of African Americans and totaled more than 2.5 million members.

Interestingly, just as the Methodist Church readily divided for social pressures, it also showed an equally strong capacity to unite with other denominations for the same reasons. In 1939 there was a reunion with the Methodist Episcopal Church Southern, the Methodist Protestant Church, and the Methodist Episcopal Church to form The Methodist Church. In 1946, two Methodist denominations, the German Methodist Conference (1807) and the United Brethren in Christ (1815) put aside their ethnic differences and joined together in 1946 to form the Evangelical United Brethren. Mergers continued unabated, when in 1968 the Evangelical United Brethren banded together with the Methodist Church to form the modern United Methodist Church.

## Membership

The United Methodist Church is the largest sect in Methodism. It claims 11,709,000 members worldwide, with 8,300,000 members in the United States. Its membership in the USA is currently dropping after peaking at over 10,000,000, going from 5.3% of the national population in 1970 to around 3% in 2000; yet, it remains the third largest religious body in the US. At the same time, this large denomination is itself divided into conservative and liberal camps: (1) the conservatives who are often identified as the Confessing Movement which tends to be evangelical and seeks to return to a stricter reading of both Scripture and Wesley, and (2) the liberals who are part of the Affirmation Movement that purposes to link the practices of Christianity with the changing fashions of contemporary culture by ordaining gay ministers and celebrating gay marriages. There are several other significant Methodist denominations (Wesleyan Church, African Methodist Episcopal, etc.) that, when combined with the United Methodist Church, makes up a denomination with 38,000,000 members worldwide.

## Salvation Creed

Methodists teach salvation by grace and faith only, and believe that when one repents of personal sin and believes on Jesus Christ, at that very moment he is forgiven of his sins and is adopted into the family of God. At some point, they believe he will be assured of personal salvation through a witness by the Holy Spirit. They believe that good works cannot save one from sins or from God's judgment (this includes obedience to the Gospel), but rather they are the fruit of faith following salvation. To Methodists, sanctification is not received upon obeying the gospel, but is instead a gradual process that involves a baptism with the Holy Spirit called a "crisis of sanctification," a lifetime of coming to full knowledge of Christ, and long term efforts to live without sin. In other words, one is not sanctified when he is baptized.

This doctrine is in conflict with the word of God. Salvation is by God's grace (Rom. 5:20-21; Eph. 2:8-10), faith (John 8:24; Rom. 5:1; Heb. 11:6), repentance (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38), confession (Acts 8:36-37; Rom. 10:9-10), and baptism (Mark 16:16; Acts 22:16) validated by the blood of Jesus Christ (1Pet. 1:2; Rev. 1:5). Leave out any of these elements and there is no salvation.

## Baptism Creed

Throughout Methodist history, baptism has been a subject of much internal controversy and external debate. John Wesley kept the Anglican-styled sacrament of baptism, teaching that in baptism a child was cleansed of the "guilt of original sin," entered into a covenant with God, was admitted into the Methodist church, made an heir of heaven, and spiritually reborn. He taught that baptism was neither essential to nor sufficient for salvation, it was merely a sign of God at work in the lives of believers. In United

Methodist tradition, baptism is administered by sprinkling, pouring, or immersion (United Methodist Baptism Study Committee, 1996). Over the years the Methodist Church systematically reduced the importance of baptism until it no longer was considered necessary. By the nineteenth century, infant baptism became nothing more than a ceremony of dedication. Adult baptism was viewed simply as the act of joining the Methodist church. By the middle of the twentieth century, the decision to be baptized was left to the choice of the believer; the Methodist churches no longer required it, nor even expected it. However, recent efforts by the Methodist Commission on Worship have been directed toward restoring it to its former status as a denominational sacrament.

This doctrine is in conflict with Scripture. Baptism is not a sacrament; it is the condition for one to have his sins remitted or washed away (Acts 2:38, 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:21). Furthermore, baptism is by immersion; sprinkling or pouring do not constitute baptism. Baptism requires: (1) much water (John 3:23), (2) going down into the water (Acts 8:36-38), (3) a burial (Rom. 6:3-4), (4) a resurrection (Col. 2:11-13), and (5) coming up out of the water (Matt. 3:16, Acts 8:39). Any action that does not include all of these elements is not baptism.

In addition, infants are not prospects for baptism simply because they have no sins and are not in need of salvation; "original sin" is a false doctrine (Ezek. 18:20). Babies are incapable of meeting the requirements of salvation: (1) they cannot hear, understand, or obey the gospel, (2) they have not developed the ability to believe, (3) they have no sinful life for which they need to repent, and (4) they do not have the capacity to confess Christ with the mouth. They are in a spiritually safe state.

## Contemporary Worship Creed

Current Methodist attitudes toward the various activities of worship are based on the philosophy that worship services have been a work in progress from the early days of Christianity. Worship is tailored to cultural and generational interests and fashions and is not based on any particular doctrine or rigid tradition. Their focus is not on what one is authorized to do in worship, but rather who is the focus of worship (Rob C. McLaren, *Theology of Worship and Its Development in Free Methodism*). In other words, as long as one is worshipping God and Jesus, his service is accepted regardless of how he worships.

This doctrine is in contrast with the words of Jesus: "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt. 15:8-9). Scripturally acceptable worship consists of (1) singing (there is no Bible authority for instrumental music, Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16), (2)

praying (Acts 12:5; 1 Cor. 14:15), (3) communing (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:20-34), (4) giving (1 Cor. 16:1-2), and (5) teaching (Acts 15:35; 20:20; 2 Tim. 4:2). Any additions or adjustments to these divinely authorized activities make worship vain, unacceptable, and sinful (Rev. 22:18-19).

### Social Gospel

Methodist ministries style themselves as “holistic,” meaning that they focus on all of the needs of members and prospects; from their perspective the salvation of souls is only one part of their responsibility as a church toward the individual. They emphasize their attention to “the physical, emotional, economic, social, political, and spiritual” aspects of believers’ lives (World Methodists Council, *Evangelism Emphasis* 2004). It is revealing to note where they have placed spiritual needs in this list. The Methodist Church seeks recognition by society in civil, political, and social matters in the hope that their involvement in non-spiritual matters will transform that society into the Methodist ideal of Christianity. They advocate that Christians ought to manifest social concern in every matter that is considered important by their leadership. The theological mandate adopted in the 1908 Social Creed continues to serve as a challenge to Methodists to battle for social cures to cultural injustices.

The New Testament does not authorize the social gospel. The church is limited to (1) preaching the gospel or the work of evangelism (Phil. 4:15-18), (2) teaching and encouraging the saints or the work of edification (Eph. 4:11-16), and (3) aiding needy saints or the work of limited benevolence (Acts 11:28-30; 2 Cor. 8:4; 1 Tim. 5:16). While individual Christians are free to engage in any lawful activity of their choice (Gal. 6:10; Jas. 1:26-27), churches are not allowed to go beyond the boundaries set forth in the word of God. Indeed, why would churches want to lay aside the all important work of feeding souls with the gospel of Christ and take up the financially impossible task of filling the stomachs of the world?

### Ecumenicalism

The Methodist Church is not just ecumenical, it is pluralistic. They recognize all professed believers and followers of Jesus Christ as fellow Christians regardless of denominational membership. In addition, they receive all such persons into fellowship without requiring them to convert to Methodism. Methodist churches declare that no person who loves the Lord may be deprived of church membership, and that every person has an inalienable

right to private judgment in matters of religion, and an equal right to express personal opinions in any way which will not violate the laws of God or the rights of others. In short, one can believe, preach, and practice the doctrines of non-Methodist denominations and still obtain and keep membership in the Methodist church.

The Scriptures limit fellowship to those who hold the pure doctrine of Christ. God does not authorize fellowship with error (Gal. 1:6-10; Eph. 5:6-11; 2 John 9-11). Fellowship must never be sought at the expense of truth.

### Women in Church Leadership

In 1966, the Methodist General Conference declared that they would not tolerate any efforts to block a person’s ordination due to gender, and that they believe that both men and women are called to the ministry and should be ordained. In addition, they banned the practice of men-only leadership on boards and committees of the church whether local or national. As a result, some areas of this country have more women than men ordained to the Methodist ministry.

Nevertheless, God established the roles of men and women in the beginning (Gen. 3:16); leadership was not granted to women. This same principle was re-stated in the New Testament (1 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:11-15). Likewise, God placed limitations on women in the body of Christ; they are not permitted the role of leadership in the work, organization, or worship of the church (1 Cor. 14:34-37; 1 Tim. 3:1-13).

### Progressively Liberal

The United Methodist Church is suffering from the same affliction as all other religious organizations, that is, the modernist, liberal, progressive movements seek to change their religion to make it more palatable to contemporary immoral society. However, the Methodist Church, because of its openness to new doctrines and its historical pattern of change, is especially vulnerable and helpless to fend off their own liberal change agents. There are movements within Methodism that are unapologetically Marxist, involving the denomination in international efforts to promote socialism. On the moral front, the United Methodist Church’s General Conference of May 2004 barely voted down the efforts to ordain homosexuals and lesbians as priests and consecrate marriages between gay persons. Inevitably, in a denomination that is known for its propensity for change to accommodate the whims of society, they will succumb to this and other such liberalizing movements.

**The Methodist Church seeks recognition by society in civil, political, and social matters in the hope that their involvement in non-spiritual matters will transform that society into the Methodist ideal of Christianity.**

# The Nazarene Church

Jay Horsley

The Church of the Nazarene claimed 1,417,664 members in 12,799 churches,<sup>1</sup> about half in the United States. It is a denominational church headquartered in Kansas City, Kansas, presenting itself as a part of the “one, holy, universal, and apostolic” church.

The Nazarenes believe that they have a “specially calling to proclaim the doctrine and experience of entire sanctification” as the true spiritual heirs of John Wesley — whose name and teachings they constantly reference. They claim to be the “largest denomination in the Wesleyan-holiness tradition.”<sup>2</sup> Both the history and current doctrine of the Nazarenes are wrapped up in Wesley’s unique doctrines of “Christian perfection” and “entire sanctification.” Few Protestant denominations are as openly and fervently tied to their historic roots and founding teachings as the Nazarenes.

## John Wesley

The story of the Nazarene denomination begins long before its official formation in 1908 in rural Texas. It begins

in the decadency of the Church of England in the 1700s — that same moral laxity, worldliness, and faithlessness that the Puritans had been fighting for two centuries. Brothers John and Charles Wesley, sons of an Anglican priest, began preaching the necessity of personal holiness (sanctification) in the 1730s. John’s preaching attracted a mass following, especially from the lower classes, and Charles gave them great hymns to sing. The Wesleys’ teaching and preaching was the most influential and lasting element of the “First Great Awakening” (1725-1750). They wanted to reform their nation’s church, not start a new one. But like Luther, their denomination rejected their reforms, so their efforts had a different result — a new, more spiritually minded church than the one they reluctantly left.

An Anglican, not a Calvinist, John Wesley taught faith only and inherited sin, but not predestination, total depravity, or once saved always saved. Wesley stressed that every man can choose to have faith and then overcome the flesh. He said that complete holiness was not only possible, but it was every Christian’s duty. Supposedly this was

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The Scriptures condemn change agents in religion, persons who loose where God has bound. They seek to conform to the world around them for several reasons: (1) they are eager themselves to engage in the sins of the world without recrimination from religious leaders (John 3:19-20), (2) they want to appear to be knowledgeable and current in the wisdom of the world (2 Tim. 3:1-9), (3) they despise the simplicity and purity of truth (2 Thess. 2:10-12), and (4) they are proud of their progressive spirit (1 Cor. 5:2, 6). The Bible condemns the sin of homosexuality and all other forms of contemporary evil (1 Cor. 6:9-11; Gal. 5:19-21; Rev. 21:8); the wisdom of men embraces such sins.

## The Future of the Methodist Church

A religious body that is willing to change its doctrines for social and cultural interests, that is ecumenical in its fel-

lowship with other denominations, and that has little regard for the authority of Scripture will rapidly evolve into a form unrecognizable to its founders. But more importantly, it is after all a denomination, a religious body created by men, governed by doctrines and commandments of men, and overseen and directed by men. It is not, nor will it ever be, the one true church, the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-13; Eph. 1:22-23, 4:4; Col. 1:18). The Methodist Church has no future save that it will “wax worse and worse” (2 Tim. 3:12). Members of the Methodist Church must be encouraged to obey the gospel of Christ and become a member of his body, or face eternal perdition in the Judgment (2 Thess. 1:7-10).

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accomplished by two works of grace (also described as “blessings”): first, forgiveness of sins at the point of faith (justification) and afterwards sanctification, the life of a Christian apart from sin. Wesley went so far as to teach if one strove hard enough, he could live entirely above all sin. But this “entire sanctification” (also called “holiness,” “Christian perfection,” “baptism of the Holy Spirit,” and “the fullness of blessing” described as the “total eradication of sin”) came only by intense effort. True Wesleyans feel a deep need to work toward this goal because they believe that they can fall from grace by willful sin (Nazarene Article Of Faith #7).

### The Methodists

In America, through fervent work and moral certainty, Methodist Churches gained hundreds of thousands of adherents. Methodist revivalist preachers were a key part of the “Second Great Awakening” (1820s and 30s) along with Adventists, Baptists, and our own brethren.

. . . Methodism not only swept through the cities; it developed an amazing strength in small towns and rural areas. Everywhere there were circuit riders, ministers on horseback riding the expanding frontier and preaching in mountain cabins, prairie churches, schoolhouses, and camp meetings of free grace and individual responsibility and the need of conversion and regeneration.<sup>73</sup>

Methodist denominations (there are twenty major ones) became one the largest blocks of churches in this country.

### Wesley’s True Heirs? Holiness Split With Methodism

As happens in most successful religious enterprises, what is built on hard work and faith is inherited by a larger body of people more materially successful than its ancestors (success that is in large part due to the principles and values of that faith) but less spiritually minded and more worldly minded. As early as the 1840s a few stridently holiness Methodists began to split off from the main body. But after the Civil War, in the great material prosperity of the Gilded Age, most Methodist churches slipped comfortably into middle class Protestantism and away from their holiness roots. (This is parallel in both action and timing to our own brethren’s drift into “Christian Church” denominationalism.) Then from the 1890s to the 1920s, modernism, in the form of rationalism, higher criticism, and other faith destroying ideas, robbed mainline Methodists (and those of many other denominations) of the foundations of their faith. Many turned to the “social gospel” (solve this world’s problems because your convictions about the next life are unsure) as a substitute. Few Methodist churches stressed the holy life and the method of strict discipline that John Wesley and the pioneer preachers had preached.

Holiness revivals (directly echoing Wesley) were preached in tents and storefronts as numerous little denominations broke from the main Methodist denominations. In

1908, seven of these united to form “The Association of Pentecostal Churches of America, the Church of the Nazarene.” Nazarene preacher W.M. Lynch explained in the *Port Arthur News* (May 11, 1957): “Near the close of the 19th Century the Wesleyan doctrine of Christian perfection had become little more than a creedal matter among the larger denominations that once taught it as essential. The Church of the Nazarene was organized by church pioneers to conserve and promote this doctrine.”

To ensure proper holiness among their members, the Nazarenes drew up lists of acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Mostly the forbidden was detailed: no card games (even if not gambling), no TV or movies, a strict dress code, no shorts at all, no jewelry; for women: long hair, no make-up or slacks, etc. Exact list making is now a thing of the past, but the *Nazarene Manual* contains a section titled “A Christian Life” that gives quite clear warnings about sinful entertainment, gambling, secret societies (like the Masons), dancing, drugs, and alcohol. They admonish each member to be very careful in his conduct and not to offend the “conscience of the church.”

As strict as this teaching is, it is looser than the Nazarenes’ past teaching, and the emphasis on holiness seems to have waned in comparison with earlier days. Evidence of this shift in attitude is the systematic removal of the word “Holiness” from the name of Nazarene Schools and other denominational organizations.

### Holiness Churches Often Pentecostal, Nazarenes Not

Several other Holiness denominations joined the Nazarenes in their early decades. Many of these had the name “Pentecostal” as part of their title, as did the main body until 1919. As the Pentecostal (“Spirit-filled,” tongue speaking) movement gained prominence, the Nazarenes dropped that name to avoid confusion since the Nazarenes reject tongue speaking and the emotionalism that supposedly happens under the Holy Spirit’s direction in modern Pentecostal churches. But Holiness Methodism did help set the stage for the Pentecostal outbreak with its teaching of “baptism of the Holy Ghost” (although Nazarenes teach that this baptism convenes to you the power to live in complete holiness) and additional works of grace (blessings) after salvation.

Holiness Pentecostal denominations (such as the Church of God in Christ, the Church of God (Cleveland, TN) and the Pentecostal Holiness Church) believe in three “works of grace”: justification at salvation, sanctification in a holy life, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit (miracles). Non-holiness Pentecostal denominations (such as the Assemblies of God and the Foursquare Churches) believe in only two “works of grace”: justification and baptism of the Holy Spirit. Wesleyan-holiness denominations (such as the Wesleyan Church, the Free Methodists and the Salvation Army)

teach the same two “works of grace” as the Nazarenes. Approximately one hundred denominations have some tie to the work of John Wesley. Evidently unity is not one of the “works of grace”!

### Nazarene Denominational Organization

Like most religions of men, the Nazarene organization reflects the situation of its founding. The Roman Catholic hierarchy resembles the organization of the Roman Empire; American Baptists have a very democratic structure; and the Watchtower Society is organized like a business. The Nazarenes, with roots in the Church of England and Methodism in which the ordained bishops have a great deal of control (but being an American splinter group that did not fully trust church officials appointed by other church officials with life-long or extended terms in office) have a hi-bred organizational structure. The Nazarene “General Assembly” (which votes on matters of policy and doctrine) consists of half elected laity and half ordained clergy. Superintendents (who run the daily affairs of the denomination) are elected to four-year terms. Congregations, overseen by a locally elected Board of Directors (open to men and women as are all Nazarene ministries), can hire their own pastors (with district approval from a list of the ordained) who are subject to periodic recall elections by the members. This organizational structure is specifically designed as a guard to keep the denominational hierocracy from taking the church into liberalism without the approval of the members (as happened to the mainline denominations). But in recent years some of the pastors and hierocracy have tried to limit the recall elections and encourage longer term “pastorates.”

### Another Conservative Denomination or Unique Place and Mission

The great question today among Nazarenes seems to be what kind of church should they be? Are they just another conservative denomination (like so many Southern Baptists) that is a comfortable part of the fundamentalist, family-values, Christian Coalition, segment of society? With their teen and children’s ministries, retreats, summer camps, affiliation with Promise Keepers, increasingly long term pastorates, traditional and contemporary worship services, and a strong stance against abortion and homosexuality, it would often seem that they are — especially the large suburban congregations.

But the Wesleyan impulse is still strong in many parts of the denomination. Holiness by a second work of grace is the most unique aspect, but from Wesley also comes a religious devotion to service to the poor and social justice. (Holiness Methodism helped spawn not only Pentecostalism but also the Salvation Army.) Many Nazarenes place a great deal of emphasis on “multicultural” and “compassionate” ministries. They offer physical help not in place of spiritual (as the social gospel does), not as a door-opener to

get an audience for an evangelistic pitch (as the conservative denominations do) but from the duty to help others as part of their practice of holiness.

Only time will tell if they majority of Nazarenes wish to remain within Wesley’s vision of “perfection” and the method of discipline that he prescribed to obtain it.

### Doctrinal Errors/Articles of Faith

The Articles of Faith in the *Nazarene Manual* contain a number of substantial doctrinal errors. Unlike many denominations today, the Nazarene denomination openly pushes its historic creed and demands that its clergy adhere to it and promote it.

**#5** — Teaches original sin, that personal sin only occurs when you willingly violate a known law and that other failures are not sin. (Ezek. 18:1-4; Acts 3:17 — Sins in ignorance are still sins.)

**#10** — (The Nazarenes’ defining issue). The Nazarenes believe in a special empowering by the Holy Spirit (second work of grace, baptism of the Holy Spirit) to eradicate sin (sinlessly perfect, total sanctification). The Bible says that none completely conquer sin (1 John 1:8; 1 Cor. 10:12) and that sanctification is growth towards holiness based on the word of God (2 Cor. 7:1) not a special power or blessing from the Holy Spirit.

**#12** — Although they prefer baptism of believers, they will baptize children and give the choices of pouring, sprinkling, or immersion (Acts 2:38; Rom. 6:1-11).

**#27.2** — That the Lord’s day is the Sabbath and restrictions on activities should be observed. (Col. 2:14-16; Matt. 28:1 — Jesus rose the day after Sabbath.)

In the New Testament men called the disciples “the sect of the Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5), but God called them “Christians” (Acts 11:26; 1 Pet. 4:16; cf. Isa. 62:2). Jesus’ disciples read and followed the apostles’ doctrine and the Scriptures (Acts 2:42; 2 Tim. 3:16). They did not follow John Wesley’s doctrine and a man-made church manual.

### (Endnotes)

- <sup>1</sup> Church of the Nazarene General Secretary Official Website <http://www.nazarene.org/gensec/who.html>.
- <sup>2</sup> Historical Statement <http://www.nazarene.org/archives/history/statement.html>.
- <sup>3</sup> Frank Mead, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*, Revised and Enlarged (1956), 48,149

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# The Christian Church/ Disciples of Christ

Russell Dunaway

**In 1909, a continental convention of the Disciples of Christ was held in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to celebrate the accomplishments of the Restoration Movement during its first one hundred years. . . . Instead of joy, however, it brought severe tension among those who had gathered to celebrate. The convention revealed that the Disciples were divided amongst themselves by the acceptance of religious liberalism by many of the Disciples.**

Both the Independent Christian Churches and The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) evolved out of what is commonly referred to as “The Restoration Movement.” The Restoration Movement, also known as the “Stone-Campbell Movement,” was a late eighteenth and early nineteenth century movement to restore New Testament Christianity in the United States.

The leaders of the movement came out of diverse religious backgrounds in different parts of the nation. James O’Kelly, for example, was a Methodist preacher in North Carolina. O’Kelly withdrew from the Methodist Church in 1794, insisting that disciples of Christ should wear no other name than the name “Christian.” He further insisted on Christ as the only head of the church, the autonomy of the local congregation, and the Bible as the only creed of the church. A few years later, in 1801, Abner Jones, a Baptist preacher from Vermont, broke from the Baptist church and began an independent movement to return to “the old paths.” Like O’Kelly, Jones believed that disciples of the Lord should worship God according to the New Testament pattern, wear only the name “Christian,” and accept the Bible as their sole rule of faith and practice. Elias Smith, a Baptist preacher from Vermont, led his con-

gregation to leave the Baptist faith in order to return to the simple faith of the New Testament. In 1812, Elias Smith and Abner Jones united in their efforts and established several independent congregations, each calling themselves simply “Christians.”

Barton W. Stone, a Presbyterian preacher in the foothills of Kentucky, led his entire congregation to break away from the Cumberland Presbytery in 1803 as he appealed to the New Testament as the only rule for faith and practice. Stone preferred to use the title “Christian” as the proper title for a believer.

In 1807, Thomas Campbell moved to America from Scotland. A Presbyterian preacher, Campbell broke free from the Presbyterians in 1808. Campbell championed the motto, “Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent.” In 1809 he published perhaps his most famous work, *Declaration and Address*, in which he stated, “The church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one; consisting of all those in every place that profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him in all things according to the Scriptures. . . .” Because of this document, many date 1809 as the beginning of the Restoration Movement



in America. 1809 also marks the year that Alexander Campbell arrived in America. Upon reading his father's *Declaration and Address*, Alexander fully endorsed its principles. Campbell referred to believers as "Disciples." In 1830, Stone and Campbell united their efforts to restore New Testament Christianity. Throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century, the restoration movement experienced phenomenal growth.

These men all came from different places and from different religious backgrounds. Yet, as they studied the Scripture, they almost simultaneously came to many of the very same conclusions independently of one another. They all held a firm conviction that the Bible was the inspired, infallible word of God that had been given to be our guide in all things (2 Tim. 3:16-17). One of their primary concerns was to unite all "Christians" in one body. This, they believed, could be accomplished only by rejecting all man-made creeds and embracing the Bible as their sole rule of faith and practice (1 Cor. 1:10-13).

### Division in the Restoration Movement

Yet, over the course of time, two different groups began to emerge from this movement. One group sought to do only what the Bible authorized without adding anything to or taking anything from the word of God. The other group believed they were at liberty to add or do anything they wished so long as it was not specifically prohibited or condemned by Scripture. With these different approaches or attitudes toward the establishing of Bible authority, the movement itself soon began to struggle with internal strife and division. By the end of the nineteenth century they were hopelessly divided over such doctrinal issues as the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship, missionary societies, and the pastor system. When the United States Government authorized a religious census in 1906, the Disciples of Christ and the Churches

of Christ were listed separately. David Edwin Harrell, Jr. observed that "the official report was little more than a belated acknowledgment of an accomplished fact. For over half a century before 1906 the group had been divided into factions. . . . No official pronouncement of schism had been made because there was no authoritative organization to issue one; but most church related institutions, editors of church periodicals, preachers, and local churches had aligned themselves with one faction or the other by the beginning of the twentieth century."<sup>1</sup>

### The Disciples of Christ

In 1909, a continental convention of the Disciples of Christ was held in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to celebrate the accomplishments of the Restoration Movement during its first one hundred years. The convention was intended to be a huge centennial birthday party for the movement. Instead of joy, however, it brought severe tension among those who had gathered to celebrate. The convention revealed that the Disciples were divided amongst themselves by the acceptance of religious liberalism by many of the Disciples.

At the heart of this division was "modernism." Modernism arose among German and European universities during the nineteenth century, and then spread to the United States. At the center of modernism was a denial that the Bible was the authoritative, inspired, inerrant, all-sufficient word of God. William Woodson observed, "In light of the restoration plea, it would seem unthinkable that such a denial would ever be embraced by those who sought to speak where the Bible speaks and to be silent where the Bible is silent; but that was not the case."<sup>2</sup>

Modernism was certainly not new among the Disciples. L.L. Pinkerton, most widely noted for his introduction of a melodian into the worship services of the church of Christ in Midway,

Kentucky, had openly renounced the inspiration of certain of the Psalms in his periodical, *Independent Monthly*. In 1873, he advocated "open membership," i.e., the practice of receiving people into the membership of the local church without baptism, in the pages of *The Christian Standard*. In 1889, according to Woodson, Robert C. Cave preached a series of sermons in the Central Church in St. Louis, Missouri, in which he denied the virgin birth of Christ, the bodily resurrection of Christ, and the existence of a divinely given plan of salvation. Cave maintained that "water baptism is not to be found in the great commission, and stated that all who obey God according to their measure of knowledge and ability were Christians and entitled to all Christian privileges, among which is church membership."<sup>3</sup> Though such arguments were challenged and produced much debate, there were many within the movement who eventually embraced the basic tenets of modernism. Their number grew and multiplied throughout the early decades of the twentieth century.

In an effort to combat the assault of modernism, conservative Disciples founded a number of Bible colleges in the 1920s and 30s which boldly proclaimed their allegiance to the Bible as the inspired word of God. In 1922, the largest of these new schools, the Cincinnati Bible Seminary, was founded for the express purpose of offering an alternative to the liberal colleges then serving the Disciples as leadership training schools.<sup>4</sup> Another school, the Pacific Bible Seminary, affirmed "the Bible as the one and only divinely inspired book" in its constitution.<sup>5</sup> In like manner, the Atlanta Christian College acknowledged its commitment to "the fundamentals of the Gospel and the Christian faith such as the Deity of Christ, the inspiration of the Bible, the Divine creation of man, the substitutionary death of Christ and his resurrection from the grave."<sup>6</sup>

By 1927, the division among the Disciples was a well established

fact. No longer able to endorse or support the International Convention of Disciples because of its extremely liberal theological and political leanings, members of the conservative Christian Churches established the North American Christian Convention (NACC). An alternative to the Disciples' convention, the NACC held its first annual meeting in Indianapolis, Indiana in 1927. While attempts at reconciliation with the Disciples' International Convention were made in the 1930s and 1940s, reconciliation was not to be. The Disciples' participation in the Ecumenical Movement further drove the wedge of division between the two groups. In 1960, five hundred seventy-one of the nine-hundred-one Disciple's churches in Kentucky and Indiana purchased a full page ad in the *Louisville Courier-Journal* in which they disavowed fellowship between themselves and the liberal Disciples of Christ. Woodson noted that "among other items, opposition was raised against the 'ultra-radical theology of many of the leaders of the 'Disciples of Christ' and professors of their Bible Seminaries for their rejection of the infallibility of the Bible, the virgin birth of Jesus, and related denials of truth."<sup>7</sup>

In 1968 the Disciples of Christ reorganized as the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). They have roughly 770,000 members in approximately 4,200 congregations. The Disciples of Christ espouse only one essential of faith: belief in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

In a document posted on the official website of the Disciples of Christ, Dr. Kenneth Teegarden, General Minister and President Emeritus of the Disciples of Christ, states, "Standing before a congregation of Disciples to confess faith in Jesus Christ and become part of the church, a person is asked only one question. It is usually phrased, 'Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and do you accept him as your personal Savior?'"<sup>8</sup> As to the question, "What Must I Do To Be Saved?" another article on the Disciples' official Website responds, "Disciples now tend to agree with the Bible and the classical affirmations of Christian faith that there is nothing that we do or can do in order to be acceptable to God. The good news is that God accepts sinful people because of who God is, not because of who we are or what we have done or can do."<sup>9</sup> Again, "There is a sense in which the answer to 'What must I do to be saved' is 'Nothing. Nothing at all. God is the Savior. We are saved by God's grace, not by our own efforts.'"<sup>10</sup> On the same webpage, the Disciples claim to practice

"believer's baptism by immersion," yet accept ("affirm") "the baptism administered by other Christians, whether in the form of infant baptism or believer's immersion." The article states,

Early Disciples argued with other Christians about whether baptism was "necessary" or not, whether one "had to" be baptized in order to be saved. Contemporary Disciples rarely take this approach, but this does not minimize the importance of baptism. Disciples practice believer's baptism by immersion. Today's Disciples also affirm the baptism administered by other Christians, whether in the form of infant baptism or believer's immersion. Along

with the ecumenical church, Disciples believe baptism should only be administered once. For Disciples, the New Testament connects baptism with forgiveness of sins (e.g. Mark 1:4; Acts 2:38; 22:16), incorporation into the church as the body of Christ and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit (e.g. Acts 2:38; 1 Cor 12:13),

identification with Christ's own death and resurrection in which believers symbolically die to the old way of life and reorient their lives to the way of life revealed in Christ (Rom 6:1-11).<sup>11</sup>

Thus, they practice baptism by immersion, but accept "baptism" by sprinkling. Baptism is connected with forgiveness of sins and incorporation into the church, yet, the only requirement for acceptance into the church is faith in Christ. What a tangled web of confusion!

Beyond faith in Christ, their members are free to follow their consciences and are expected to extend that freedom to others. Disciple leaders have promoted ecumenism, including involvement with the National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches, and an extremely liberal social agenda, including the ordaining of homosexuals, advocating pro-choice on the issue of abortion, and advocating feminism. Many of their congregations have female "elders" and "preachers."

When television networks CBS and NBC refused to air a 30-second United Church of Christ television ad, William Chris Hobgood, General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), wrote the CEO of both networks in protest. The ad in question began airing on other stations on December 1, 2004. It is "part of the denomination's new, broad identity campaign" which states that, "like Jesus — the United Church of Christ

**As to the question, "What Must I Do To Be Saved?" another article on the Disciples' official Website responds, "Disciples now tend to agree with the Bible and the classical affirmations of Christian faith that there is nothing that we do or can do in order to be acceptable to God."**

seeks to welcome all people, regardless of ability, age, race, economic circumstance, or sexual orientation.”<sup>12</sup> Hobgood argued that the refusal of the ad because it was “too controversial” was in violation of the first amendment of the *Constitution*. He went on to state, “As Christians, we are called to create a loving and spirit-filled community of believers, which welcomes all people. Our denomination, comprised of 770,000 members, supports the UCC in its efforts to develop creative, thought-provoking messages of evangelism. The UCC has been a long-time partner with our church in a variety of ways. We share their message of inclusiveness and belief in God’s saving grace. We ask that you reconsider your opinion about the use of the ad and join with those at a number of other networks who concur with the UCC that this thought-provoking ad is worthy of public viewing.”<sup>13</sup> Again, the agenda of the United Church of Christ is to welcome all people regardless of their sexual orientation, and the Disciples of Christ organization share that message.

The Independent Christian Churches (Churches of Christ) today have approximately 1.6 million members in some 6,500 congregations, each congregation being independent and autonomously governed. While many believe that the only major differences between the Church of Christ (non-instrumental) and the Independent Christian Churches (Churches of Christ) are the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship and the formation of missionary societies, such is not the case. The Independent Churches of Christ are divided between liberal and conservative factions among themselves, with the more liberal element weakening in their stand on the necessity of baptism for salvation. Many Christian Church (Church of Christ) preachers are seeking to redefine the import of “baptism.” In seeking to understand why this change has occurred, William E. Paul writes,

I submit that the “reason” why so many preachers . . . are redefining the import of ‘baptism’ is rooted in the church growth movement of the 1970s. The emphasis on reaching more people, building larger congregations, and hopefully producing burgeoning mega-churches has led some to reconstruct their outreach methodology. If our traditional view on baptism has proven an obstacle to many sincere believers who strongly feel that salvation comes through “faith alone,” then perhaps a “slight” change in our approach to baptism will be less offensive. Perhaps a larger number of sincere, baptized, “faith only” people will choose to place fellowship with our churches if we desist from insisting that baptism is part of the plan of salvation. After all, where that approach has been taken, sure enough, there have been more people added to such congregations.

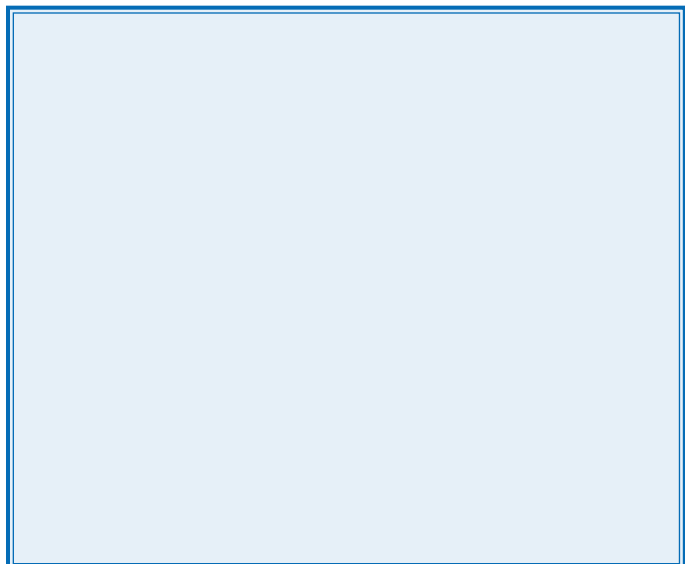
It seems the only options to account for this shift in teaching on baptism are: (1) the Bible has changed, (2) we have “smarter” preachers today who have figured out what those of yesteryear missed, (3) we can grow bigger churches if

we tone down the biblical purpose of baptism. My contention is that some well-meaning preachers have caved in to the pressure of the “faith-only” movement, which is built on the unscriptural belief that baptism is subsequent to salvation rather than being a part of it, as taught by Jesus (Mark 16:16; John 3:5), Peter (Acts 2:38; 1 Pet. 3:21), and Ananias (Acts 22:16).<sup>14</sup>

In commenting on a lecture presented at the 1984 NACC Workshop by Robert O. Fife, “Why Must I Be Baptized,” Dr. Roger R. Chambers, Professor of History at the Florida Christian College, wrote,

Some of our best-known preachers have abandoned salvation by faith in favor of miraculous regeneration. Salvation, for these men, is “asking Jesus into your heart”; baptism for the remission of sins is watered down to “follow Jesus in baptism,” whatever that means. Even among those who reject Calvinism, the baptism question is being reopened (as if the Spirit had not made himself clear), with the conclusion set forth that we cannot allow the unimmersed into church membership, but that doesn’t mean they aren’t Christians. If it is a reasonable expectation that God will make allowance for those who learned false doctrine, we overstep our authority to grant salvation to them. We ought to mind our own business and trust God to take care of that over which He alone is sovereign.<sup>15</sup>

While some conservatives among the Christian Church (Churches of Christ) are actively seeking to combat this doctrinal shift from the necessity of baptism for salvation, others are in denial of the change. In a lecture entitled “Wishful Thinking: What Christian Churches Wish Churches of Christ Knew About Christian Churches,” Victor Knowles, founder and executive director of Peace on Earth Ministries in Joplin, Missouri, and editor of *One Body*, stated that he wished Churches of Christ knew, among other things,



That we teach the same plan of salvation as do the churches of Christ (*a cappella*). Like you, we teach that man was created in the image of God but that image was marred by sin (we were not born as sinners but became sinners by choice). We inherit the consequences of Adam's sin, but not the guilt. Therefore we are in need of salvation that is only made possible by the love, mercy, and grace of God as demonstrated by the vicarious, substitutionary sacrifice of His Son on the cross. We have free will to accept or reject God's marvelous offer of salvation. The New Testament plan of salvation includes confessing faith in the deity and Lordship of Jesus Christ, repentance, that is, a sorrow and a turning from one's sins, and baptism (immersion) for the forgiveness of sins. Baptism is not a work of man but an act of obedience. The Holy Spirit is promised to every penitent, baptized believer and dwells within to produce his fruit in our lives. We do not believe that the Holy Spirit only indwells us through the word. He is a person, the third person of the Godhead, who dwells within us (Rom. 8:11).<sup>16</sup>

In the same lecture, Knowles held up the Southeast Christian Church of Louisville, Kentucky as an example of the Christian Churches "continuing commitment to the restoration plea." Knowles argues, "Only the ignorant or uninformed would deny that we share the same spiritual DNA." He then set forth Southeast as an example, stating,

Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, KY, is one of the largest churches in America, currently averaging 17,500 in attendance. Last year this church alone baptized 1,363 people.<sup>17</sup>

Now, that sounds like quite an accomplishment. Yet, upon visiting the Website of the Southeast Christian Church, we read the following:

A person should be baptized to follow the example of Christ (Matt. 3:13-17), to obey Christ's command (Matt. 28:18), to accept forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16), to receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), to express trust in Christ (Acts 8:12-13), and to testify to God's work in his or her life (Rom. 6:1-8; Gal. 3:27). Baptism also serves to cleanse a guilty conscience (1 Pet. 3:21). The Holy Spirit prompts individuals to recognize their sin and guilt. The only method by which the human soul can be wiped clean of sin is through the blood of Jesus Christ (Heb. 9:27-10:7). This "washing away" of sin is most clearly symbolized in the act of baptism (Acts 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:21).

Since one of the biggest obstacles between God and man is human pride, baptism also offers a venue by which believers humble themselves before God and others and admit their need for Christ's redemption (Jas. 4:6). In addition, baptism meets a God-given human need for expression. Everyone needs an outlet for emotion, or an expression for an impression. Baptism is the outlet for an expression of faith in Christ.

The act of baptism cannot save an individual. We are saved only through accepting Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Baptism demonstrates the believer's acceptance of Christ and is the point of time when the believer receives assurance of his faith. Those who were never baptized by immersion but were sprinkled for baptism as infants rest in God's merciful hands. We hope that Jesus will say to any person who has truly submitted to him but was not taught about immersion, "Your faith has saved you." Yet someone who understands Christ's command to be baptized and refuses to obey should not consider himself to have submitted to Christ.

#### Should a Person Ever Be Rebaptized?

Any person who has trusted in Jesus as the only Son of God and who has willingly been immersed into Christ may become a member of Southeast Christian Church whether the baptism occurred at Southeast or elsewhere. Rebaptism is encouraged for those who lack confidence in their initial baptism experience because they don't remember it, they were coerced, or their heart was not right with God at the time. Anyone who has fallen into sin after having been baptized should repent and seek forgiveness, but rebaptism is not necessary (Acts 8:13-24).<sup>18</sup>

Again, we read,

Are there any requirements for membership? Anyone wanting to make a commitment to membership must be willing to surrender his or her life to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. This means: (1) Admitting that all people (including you) have sinned (Rom. 3:23), (2) Acknowledging that Jesus Christ is God's only son, that he paid the penalty for your sin by his death on the cross, and that he made it possible for you to have new life through his resurrection (Rom. 10:9; 6:23; 2 Cor. 5:17, 21), (3) Totally trusting Jesus Christ by: accepting his free forgiveness, repenting of past and present wrongs, being baptized by immersion into him, and surrendering your abilities, your desires, and your whole life to him (Acts 2:38; Rom. 6).

If I have already received Christ and have been baptized by immersion in another independent or denominational church, will I have to be baptized again to be a member of Southeast?

No. Some people, however, who become members choose to be baptized again if they feel their first baptism was for the wrong reason, such as an adult who was baptized as a child because a friend or parent pressured them to do.<sup>19</sup>

Victor Knowles wishes that members of the non-instrumental churches of Christ knew that the Independent Christian Churches teach the same plan of salvation that conservative Churches of Christ teach. He holds up Southeast Christian Church as an example, and yet, the Southeast Christian Church openly acknowledges that it will accept baptism by immersion from any denominational church as valid, and that the act of baptism cannot save an individual.

Either Victor Knowles is in denial of the fact that Southeast Christian Church has redefined “baptism” in order to appeal to the “faith-only” masses, or he is uninformed of where Southeast actually stands. No doubt, many non-instrumental congregations could number in the thousands if they were willing to accept denominational baptism as valid, and make baptism a condition for church membership rather than an essential for salvation.

The Independent Christian Church is currently in a struggle between the more liberal and more conservative elements. Bill Tucker writes,

Changes are occurring within Restoration Movement churches. Across the country, with noted uniformity, our urban churches are swiftly adopting a myriad of changes in music, worship, preaching, teaching, and organization. In short, services and structure that once identified our fellowship have been abandoned; best said by one individual, “I didn’t leave the church, the church left me!” Many articles written within our brotherhood address the recent changes in our worship. Generally, discussion of these changes have been framed as a “traditional versus contemporary” showdown. Almost without exception, the writers regard the shift from traditional to contemporary worship as a matter of taste.<sup>20</sup>

Later, in the same article, Tucker continued,

Many urban churches, including Restoration Movement churches, have adopted differing variations of the seeker model. The model’s focus suggests the problem of unbelief in our world is not hardness of the human heart, but rather that traditional worship services are culturally irrelevant. This movement takes 1 Corinthians 9:22b as its proof text, “I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.” Seeking to bring in the unchurched, services have been re-tooled, employing well-engineered background music, lighting, choreography and drama to promote an entertaining experience in Sunday services. Choruses that specifically target an emotive response have replaced hymns. Sermons focus off of Biblical exegesis to remove objectionable content and instead, address the attendees “felt needs.” The model creates a friendly, non-hostile, open environment, designed to put visitors at ease. There is no doubt these antics work; in the sense of drawing a crowd. As discussed later, this church re-design fits the postmodern world like a glove.

In the days of the early church, the Gospel was presented as God-inspired propositional truth. The apostle Paul referred to this evangelism as “the foolishness of preaching” (1 Corinthians 1:21). Seeker proponents, noting others’ concern about methods, cite that their message is unchanged. In some churches, this just isn’t true. A focus on felt needs is a focus off of expository preaching. An unchecked market-driven service will lead many toward a religion of self-fulfillment and personal peace and prosperity. Evangelistic pragmatists forget that church is for believers. In

their goal of getting “unchurched Harrys and Marys” in the church’s front door, they have modified the Church’s who, what, why and how. When pragmatism replaces doctrine as the guiding principle for missiology, the church may face certain dangerous results . . .<sup>21</sup>

There is indeed a marked tendency today among the Independent Christian Churches (churches of Christ) to be drifting further from the Scripture in their zeal for church growth. The only solution for them is to abandon all their man-made beliefs and practices and return to the pure and simple teaching of the New Testament for the pattern for the teaching, work, and worship of the Church. Ironically, that is what the leaders of the Restoration Movement were seeking to do when the movement began.

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> David Edwin Harrell, Jr. “The Sectional Origins of the Churches of Christ,” *Journal of Southern History* 30 (August, 1964), 261.
- <sup>2</sup> William Woodson. “The ‘Disciples of Christ’ Espouse Modernism,” *The Spiritual Sword* 16 (January, 1985), 11.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 12.
- <sup>4</sup> Henry Frey Lutz. “The Cincinnati Bible Seminary and Modernism,” *Restoration Herald* 4 (December, 1925), 5-6.
- <sup>5</sup> R. E. Elmore, “Pacific Bible Seminary,” *Restoration Herald* 7 (December, 1928), 14.
- <sup>6</sup> Maurice B. Ingle, “A College for the South: Atlanta Christian College Opens Its Doors September 11,” *Restoration Herald* 6 (August, 1927), 13.
- <sup>7</sup> Woodson, “Disciples of Christ,” 13.
- <sup>8</sup> [http://www.disciples.org/discover/beliefs\\_more.htm](http://www.disciples.org/discover/beliefs_more.htm).
- <sup>9</sup> <http://www.disciples.org/discover/saved.htm>.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>12</sup> <http://www.stillspeaking.com/default.htm>.
- <sup>13</sup> [http://www.disciples.org/hobgood/ucc\\_response.htm](http://www.disciples.org/hobgood/ucc_response.htm).
- <sup>14</sup> William E. Paul. “A ‘New Revelation’ on Baptism,” *Restoration Herald* 80 (December, 2001), 11.
- <sup>15</sup> Dr. Roger R. Chambers. “Doctrinal Trends of the Restoration Movement,” a lecture delivered at the Florida Christian Convention/National Missionary Convention, 1985, available online at: <http://www.thecra.org/Doctrinaltrends.pdf>.
- <sup>16</sup> Victor Knowles. “Wishful Thinking: What Christian Churches Wish Churches of Christ Knew About Christian Churches,” a lecture delivered at the 2004 International Soul Winning Workshop (Tulsa, OK), lecture available online at: <http://www.poeministries.org/Pages/Wishful%20Thinking.html>.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>18</sup> [http://www.southeastchristian.org/newmembers\\_questionsanswered.cfm?doc\\_id=640](http://www.southeastchristian.org/newmembers_questionsanswered.cfm?doc_id=640) (All emphasis in the quotation are from Southeast Christian Church).
- <sup>19</sup> [http://www.southeastchristian.org/com\\_faq.cfm?step=outreach#outreach](http://www.southeastchristian.org/com_faq.cfm?step=outreach#outreach).
- <sup>20</sup> Bill Tucker, “‘. . . the Church left me!’: Postmodernism and the Church,” *Restoration Herald* 80 (November, 2001), 4.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

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## “Presbyterian” continued from front page

orientation. More liberal Presbyterians side with mental health professionals, human sexuality researchers, as well as gays and lesbians themselves in viewing homosexuality as normal and natural for a minority of adults.

Ordination is the threshold issue. Since 1978, the church has welcomed homosexuals as members but prohibited them from being ordained unless they promised to remain celibate. Previously ordained gays are allowed to remain in office.

### Ordination of Women

The schism over homosexual ordination is the hottest issue in Presbyterianism since the debate over ordination of women, and that issue reportedly is heating up again as elements of the church debate whether to rely on biblical directives or popular culture.

The church began in 1956 to consider women candidates for ordination. But in 2001 the church’s General Assembly received proposed resolutions that would allow individual congregations to decide whether or not to ordain women.

The “local option” resolutions, if approved, would reflect a break with general practice. Most Presbyterian churches permit women ministers, elders and deacons. The church even “mandated” the presence of women elders on sessions as part of a process to bring about more representative leadership. Women constitute between a third and half of most seminary student bodies.

This trend has led to greater acceptance of gender-neutral or inclusive language in worship. The church participated in production of the National Council of Churches’ inclusive language lectionary, which removed masculine references to God, addressed God as Father and Mother, deleted passages which instruct a wife to submit to her husband and added the names of wives to the Old Testament genealo-

gies. At the same time, more conservative elements in the church oppose such.

### Ecumenicalism

The Presbyterian Church is a leading denomination in the ecumenical movement. It is a member of the radical National and World Councils of Churches, which Presbyterians were instrumental in founding in 1948 and 1950. These councils fellowship denominations as diverse as American Baptists, Disciples of Christ, Episcopal, Greek Orthodox, Lutheran, and the Polish National Catholic Church of America. Presbyterians also are part of the Churches Uniting in Christ ecumenical organization.

Despite this, the church has retained an independent identity in the United States. This isn’t always true outside the states. Presbyterians in India united with Methodists, Anglicans, and others to form the Church of South India in 1947 and the Church of North India in 1970. A majority of the denomination merged with Congregationalists and Methodists in Australia in 1977 to form the United Church of Australia. Similar mergers in Canada produced the United Church of Canada. Like actions have taken place in Nigeria, South Africa, and Belgium.

### Modernism and Paganism

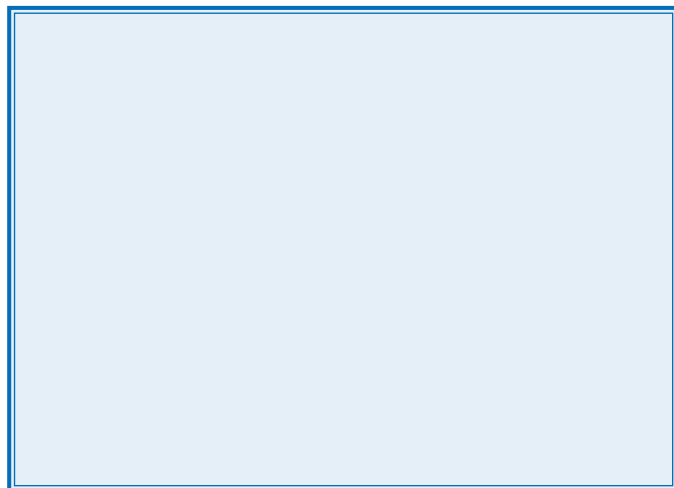
A 1986 survey revealed that only five percent of clergy and sixteen percent of members believed the Bible is to be taken literally. More than seventy-five percent of those polled reportedly rejected the idea that those who have not heard of Jesus Christ will be damned.

In 1987 the church adopted a report averring that Jews already are in covenant relationship with God and do not need to be born again through faith in Jesus.

PCUSA News reported that in 2000 a Rev. Ficca “suggested that an omnipotent and merciful God might provide other avenues to salvation for Jews and Muslims and other non-believers in Christ.” This suggestion reportedly ignited a firestorm of protest from more conservative elements within the church.

In 1982 the church reportedly ordained Mansfield Kase-man in spite of his denial that Jesus is God, that he was sinless, and that he arose bodily from the dead.

The church is a member of the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights. A new Presbyterian hymnal deleted “Onward Christian Soldiers” because of its military imagery, in spite of the Apostle Paul’s use of such in Ephesians 6:11-17. The church granted \$66,000 to sponsor the World Council of Churches’ “Re-imagining Conference” in Minneapolis in 1993, where women prayed to the goddess Sophia.



In 1992 the church's General Assembly was opened with a pagan Indian ritual to expel unwanted spirits and attract desired ones. In 1989 a witch named Starhawk addressed the San Francisco Presbyterian Theological Seminary. She performed ritual chants as prayers to "the powers under the earth." She referred often to the "Mother-Father God," a concept used in feminist theology.

The social gospel is a major force within the denomination. It supports a number of radical social-political causes around the world.

### Predestination

When most people think of Presbyterians they think of the doctrine of predestination and Calvin's five theories: total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace and perseverance of the saints (T.U.L.I.P. theory).

This doctrine remains a part of Presbyterian teaching, but its interpretation has been greatly modified and quibbled over in the late twentieth century. Ecumenical efforts have demanded some re-thinking of Calvin's argument that some people are destined to salvation regardless of their behavior and that God has foreordained some people to damnation. "There has been pressure to revise the *Westminster Confession*, for example, to remove statements that teach God's eternal condemnation of some people. The United Presbyterian Church edition of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* specifically repudiates this teaching," writes Jane Dempsey Douglass in *Presbyterians Today* Online.

The 2004 edition of *World Book Encyclopedia* says, "Predestination is no longer a characteristic theme of Reformed theology." In reference to predestination, the *Encyclopedia American* says, "Presbyterianism in the 20th Century has greatly broadened its views." *The Encyclopedia of American Religions'* article on the denomination says, "The issue of a strict or lenient interpretation of predestination has divided both European and American Calvinists."

### Attitude Toward Scriptures

Presbyterianism traces its origins to John Calvin and the sixteenth century Reformation and was greatly influenced by John Knox in Scotland. Some of the first Presbyterians in America came from the Puritan movement in England.

While Presbyterianism emerged in the Reformation plea of *sola scriptura*, and while the denomination has given testimony to the need to affirm its beliefs by the Bible, modernism and ecumenicalism have effectively gutted that standard.

"The great strength of Presbyterianism is its uncanny knack of fostering a fellowship in which people of different viewpoints continue to dialogue. Not only in the same denomination but also in the same congregation it is often possible to find folks who believe every word of the Bible to be factual worshipping alongside sisters and brothers in Christ who treat the Bible as true in meaning but not necessarily factual, and still others who would not even agree that the Bible is wholly true in meaning, let alone factual," writes David Robert Ord, pastor of Oak Park Presbyterian Church in New Orleans.

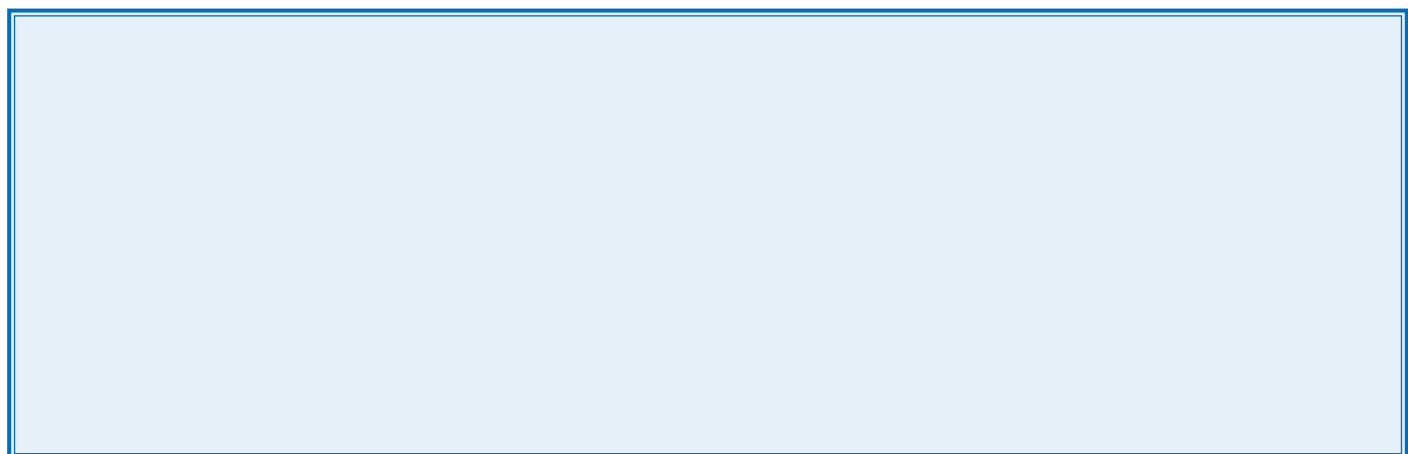
He continued, "What do Presbyterians believe about the Bible? We believe that through it God speaks to us, that it is inspired. For some, that means the Bible is inerrant. For others, it means that even though the Bible is culturally conditioned and not necessarily factual or even always true, it breathes with the life of God."

### Conclusion

This dichotomy of attitudes toward the value and use of Scripture in defining what God has said and expects appears to be the Petri dish in which division, decline, and distress are growing in the Presbyterian Church.

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“Church of God” continued from page 2

ing death of Christ.<sup>6</sup> They also teach the personal return of Jesus, a bodily resurrection, and eternal life for the believer and a literal hell for the unbeliever.

Morally, they denounce the use of alcohol and tobacco, as previously noted. The Church of God of Prophecy explains proper dress in this way:

ADORNMENT: the Christian’s use of adornment should be guided by the biblical principles of sobriety, modesty, submission, and self-discipline: Matthew 16:24. . . . The Scripture explicitly teaches that the use of adornment for occultic, lascivious, and idolatrous practices is prohibited . . .<sup>7</sup>

Abortion, lodges, cursing, and divorce and remarriage are condemned as well.

Further, Churches of God denounce same-sex marriage. The Church of God in Christ well expresses their basic position on homosexual marriage: “We believe that homosexual practices of same-sex couples are in violation of religious and social norms and are aberrant and deviant behavior. We believe that these unions are sinful and in direct violation of the law of God in that they are a deviation from the natural use and purpose of the body.”<sup>8</sup> Though Churches of God are conservative on some fundamental doctrinal and moral issues, they remain charismatic.

Churches of God believe in Holy Spirit baptism, modern-day miracles, and speaking in tongues.<sup>9</sup> Each position is refuted by Scripture. Churches of God claim Holy Spirit baptism and water baptism are two distinct events — two baptisms.<sup>10</sup> Thus, they contradict Paul’s teaching that there is one baptism (Eph. 4:4-6). Holy Spirit baptism served its purpose in the first century and is neither needed nor promised for us today (Acts 2:10). Water baptism for the remission of sins continues to be needed and is to be preached to all the world (Acts 2:38-39; Mark 16:15-16).

Modern-day claims of miracles do not fit the biblical pattern. First, faith was not required (Luke 7:11-15; Acts 13:10). Second, laying on of the apostles hands was the means of transferring spiritual gifts (Acts 8:4-18; 19:1-6). No apostles are around today, therefore, no one alive has miraculous powers.

Additionally, biblical tongue-speaking was done as a sign for the unbeliever (1 Cor. 14:22). However, the Church of God claims it is evidence to the believer that he has been baptized with the Holy Spirit.<sup>11</sup> Too, biblical tongues were distinct, discernable human languages spoken by men who had not studied or learned them before (Acts 2:1-12). They were not unintelligible gibberish uttered in a connived state of ecstasy.

## Other Doctrinal Problems

The Churches of God are not distinguishable from other mainstream Protestant denominations in the area of “ministries.” There is one for almost every conceivable cause. The Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee) lists various works in which it is involved: Homes for Children; Youth and Unwed Mothers; Operation Compassion (benevolence).<sup>12</sup> Browsing the Web Sites of assorted local churches of God will expose their addiction to the social gospel, including youth, college, and career ministries. One church advertises their “dance team practice” as part of its worship schedule.<sup>13</sup> These are all additions to the Bible. Instead of social and recreational allurements, the people of God are to use the word of God to attract sinners (Rom. 1:16; 2 Tim. 4:2; John 6:44-45).

Scriptural doctrine is also violated by having female “pastors.” A quick check on the Internet will reveal “co-pastors” at many Churches of God. Usually, they are a husband-wife team for either the entire church or some segment of it, like singles, youth, or elderly. Male leadership is the Bible pattern. Elders, true pastors, are to be the husband of one wife, not the wife of one husband (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-7). Deacons are to be married to women, not men (1 Tim. 3:8-13). Women are not to usurp authority over men by taking on the role of a preacher (1 Tim. 2:11-12).

As noted at the beginning of this article, most churches of God are premillennial. They believe in a literal 1,000 year reign of Christ on earth. Of course, this false doctrine undermines the cross and church. It teaches that Jesus was supposed to establish a kingdom during his first advent. Thus, the Jews would not have handed him over to Pilate for crucifixion, and the atoning death would not have occurred. Likewise, the church would not have been established, because Jesus’ blood which purchased the church would not have been shed (Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25).

## Conclusion

Churches of God are biblical in name, but not in beliefs and practices (1 Cor. 1:2). They are overwhelmingly Pentecostal and premillennial. They are zealous, but ignorantly so (Rom. 10:1-3). Their popularity is increasing as they put more and more emphasis on social programs and exciting, entertaining services. Therefore, members of the true Church of God must work diligently to counter act their influence.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Mead, Frank S., and Hill, Samuel S. *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*. 10th Rev. ed. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995.
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- <sup>3</sup> The Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee). *A Brief History of the Church of God*. Retrieved 8 Dec. 2004 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.churchofgod.cc/history.cfm>.
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174 Oak Run Dr., Mt. Washington, Kentucky 40047

## Quips & Quotes

### "I Will, I Will . . . But Not Just Yet"

"Washington — It used to be common for men and women to get a marriage certificate not too long after collecting their high school diploma. Not anymore.

"Census Bureau figures for 2003 show one-third of men and nearly one-quarter of women between the ages of 30 and 34 have never been married, nearly four times the rates in 1970.

"It's further evidence young people are focusing on education and careers before settling down, experts say. Societal taboos about couples living together before marriage also have eased, said Linda Waite, a University of Chicago sociologist.

Data from the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey released this week show that the age at which someone typically marries for the first time rose from 21 for women and 23 for men in 1970 to 25 and 27 respectively, last year.

"In 1970, only 6 percent of women 30 to 34 had never married; the figure was 23 percent in 2003. The rate for never-married men in that age group rose to 33 percent from 9 percent.

"Among younger women, 36 percent of those 20 to 24 had never married in 1970; last year it was 75 percent. Among men in that age group, the change also was dramatic: 55 percent in 1970 compared to 86 percent last year" (The Indianapolis Star [December 2, 2004], A8).

### Church Defrocks Lesbian Minister

"Pughtown, PA. — The United Methodist Church defrocked a lesbian minister who lives with her partner Thursday for violating the denomination's ban on actively gay clergy—the first such decision by the church in 17 years.

"A 13-member jury made up of Methodist clergy convicted the Rev. Irene Elizabeth Stroud at her church trial. Methodist law bars 'self-avowed, practicing homosexuals' from ministry. Nine votes were necessary for a conviction, and the jury voted 12-1 to find Stroud guilty" (The Indianapolis Star [December 3, 2004], A3).

### Dutch Hospital Admits Euthanizing 4 Sick Newborns

"Amsterdam, Netherlands — A hospital in the Netherlands—the first nation to permit euthanasia—recently proposed guidelines for mercy killings of terminally ill newborns.

"It then made a startling revelation: It already has begun carrying out such procedures, which include administering a lethal dose of sedatives.

"The announcement by the Groningen Academic Hospital came amid a growing discussion in Holland on whether to legalize euthanasia on people incapable of deciding for themselves whether they want to end their lives—a prospect viewed with horror by opponents and as a natural evolution by advocates" (The Indianapolis Star [December 5, 2004], A18).

### Vatican Will Inspect U.S. Seminaries

"Rome — The long awaited Vatican inspection of U.S. Roman Catholic seminaries, which was planned in response to the clergy sex-abuse crisis, is expected to begin in the fall of next year, according to Catholic News Service.

"The Vatican will soon publish a three-page questionnaire as a guide for the visits to more than 100 seminaries and other American institutions that help prepare men for the priesthood, CNS said.

"Bishop John Nienstedt of New Ulm, Minn. Chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Priestly Formation, said that the issue of homosexuality is expected to be part of

the review. The visitation will take up the question of 'how seminaries approach celibacy and chastity—either in relationship to heterosexuality or homosexuality—or the temptations or inclinations people have,' Nienstedt said" (The Indianapolis Star [December 18, 2004], F8).

### Gay Marriage Constitutional, Canadian Supreme Court Rules

"Toronto — Canada's Supreme Court ruled Thursday that gay marriage was constitutional, a landmark opinion allowing the federal government to call on Parliament to legalize same-sex unions nationwide.

"If legislation is approved by a majority of the House of Commons, as widely expected, Canada would become the third country to embrace gay marriage. Belgium and the Netherlands are the two others.

"Religious officials cannot be forced to perform unions against their beliefs, the court added. It also declined to answer a question about whether traditional marriage was constitutional" (The Indianapolis Star [December 10, 2004], A11).

### Mass Delivery of Bible Ignites Ire, Debate

"The Denver Post — When subscribers to the Colorado Springs Gazette picked up their paper last Sunday, they got more than the typical free sample of detergent.

"A copy of the New Testament—a \$125,000 Christmas gift from the International Bible Society — hit doorsteps along with the news.

"The Christian group raised the money to print and place the books in the Colorado newspaper in a fashion similar to the way major advertisers place free razors and toothpaste into newspaper bags on Sundays.

"The move by the Bible society has led to a community debate about how religion is presented to the public. It's also expected to renew an ethical debate for newspaper publishers about how to distinguish a newspaper's independence from advertisers" (The Indianapolis Star [December 26, 2004], A11).

### Evolution Stickers Must Go

"Atlanta — A federal judge on Thursday ordered a suburban Atlanta school system to remove stickers from its high school biology textbooks that call evolution 'a theory, not a fact,' saying the disclaimers are an unconstitutional endorsement of religion.

"By denigrating evolution, the School Board appears to be endorsing the well-known prevailing alternative theory, creationism or variations thereof, even though the sticker does not specifically reference any alternative theories,' U.S. District Judge Clarence Cooper said.

"The stickers were put inside the books' front covers by Cobb County public school officials in 2002. They state: 'This textbook contains material on evolution. Evolution is a theory, not a fact, regarding the origin of living things. This material should be approached with an open mind, studied carefully and critically considered'" (The Indianapolis Star [January 14, 2005], A5).

### Lutherans Urged to Maintain Stance on Gays

"Chicago — Trying to walk a line that will preserve unity, a panel recommended Thursday that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America maintain its positions against same-sex blessing ceremonies and gay and lesbian ministers in relationships but tolerate dissenters.

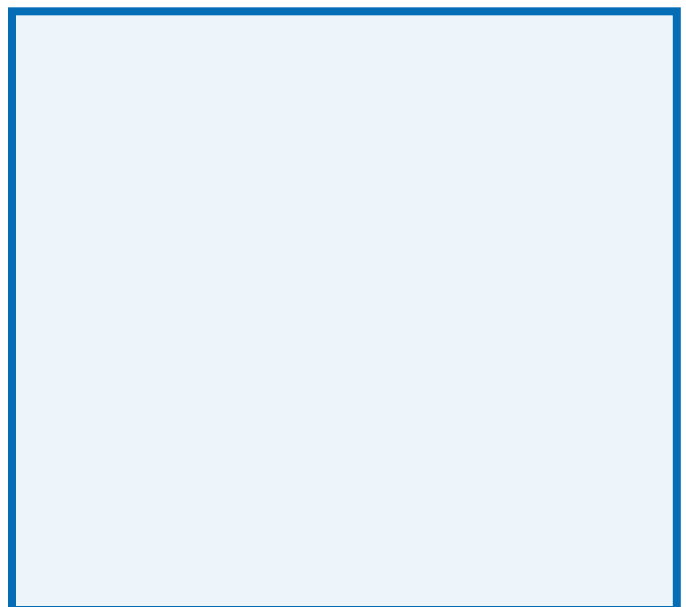
"Both conservatives and gay and lesbian groups were disappointed. Conservatives say the recommendations — to be considered by church leaders at their August meeting — condone defiance of church doctrine; gay supporters say they reinforce discrimination.

"Many fear the issue will divide the church, one of the nation's larger Protestant bodies, with 5 million members" (The Indianapolis Star [January 14, 2005], A5).

### Supreme Court Lets Ban on Adoptions by Gays Stand

"Washington — The Supreme Court steered clear of a dispute over gay adoptions on Monday, energizing conservatives who want other states to copy Florida's one-of-a-kind ban on gays adopting children.

"In refusing to review the law, justices averted a second showdown over gay rights in two years; the court barred states in 2003 from criminalizing gay sex" (The Indianapolis Star [January 11, 2005], A4).



## Second Annual Truth Magazine Lectures

# The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible

**July 11-14-2005**

Bowling Green, Kentucky — Convention Center

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
8:00 - 8:50	What About Islam and the Qu'ran? Kyle Pope	Is the Biblical Text Reliable? John Smith	Are There Lost Books of The Bible? Mark Mayberry
9:00 - 9:50	Evidences: Unity of Bible: Steve Wallace	Evidences: Prophecy: Kevin Maxey	Evidences: Historical Reliabilty David Dann
10:00 - 10:50	Addictive Behaviors Pornography: Steve Wolfgang	Addictive Behaviors Substances of Abuse: Art Adams	Addictive Behaviors Gambling: Joe Price
11:00 - 11:50	Creation: Dan King	Genesis 3: Paul Blake	Genesis 6-8, The Flood: Tom O'Neal
<b>Lunch Break</b>			
<b>Ladies Classes</b>			
10:00 - 10:50	How To Deal With a Husband Addicted to Pornography: Betty Wolfgang	Teaching Children to Respect Authority: Sherilyn Mayberry	Creating Peace At Home Violet McDaniel
<b>Auditorium</b>			
2:00 - 4:00	Open Forum	No Forum	Elders & Work of the Church
<b>Singing 7:00 - 7:30</b>			
What Does the Bible Claim For Itself? Donnie V. Rader	Is the Bible Adequate to the Modern World? Walton Weaver	Oh How I Love Thy Law: Johnie Edwards <i>(After Wednesday evening Bible Study)</i>	First Century Morals for the Twenty-first Century: Andy Alexander



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