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Magazine

Roman Catholicism

Jason Longstreth

INTRODUCTION

The Roman Catholic Church . . . in many parts of the world, this name is considered to be synonymous with Christianity. Catholicism is the oldest of the man-made denominations and is also the largest. In fact, some people have never been exposed to true Christianity; they have only witnessed the Catholic version. However, there are a great many differences between the church Jesus built in the first century and the Roman Catholic Church of today.

THE FALLING AWAY

The church of the first century was established exactly the way the Lord had intended. It was established with Jesus as the builder, the foundation and the head of the church (Matt. 16:18; 1 Cor. 3:11; Eph. 1:22-23). In fact, it had no source of authority except Christ and his word. There was no need for anything else because the Bible told them everything they needed to know (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The members of this church were simply known as “Christians” (Acts 11:26; 1 Pet. 4:16). They seem to have been united in faith and practice, just as Jesus had prayed in John 17:20-21. The New Testament tells of “one faith” and “one body” (Eph. 4:4-6) and for a while the church seemed to enjoy relative peace within itself.

But the peace and unity would not last long. In fact, the Holy Spirit warned that in the future a great apostasy would take place. In 1 Timothy 4:1-3a Paul wrote, “But

the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods.” He reminded Timothy of this again in 2 Timothy 4:3-4, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths.” A major part of this apostasy is seen in the early development of the Roman Catholic Church.

Special Issue (Continued) The Bible and Contemporary Churches

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CATHOLICISM

As the church neared the beginning of the second century, it faced a number of challenges. Those challenges included the severe persecutions placed upon them by the Roman world as well as the introduction of a number of “heresies” or false teachings into the church (especially concerning the deity of Christ). However, it was neither the external persecutions nor the false teachings that created the biggest problem for the church — both of these would be conquered. Instead, the biggest problem concerned the matter of church organization. Sometime during the second century, the churches began to select one of their elders and appointed him to preside over all meetings of the church. This elder became known as the “presiding elder” and later became

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The Jehovah's Witnesses

Phil Martin

The contemporary group calling themselves “Jehovah’s Witnesses” represents an active segment of the religious world. Historically they have also been identified as a movement with the descriptive term: “Russellism.”

With a close look, it is no surprise that the Jehovah’s Witnesses have been labeled as a cult by most of society. On the surface it is noted that they practice many of the activities commonly tied to cultism: especially in regard to mind and behavior control. Their members are not permitted to accept or read religious tracts from sources beyond their own publications, nor are they to read their Bibles without a senior member present to lead them.

It is quite common to see their members working door to door in our neighborhoods and city streets, hoping to find a willing person to listen to their rhetoric and fall prey to their deceptive devices. Christians would do well to arm themselves with the Bible so as to answer their error.

ORIGINS

The beginnings of Jehovah’s Witnesses can be found first in the work of Charles Taze Russell starting in 1884, participating in a Bible study group, located in Allegheny, Pennsylvania. Charles began to advocate that Jesus and the apostles descended to this earth in October of 1874 and have been here ever since. It was not until 1931 that they officially took the name “Jehovah’s Witnesses.”

Following Russell’s death in 1916, his work was pressed on by Judge J.F. Rutherford, with Rutherford’s views replacing what Russell had taught in the past. His now very infamous book, *Millions Now Living Will Never Die*, predicted that Jesus would return in the year 1914. When Jesus did not return, Rutherford recalculated and came up with the year 1925. During World War I, Rutherford was sentenced to prison in 1918 for refusing to support the government. By 1922 Rutherford reorganized his movement to send out his disciples to our doorsteps with arms full of tracts and magazines published by the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society.

When Rutherford died in 1942 their organization took a drastic turn. Nathan Knorr succeeded him as the president of the organization. Until this time, the Witnesses had been regarded as being on the far fringe of religious thought; Knorr provided a foundation that brought to them a level

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The Baptist Church Then and Now

Dick Blackford

There are over thirty different kinds of Baptists and numerous independent groups going by that name.

ORIGIN

As organized churches, the Baptists began in Holland and England. When the Reformation set the Bible and men free early in the sixteenth century, scattered groups appeared advocating the beliefs which today make up the theology and ideology of most Baptists. They were known as “Anabaptists” because they re-baptized adults once “baptized” (sprinkled) as children.

In Holland, a group of Mennonites (followers of the former Anabaptist leader, Menno Simons) taught principles of the Anabaptists who came out of the Reformation Movement. They taught that the Scriptures were the sole authority for man’s belief and practice, that baptism was a believer’s privilege, that church and state should be completely and forever separated, and that church discipline should be rigidly enforced. These Mennonites deeply influenced a small group of British Separatists who had taken refuge in Amsterdam from the religious persecutions of King James I. Many of them lived in Mennonite homes, and one of their leaders, John Smythe, was completely captured by the Mennonite argument. He re-baptized himself and his followers in the Anabaptist or Baptist faith (as it came to be known). With them the first English Baptist church was organized in 1609.

In 1631, Roger Williams, who had come to America, established the first Baptist church on American soil at Providence, Rhode Island. While there are so many kinds of Baptists, having their own associations and conventions, they maintain contact through the Baptist World Alliance (Washington, D.C.) which meets every five years and is composed of over 22,000,000 members. The two largest groups are the Northern Baptists (now identified with the American Baptist Convention) and the Southern Baptists. These divided over slavery issues and also over organizational structure. Northern Baptists had no central denominational organization but had separate and independent organizations (“societies”) for various types of cooperation, while Southern Baptists had one organization controlling all of their activities.

Southern Baptists are the largest, numbering over eleven million and adhere to the New Hampshire Confession of Faith. Southern Baptists have

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expanded rapidly throughout the United States so that the term “Southern” is now a misnomer.

THEN

Most Baptists have been in agreement on the doctrines of the trinity, salvation at the point of faith (before and without baptism), impossibility of apostasy, premillennialism, instrumental music in worship, etc. During the first half of the twentieth century Baptists were strong on doctrinal emphasis and were much more militant in promoting their beliefs than they are today. Defense of Baptist doctrine was largely made by the Independent Missionary Baptists. While Southern Baptists often debate within their conventions, they have been unwilling to defend Baptist teaching in public discussion with preachers in the church of Christ. Suppressing such discussions has been a major contributing factor to their growth.

Now

So far as basic doctrines believed by Baptists, there has been little change among the majority. The “Baptist Church Manual” (revised), by J.M. Pendleton, is still used by many Baptist churches and can be purchased from Southern Baptist publishers. They continue to teach salvation by faith only (minus obedience). Baptism is regarded as essential to obedience but not to salvation.

No responsible Baptist would claim that baptism is necessary for salvation, but it is essential if we are to be obedient to our Lord in following his example and instruction (Billy Graham, *Why I Am a Baptist*, compiled by Joe T. Odle, Broadman Press, Nashville TN).

Of course they overlook that obedience is essential for salvation (Heb. 5:8, 9; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; 1 Pet. 1:22). In many cases Baptists have been more successful with their doctrine than brethren have as some of our more doctrinally liberal brethren have caved in to Baptist teaching and are now proclaiming the same message and are engaging in joint works with them. Baptists teach a popular doctrine that many want to believe — just believe and be saved, and then you can’t lose it! The Bible teaches otherwise (Mark 16:16; Acts 22:16; Jas. 2:24, 26; Gal. 5:4; Heb. 3:12).

Baptists, like many other religious bodies, have their liberals and conservatives. There has been a battle among Southern Baptists over the inerrancy of the Bible, the role of women etc. They have, for the most part, booted out from their colleges and seminaries the modernists among them and have taken a strong stand on the infallibility of the Scriptures. On this the Baptists are correct (2 Tim. 3:16, 17; 1 Cor. 2:13; Matt. 24:35), but their use of creed books argues against what they profess to believe.

Baptist churches have become more involved in the religio-socio-political arena. Political candidates who share

their views are often invited to speak at their services. They have been strong in their opposition to abortion and homosexual marriages. All Christians should take a strong moral stand in regard to such matters and preachers should teach God’s word on relevant topics, but New Testament churches never got involved in the political process.

While Baptist churches have often used carnal appeals to attract and keep members, probably the biggest change is a much stronger emphasis on carnal attractions. It is believed that it is the church’s responsibility to meet all the “needs” of individuals and families. Huge “Family Life Centers” are the order of the day in which is provided. All types of counseling (financial, psychological, marriage, vocational, etc.) are made available. Every form of recreation and entertainment imaginable has been used (bowling alleys, gymnasiums, baseball, soccer, tennis, ping pong, fitness spas, annual fourth of July fireworks displays, antique car shows, etc.). Even worship services have become more entertainment oriented — from “concerts” performed by religious celebrities in the “gospel music” field to complete bands and orchestras. Some churches have even allowed fast food restaurants to install franchises inside their facilities. Instead of service, religion has become a matter of “serve us.” Religion has become “man-oriented” instead of “God-oriented.” These churches, from their Convention on down, refuse to see a connection to their practices with Jesus cleansing of the temple (Mark 11:15-18). No scriptural defense can be made for such practices today. With a strong emphasis on tithing they always seem to come up with the money for such man-made projects. We never read of the New Testament church engaged in these kinds of activities. Just as in Jesus’ day, throughout history men have been ingenious in devising ways to pervert religion to their own selfish desires. History has a way of repeating itself when men refuse to learn from it.

CONCLUSION

From these and other considerations it is easy to see why Baptists remain the fastest growing of the larger denominations.

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The Episcopalian Church

Donald P. Ames

Although they have become one of the largest denominations in America today, the Episcopalian Church did not always enjoy such a status. In fact, its very beginning raised a lot of problems. In 1509 seventeen-year-old Henry VIII was crowned king of England. In his earlier life, he had opposed the teachings of Martin Luther and was awarded the title “Defender of the Faith” by the pope himself. But this great “defender” was soon to turn on the Roman Catholic Church himself. Desiring a separation from Catherine of Aragon so he could marry his new love Anne Boleyn, he besought the pope for an annulment. For various political reasons the pope declined such an annulment. Henry VIII promptly took matters into his own hands. He removed Cardinal Wolsey from his post in England, and replaced him with Thomas Cramer, who immediately annulled Henry VIII’s marriage to Catherine and married him to Anne Boleyn. This brought a quick response from the Roman Catholic Church which excommunicated him for his actions. Henry VIII then had Parliament to declare him “Supreme head of the Church” in 1534, and thus the Church of England (sometimes also referred to as the Anglican Church) severed all ties with the Roman Catholic Church.

Brought to America in 1607 by Chaplain Robert Hunt, it slowly began growing and taking its place among some of the other commonly accepted denominations. Following the American Revolution, the name of “Church of England” was unpopular, so they dropped it and in 1783 formerly accepted the name of The Episcopalian Church instead. (Episcopalian comes from the Greek word *episkopos*, meaning “bishop,” and it is a term that glorified their system of organization.)

Through the influence of Henry VIII, Thomas Cramer wrote the *Book of Common Prayer*, which along with the *Forty-Two Articles of Religion* and several other creeds, became their new standard creed book. They also bestowed the final word of all doctrinal discussions upon the church and declared it even more accurate than the Bible (607). In this, they follow the same steps the Roman Catholic Church had followed in declaring the church to be more accurate than the Bible—and more current as well.

POINTS OF INTEREST

One does not have to look very far to realize that the Episcopalian Church bears little resemblance to the church of the New Testament. They define their beliefs as including the following:

1. While they believe the Bible to be inspired, they do not mean by that it is “verbally” inspired in the sense that each word and statement therein is inspired of God (1 Cor. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16-17) but only in a “general way” (per phone conversation with the Bishop of New York on December 1, 2004). They do not hesitate to advance their own ideas over those of the Bible, and to dismiss portions of the Bible they are not too fond of.

2. Jesus came to reconcile his Father to us—despite such plain statements in the Bible as 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 and Romans 5:10 that show it was man who had drifted away and was in need to be reconciled back to God (i.e., on God’s terms, not man’s).

3. Children are born into this world guilty not only of their own sins but also guilty of the “original sin” of Adam as well (*Book of Common Prayer* 603). Again the Bible teaches the exact opposite in such passages as Ezekiel 18:20; Matthew 18:3; 19:14, etc.

4. Baptism and the Lord’s supper are both regarded as the only two “sacraments” of the Church (i.e., they are “church ordained”), and those engaged in such are cleansed of their sins automatically, whether or not they do anything else. However, neither baptism nor the Lord’s supper originated within the church itself (both were instituted by Christ) and these alone do not make a good Christian.

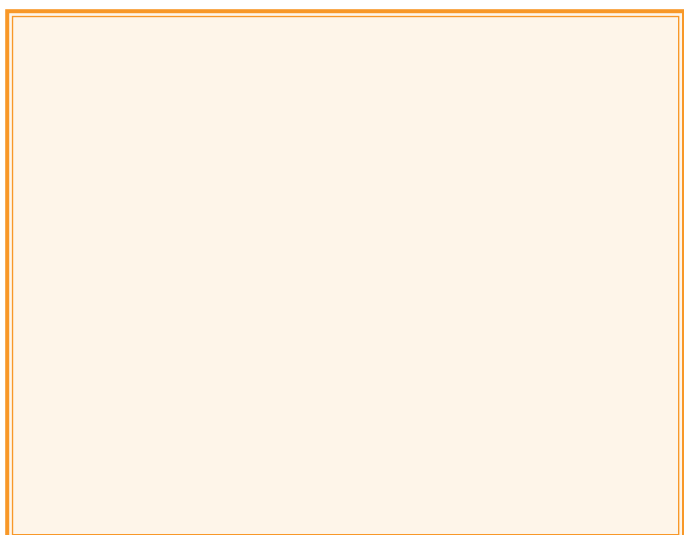
5. Baptism is referred to as a “sprinkling” and is to be administered to infants to free them from the “original sin” passed down from Adam (608). Yet, there is not a single case of infant baptism to be found within the pages of the New Testament. In every single case, it was administered to men and women old enough to believe, repent, and choose their own course of action. And while the very

word “baptism” in the Greek means to “immerse, plunge under,” such passages as Romans 6:3-6 and Acts 8:38-39 certainly demonstrate a full harmony with this method. The term “sprinkling” is found in the New Testament, but is not used with reference to baptism.

6. “We are justified by Faith only is a most wholesome, Doctrine, and very full of comfort” (*Book of Common Prayer* 605) is another famous quote that comes from their creed book. And while the Bible speaks of being justified by faith (Rom 5:1), it is a working faith (cf. Rom. 1:5; 6:16-18; 15:26), and no where in the Bible does it speak of one being justified by “faith only.” In fact, the only time the term does appear in the Bible, it affirms that one is justified by works, and not by “faith only” (Jas. 2:19, 24, 26).

7. Each local church (“parish”) is governed by a priest (“rector”), and each region or section of the country is divided into regions as overseen by a Bishop. The Indianapolis area, for instance, is overseen by the Bishop of Indianapolis, the Right Reverend Catherine Waynick. They also have a General Convention every three years, which meets to determine church policy dealing with current problems. Yet, the Bible affirms Jesus has “all authority” today (see Matt. 28:18; cf. Eph. 1:22-23). The term “bishop” is not limited to a “regional overseer” in the Bible, but is actually another term used interchangeably with “elders” (see Acts 20:17, 28). In New Testament times, a plurality of elders or bishops were selected to oversee each local congregation (cf. Acts 14:23).

8. They wear a variety of titles, including “Father,” “Reverend,” “Right Reverend,” and “Very Reverend.” The bishop of New York informed me that these are “old English terms” that have just been “carried forth” and continue in use today. He said the term “Right Reverend”



was actually the equivalent of the term “bishop,” and he preferred to be addressed by the term “Bishop” instead, “since it was a Bible term, and the other is not.” Even though the term bishop may be a “Bible term,” It is not used in the way that he is using it. As the other titles, they need to pause and consider such passages as Matthew 23:9, Psalms 111:9 and 89:7. Certainly no man would dare to presume he is to be “feared” in the same sense God is!

9. They nave women serving as priests and bishops, as illustrated by Catherine Waynick, the “bishop of Indianapolis.” This is certainly contradictory to what the Bible sets forth in 1 Timothy 2:8-9 where the woman is not allowed to “usurp authority” over a man, and yet as a preacher, Titus was exhorted to speak “with all authority” (Tit. 2:15).

10. They also have “practicing homosexuals” serving as priests (per the phone interview), though it is a “big issue” in the Episcopalian Church as the controversy grows today. The bishop I interviewed over the phone also went on to say the church did take a stand presently against any kind of recognition or approval of homosexual marriages or living together arrangements. But they have opened the door to accept practicing homosexuals as members without repentance, as required in Acts 2:28, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, and Romans 1:26f. These passages, he said, they are looking over to see if they were opposed to the actual act of homosexuality or “forced relations” (“as may be the case in such cities as Sodom and Gomorrah”). He needs to reread the accounts in Genesis about the sin involved there as well as such passages as Leviticus 18:21-29; 20:13, etc. These sins were an “abomination” to God.

11. References to such miracles as the virgin birth of Christ, the bodily resurrection of Jesus, a literal creation in six literal days, a universal flood in the days of Noah, are all points open to “various interpretations.” The Bishop of New York favored the first two, but dismissed the two later ones as “concepts” rather than actually real. Of course former Bishop Pike of San Francisco also described the Garden of Eden and the Virgin Birth of Jesus as “myths.” So, their belief in the “inspiration of the Bible” goes only as far as they wish it to.

12. The Bishop of New York went on to say he was opposed to abortions “period.” And on stem cell research being pushed today that “one mut go carefully” as “there is a lot of conflict still out there to be defined.” Of course, the fact that many babies are being killed for the stem cell research in the past is not an area to be “defined.” Life begins at conception, and just because a babe may be in the mother’s womb, it is still regarded as life by God (see 21:22-23; cf. Luke 1:41; 2:16 where the same term is used to describe an infant both in the womb and one which has been born already).

13. He definitely favored church sponsored recreation, saying “we need more such association today.” This, despite the fact the church is a spiritual institution set up for a spiritual mission of saving souls (see John 6:26, 63; cf Rom. 14:17, 1 Cor. 11:39; Acts 6:3, etc.). It is not the function of the church to provide entertainment, but rather to preach the saving gospel!

14. Unity with the Roman Catholic Church — and other denominations — is open to “developing the proper guidelines.” I asked if the office of the pope was an obstacle to such a union. He replied, “Not the office, but the doctrine of his infallibility, which is one reason the Church of England broke off to begin with.” Of course, unity is always to be sought (John 17:21), but not with a compromising disposition (see Eph. 5:11; 2 John 9-11; Gal. 1:6-8, etc.). Unity can only be had on God’s terms, not man’s.

15. As for premillennialism, he informed me, that the church did “not have a firm position,” but that they strongly questioned the concepts of the Rapture and the ‘early reign’ of Jesus” — both also unknown to the word of God. Jesus affirms in John 5:28-29 that “the hour” is coming in which both the good and evil will be raised together to face judgment, and Paul affirms in 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10 that the wicked will be punished the same day the righteous will be rewarded.

16. On divorce and remarriage, I was told that in recent years the church had modified its position and is now accepting those in violation of Matthew 19:9 into full fellowship without any repentance. Acts 2:38 says the repentance must precede their salvation.

17. Episcopalian bishops, formerly Catholic bishops before the division by King Henry separated from the Roman Catholic Church, also claim an unbroken line or succession back to the days of the Apostles themselves,

which they think makes them a part of the “one body, catholic and apostolic church.” Even if they could prove such a line of succession, there were already apostasies at work in the days of the apostles, and if they do not resemble the church of the New Testament, it proves nothing.

18. They have carried many Roman Catholic holy days over, such as Easter, Lent, and Christmas, despite such plain passages as Galatians 4:10-11, where Paul condemns man-made holy days (John 4:24; Matt. 7:21-23).

19. The very term “Episcopalian Church” is unknown in the Bible, which mentions instead that pursuing human names contributes to division and carnal mindedness (1 Cor. 1:10-13; Gal. 5:21).

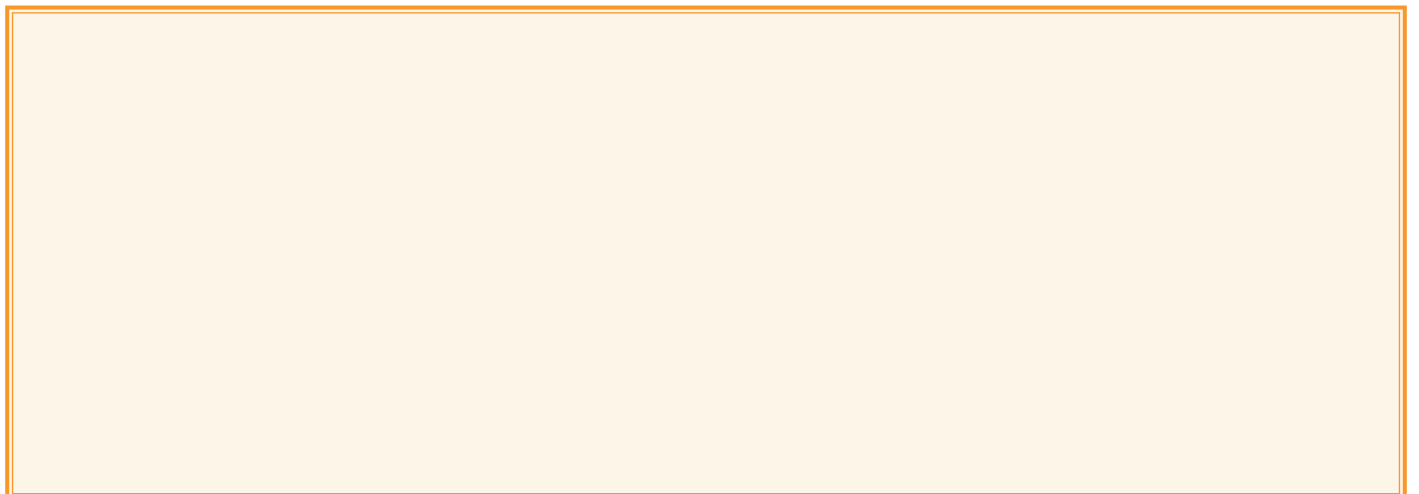
20. They have “pledges” for giving and hold up the tithe of the Old Testament as an example. Declaring a pledge is to be a “moral obligation” just as any other debt (see 1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 8:12, etc. plus the fact that the Old Testament has been abolished and we are not under its regulations today).

21. They also bind the Ten Commandments on all people despite plain teaching. They were nailed to the cross and Christ has all authority today (Rom. 7:1-4; Gal. 3:19-25; 5:4; 2 Cor. 3; Eph. 2:14-16; Heb. 8).

CONCLUSION

Thus one does not have to look too hard to realize that the Episcopalian Church could not possibly be the church of the New Testament, that those following such ideas are being led astray by men (Matt. 15:8-9, 14) and need to be taught the truth of God’s word (Mark 16:15-16). There are many good and sincere people caught up in this movement. Unfortunately, Jesus is not their accepted leader (Eph. 1:22).

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The Lutheran Church

Art Adams

The “traditional” have been supplanted and outnumbered (in many cases) by the “contemporary.” This has evolved as major religious bodies have either failed to focus or become bored with focusing on their core beliefs.

Major shifts have occurred in religious thinking over the last few decades and with them has come the emergence of a new breed of religion. The “traditional” have been supplanted and outnumbered (in many cases) by the “contemporary.” This has evolved as major religious bodies have either failed to focus or become bored with focusing on their core beliefs. The Hebrew writer warned the faithful about “drifting away from those things which you learned.” While this is true for the faithful, it is also a pattern with any group. In this article, I want to share information about the Lutheran Church by looking at its core beliefs and help the reader become aware of how modernism has infiltrated their system.

PRESENT SIZE

The top ten nations with the highest proportion of Lutherans are: Iceland (94%), Norway (90%), Denmark (90%), Sweden (90%), Finland (86%), Greenland (80%), Namibia (50%), Germany (30%), Estonia (26%) and the USA (6%) (www.adherents.com). In the United States the largest concentration of Lutherans by population are in: North Dakota (36.5%), Minnesota (33.9%), South Dakota (30.30%), Wisconsin (26.20%), Nebraska (16.30%), Iowa (15.40%), Montana (12.20%), and others states (8.6% or less) (adherents.com/largecom/com_luth.html). Thus, the influence of the different “bodies” (we would call them branches) of the Lutheran church is felt worldwide. In

the United States “there are 20 different churches” or Lutheran “bodies” (ELCA Department for Communication).

GOVERNANCE

The Lutheran church is organized by regions and synods that appear to have geographical boundaries, as well as lines of religious differences. These synods meet and draw up statements of belief and position statements for those affiliating with them. The synods are not all in fellowship with one another. Some have fellowship only with “cooperation in externals” but not in “sacred things” (www.lcms.org/pages/intenal.asp?NavID=4840). Therefore, when a person identifies himself as a Lutheran, he may well tell the synod thus identifying his “bodies” of belief. Listen closely for this will tell you their religious belief system and give a key on where to open discussion with them.

CORE TEACHINGS

While there are varying ranges of radical, conservative, liberal, and modernist views within the “bodies,” Lutherans as a whole still celebrate the Reformation on October 31 and continue to support the basic principles of theology and practice espoused by Luther, such as *Sola Gratia, Sola Fide, Sola Scriptura*:

- We are saved by the grace of God alone — not by anything we do;
- Our salvation is through faith alone — we only need to be-

lieve that our sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, who died to redeem us;

- The Bible is the only norm of doctrine and life — the only true standard by which teachings and doctrines are to be judged (www.elca.org/questions/Results.aM?recid=41).

Lutherans follow Luther's *Small Catechism* and the *Augsburg Confession* to introduce people to the Lutheran faith. These and other Lutheran confessional documents are included in the Book of Concord (augspurg-fortress.org). "Many Lutherans still consider themselves as a reforming movement within the Church catholic, rather than a separatist movement . . ." (www.clca.org/questions/Results.asp?recid=41).

SOME AREAS OF SIGNIFICANT BIBLICAL CONFLICT

Human Foundations. The Lutheran church began as an effort to "reform" the Catholic Church. It dates back to the eve of "All Saints Day," October 31, 1517 when Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the church building door of the Witten-



Wittenberg Church — Wittenberg, Germany

berg Catholic Church. These were 95 grievances Luther had with the Catholic Church and were his effort to reform the Catholic Church by calling it back to its earlier teachings. The Lutheran church wears his name

despite his plea: "I pray you leave my name alone and not to call yourselves Lutherans, but Christians" (Michelet, *Life of Luther* 262).

In Matthew 16:18, Jesus promised to build his church. He is its head and founder. In Ephesians 1:22-23 all things are subject to Christ and God "gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body." The church of the Bible was built in the lifetime of some of those who physically saw and heard Christ. Mark 9:1 cites that there were some standing there who would not die "until you see the kingdom come with power" Since the "power" came on Pentecost (Acts 2), then the kingdom came on Pentecost and the Christ's church was begun that day. The Lutheran church is one thousand and eighty-four (1484) years too late to be the New Testament Church. "For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11). Therefore, I must conclude that the Lutheran Church is built on the wrong foundation.

MAN-MADE CREED

Luther's catechism "is intended as a help to study and understand the Bible" (*What Lutherans Believe, The Lutheran Book Concern*, 14). They, also, hold to the Augsburg Confession of Faith.

If a creed book says the same thing the Bible says then why is it needed? If it says more than the Bible says then it says too much and if it says less than the Bible says then it says too little. The reality is that the creed book teaches one how to be a Lutheran. The Bible tells one how to be a Christian only. In the first century Peter affirms that God's "divine grace has granted unto us all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3). If God's word gives us all things, then why do we need any other book as our body of faith?

FOLLOW THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

The Ten Commandments are bind-

ing on us according to the Lutheran Church. "The moral law is that law which sets forth our duties to God and man, as briefly comprehended in the ten commandments" (*Questions and Answers No. 21, Luther's Small Catechism*). "The moral law alone is binding on all men" (Answer No. 21, *Luther's Small Catechism*).

The Ten Commandments were the decalog of the law of Moses and were "written and engraven in stones." 2 Corinthians 3:7-11 says they are the ministration of death and condemnation and are passed away. "But if the ministration of death, written, and engraven on stones, came with glory. . . . For if the ministration condemnation hath glory. . . . For if that which passeth away was with glory, much more that which remaineth is in glory." The Hebrew writer affirms that the law of Moses was replaced: "For if the first covenant had been faultless, then would no place have been sought for a second." The text goes on to affirm that God has made "a new covenant" with his people (Heb. 8:6-13). And, he "blotted out the bond written in ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us: and hath taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross" (Col. 2:14-17). In order to follow the old law (Ten Commandment decalog and body of Moses law) one must walk over Jesus' cross and reverse what he did in nailing it to the cross.

If you want to see something very obvious look at Luther's *Small Catechism* and you will see ten commandments, but look again. The second commandment is not there. "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image" (Exod. 20:4). To make up for the one they leave out, they divide number ten into two parts and call it nine and ten (see Luther's *Small Catechism* 43-44). "This is the most serious part of all of it. They leave out one commandment and never keep the Sabbath commandment. When I learned they violated the ten commandments, left one out and even bound on us a law that was

abolished, I could no longer be a Lutheran” (*Why We Left Lutheranism*, Claude Guild, www.northsalinaschurchof-christ.com/build.htm).

SACRADOTALISM

Luther’s *Small Catechism* says: “Confession consists of two parts: the one is, that we confess our sins; the other, that we receive absolution or forgiveness through the pastor as of God himself, in no wise doubting, but firmly believing that our sins are thus forgiven before God in heaven” (79). Now, just look at this — the pastor “as of God himself” has the power of absolution or forgiveness of confessed sins. Who has the power to forgive sins? This teaching is an outgrowth of sacerdotalism which teaches that the clergy is the visible representative of God on earth and has the power to forgive or retain sins. Do you believe that?

Paul told Timothy, “There is one God, one mediator also between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5). John wrote “And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1). For any “pastor” to assume the power to forgive or absolve sins, he must take the seat and authority of Jesus. Anyone “unseating” Jesus is in for serious consequences.

INFANT BAPTISM

“Since children are part of every nation, they are evidently among the ones to be disciples and baptized” (*What Lutherans Believe* 139). “Accordingly, we conclude that since baptism has taken the place of circumcision, babies should be baptized” (*Ibid.* 141).

INHERITED SIN

“Original sin is the depravity which is born in us; it is the inclination to evil which we and all men have inherited from our parents. Ever since the fall of Adam, all men who are naturally begotten are conceived and born in sin” (*Ibid.* 65).

But, Jesus said, “Suffer the little children, and forbid them not to come unto me; for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 19:14). Jesus was speaking of the innocence of children in this verse and says we must become like them to enter heaven. There is no chain of sin passed on through inheritance. Even if there was, the assumed chain of inherited sin broke in Ezekiel 18:20: “The soul that sins it shall die; the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son.” The consequences of Adam and Eve’s sin were passed on through the curse to the earth, pain in childbirth, and separation from the tree of life, but that is a far cry from saying

the guilt and responsibility for their sin was passed on. That would mean God is about to punish people for something they did not do (Adam and Eve’s sin). The Ezekiel passage affirms the soul that sins dies and the child shall not inherit sin. Lutheranism says the opposite.

MODE OF BAPTISM

We recognize any mode of baptism in which water is applied in the name of the Triune God, whether it be by immersion or pouring or sprinkling (*What Lutherans Believe* 136).

Jesus and the New Testament writers had three Greek words with specific meanings in their vocabulary. Sprinkling (*rhantismos*, Heb. 9:19, 21; 10:22), pouring (*cheo*, Acts 2:17-18, Matt 26:7; Mark 14:3) and immersion (*baptizo* — overwhelm). While three words were available to say what was intended only one was used exclusively and that one is *baptizo*. Never are sprinkling or pouring even

remotely used in any context of baptism in the Scriptures. Whether one knows Greek or not, the Bible describes the action of baptism in passages like Romans 6:4-5: “We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death.” Baptism is clearly a burial. Further it is for a purpose “the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38), “to wash away sins” (Acts 22:16), “to be

born again” (John 3:5), and many more New Testament passages. Lutherans do not baptize to take away sins. Rather, “you are saved by grace through faith.” Baptism is “a means by which you receive that grace” (Miriam L. Woolbert, ELCA Department for Communication, www.elca.org/ly/fNs.html).

ONLY TRUE RELIGION

In response to the question, “Do Lutherans believe theirs is the only true religion?” the late Dr. Elson Ruff, editor of *The Lutheran* replied, “Yes, but Lutherans don’t believe they are the only ones who have it. There are true Christian believers in a vast majority of the churches, perhaps in all” (www.elca.org/questions/Results.asp?recid=42).

All the saved are in “one body” (Acts 2:42-44; Eph. 1:22, 23). Ephesians 4:4-6 says there is “one body.” Now if this is one body and Paul defined that body as the church (Eph. 1:22,23), then how many churches are there? The answer is “one.” This answers Jesus’ prayer for unity of believers in John 17. Jesus wants all to be one “as thou art in me and I in thee that they may be one in us.” Why Jesus? “That the world may believe that thou hast sent me.”

DIVISIONS (ELCA, LCMS, WFL)

Today’s Lutheran Church struggles with radical, conser-

vative, liberal, and modernistic thinking much like other religious groups.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America appears to be the prominent liberal and modernist group. The ELCA has nine regions, sixty-five synods and 10,721 congregations (www.elca.org/sr/regions_and_synods.html). The governing body has Office of the Presiding Bishop, Office of the Secretary and Department for Synodical Relations. There are numerous church regulations including a checklist for closure with outgoing bishops, transitioning new leaders, fundraising, and more. Many of their “giving areas” are focused on: Disaster response, missions, world hunger (www.elca.org/scriptlib/dcm/giving/hunger.asp).

Very recently the ELCA task force on Studies on Sexuality meet in Chicago to form a position statement on homosexuality: (1) “whether or not the church should bless same gender relationships” and, (2) “whether or not it should allow people in such relationships to serve the church as professional lay and ordained ministers” ([www.elca.org/Scriptlib/CO?ELCA News/encArticleList.asp?a=2970&0=1](http://www.elca.org/Scriptlib/CO?ELCA%20News/encArticleList.asp?a=2970&0=1)).

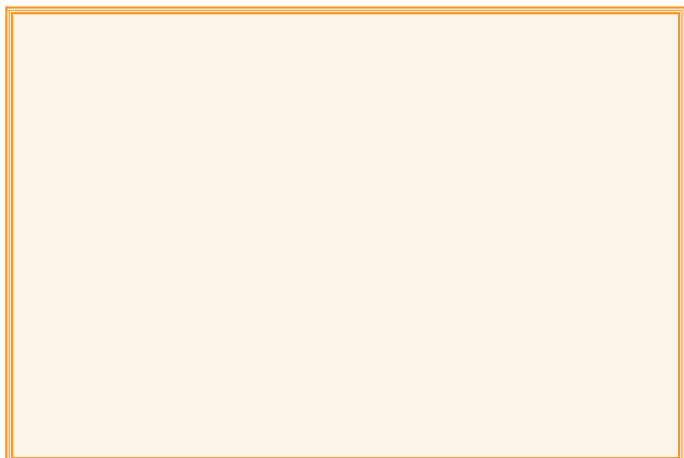
The report will go to ELCA leaders via confidential e-mail on January 12, 2005 and is to be discussed on March 3-8 in the ELCA Dallas Conference. From the article the findings “will provide a model for how wider communities in the church also can begin to think of themselves as servants of the gospel, talking in faith with one another despite differing opinions.”

The ELCA position paper on abortion is nine pages long. Much length is given to the preciousness of life, faith, judgment, repentance, and alternatives. A couple of statements strike me: “A developing life in the womb does not have an absolute right to be born, nor does a pregnant woman have an absolute right to terminate a pregnancy. . . . This requires that we move beyond the usual ‘pro-life’ versus

‘pro-choice’ language in discussing abortion.” While the position encourages continuing the pregnancy and looking at alternatives like adoption, in section B. Ending a Pregnancy there are three (3) circumstances when “an abortion is morally responsible”: (1) continuing the pregnancy is a clear threat to physical life of the mother, (2) “if the pregnancy occurs when both parties do not participate willingly in sexual intercourse” and (3) extreme fetal abnormality. However, in all of these events if the unborn child can survive outside the womb “every reasonable and necessary effort” should be made to support life ([Nvwww.elca.org.socialstatements/abortion](http://www.elca.org/socialstatements/abortion)).

The ELCA policies on funds emphasizes “stewardship” and free will offerings. However, there is another lengthy position statement with a decision tree or multiple questions to be explored prior to fund raising. Perhaps this is summed up as follows: “financial needs and cultural influence have led people, at all expressions of the church to look at new ways of supporting ministries in the future: Investments, real estate, stocks and bonds” may be used. A modernist position is reflected in “activities to raise funds for congregations can do more than make money; they can build fellowship and commitment in a community of faith.” I’m wondering what Luther would say since there is absolutely no Scripture to support this fundraising and investment philosophy. But, even more, I’m wondering what Jesus says and I know that answer (1 Cor. 16:1, 2; Acts 2). Commercialism in many churches has placed them in competition with big business and gives a false picture to the world of what the Lord’s church is supposed to be.

The ELCA has many outreaches including disaster relief both domestic and international. The group has large missions dedicated to world hunger and has been involved in ecumenical meetings and affiliations with the Lutheran World Federation, World Council of Churches, and the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. In 1997 the ELCA adopted an agreement with the Presbyterian Church, The Reformed Church in America, and the United Church of Christ for “full communion” based on agreement on “fundamental doctrinal consensus” (*A Formula of Agreement*). Jesus wants his church to focus on spreading the gospel (Matt 28:19-20). After the feeding of the 5000, the crowd tried to take him by force and make him a king. That was the chance, if the church was going to be built on food and feeding the hungry. Jesus never fed the crowd again after that. Instead he rebuked them for following after him for the loaves and fishes. He, then, gave one of his hardest lessons on “the bread of life” after which “many turned and followed Him no more” (John 6). When will people learn that the “kingdom of God is not eating and drinking” (Rom. 14:17)? Why are religious leaders misleading people into believing the kingdom of God is what God said it is not?



MISSOURI SYNOD

The Lutheran Church Missouri synod (LCMS) is much more conservative. In the 1998 convention the LCMS adopted a summary statement of some of the key differences between them and the ELCA. There are three main differences:

1. The doctrine and authority of Scripture. The LCMS believes that the Bible is without error in all that it says. The ELCA holds that “scripture is not necessarily always accurate on such matters as history and science” (www.lcms.org/pages/intemal.asp?NavID=2146). The website goes on to say that these differences on the authority of Scripture explain why the ELCA ordains women and is forming a position statement on homosexuality. The LCMS does not ordain women and “unequivocally rejects homosexual behavior” as unscriptural.

2. The ELCA acknowledges the need for commitment to Christ and the teachings of Luther, but “tends to emphasize the historical character of these writings and to maintain the possibility of dissent to confessional positions.” The LCMS holds strictly to the teachings of Luther, the inerrancy of the Scriptures, and avows belief in the application of the Scriptures in today’s world — not just in their historical setting.

3. The LCMS believes in “agreement in all that the Bible teaches” in order to have fellowship as Lutherans. The ELCA holds that there can be fellowship even with disagreement in matters of Lutheran doctrine “like the mode of Christ’s presence in Holy Communion” (www.lcms.org/pages/print.asp?print=1&NavID=2146&path=%2Fpages%2Finter na.).

WISCONSIN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD (WELS)

In 1961 there was a break in fellowship between WELS and LCMS. The WELS group holds that to have fellowship there must be commonality and consistency in belief.

The LCMS group makes a distinction between altar fellowship and prayer fellowship. The belief is fellowship in “sacred things” such as the word, worship, and “sacraments” require common belief and agreement. Whereas, cooperation in “externals,” like efforts to feed the hungry or assist the needy, can be shared with other churches or even nonreligious groups.

The WELS group appears to have held that all fellowship with those not sharing common and consistent belief is prohibited including praying with them (www.lcms.org/pages/internal.asp?NavID=4840).

LESSONS LEARNED

Modernism is well and working with an emphasis away from the traditional and the hereafter. It is focused on life on this earth. The core issues are the same in regard to interpretation of any document and boil down to two positions: (1) Where the writer speaks we are limited and cannot go beyond, (2) Where the writer has been silent we are at liberty to exercise our own will or views. In 1 Corinthians 4:6, we are reminded “not to go beyond that which is written.” Luther would have done well to have that in his 95 theses. God does have it in his word. Our only hope is to go back to the Bible, do Bible things in Bible ways, speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where it is silent. People of all faiths — it is time we started listening to God!

We must meet people where they are religiously and start teaching them from there. Paul on Mars Hill (Acts 17) started with the “unknown god.” Philip “began from the scripture and preached unto him Jesus (Acts 8).

To be effective in sharing the gospel, we, too, must find where the person is in his religious journey and begin from that point to led him out of error and into a true relationship with Jesus.

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The Mormon Church

Joe R. Price

There is no denying that Smith was an innovative and charismatic religious leader. He continues to be held in the highest esteem by devout Mormons. Nevertheless, he miserably fails the biblical tests of a prophet (1 John 4:1-6).

Most people's contact with the Mormon Church is that of two well-dressed young men (Mormon "elders") knocking on their front door and offering an introduction to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. That introduction includes instruction on direct revelation from God, extra-biblical "Scripture" and a living prophet.

The Mormon Church is a newcomer among churches. It has only existed for about 175 years. December 23, 2005 will mark the 200th anniversary of the birth of Joseph Smith, Jr., who burst onto the religious landscape of America from 1830-1844, beginning a religious movement that is now headquartered in Salt Lake City, Utah, and claims a worldwide membership of around twelve million. Adherents of Mormonism consider Smith to be a true prophet of God and the one through whom God has restored the "fullness of the everlasting gospel."

THE "PROPHET" JOSEPH SMITH, JR.

A study of the Mormon Church must begin with an analysis of Joseph Smith, Jr., for without him, no Mormon Church would exist. From weekly worship services to semi-annual church conferences to the homes of Latter-day Saints, his name is evoked as a blessing to humanity and a testimony to the validity of the Mormon faith.

Smith evidently shared this high opinion of himself and his achievements:

I have more to boast of than ever any man had. I am the only man that has ever been able to keep a whole church together since the days of Adam. A large majority of the whole have stood by me. Neither Paul, John, Peter, nor Jesus ever did it. I boast that no man ever did such a work as I. The followers of Jesus ran away from Him, but the Latter-day Saints never ran away from me yet (*History of the Church*, VI:408-409).

If a "majority" stood by Smith that means a minority did not, and consequently he did not "keep a whole church together" as he arrogantly claimed. Before and after Smith's death the Mormons fractured into various subgroups, the largest being the Community of Christ (formerly known as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints), headquartered in Independence, Missouri.

On another occasion Smith said,

You don't know me; you never knew my heart. No man knows my history. I cannot tell it: I shall never undertake it. I don't blame any one for not believing my history. If I had not experienced what I have, I would not have believed it myself (*History of the Church*, VI:317).

The renowned historian Fawn M. Brodie insightfully observed that few men "have written so much and told so little about themselves" (*No Man Knows My History*, preface, vii).

What we do know of his history includes the origin of the Mormon Church. On April 6, 1830 in the home of Peter Whitmer, Fayette, New York, the “Church of Christ” (later called the “Church of the Latter-day Saints” and finally, “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints”) was officially organized by Smith and five other men. By that time he had already claimed visions of God the Father and the Son Jesus Christ (at fourteen years of age), annual appearances of the angel Moroni who showed him gold plates of a record of an ancient people who had inhabited America (17-21 years of age), and he had “translated” and published the *Book of Mormon* from these “gold plates.”

There is no denying that Smith was an innovative and charismatic religious leader. He continues to be held in the highest esteem by devout Mormons. Nevertheless, he miserably fails the biblical tests of a prophet (1 John 4:1-6):

1. Joseph Smith, Jr. fails the doctrinal test for a true prophet. God warned Israel there would be prophets who would come with signs and wonders and try to turn them away from the true God to “other gods” (Deut. 13:1-5). Smith taught that God was once a man with a body of flesh and bones: “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s” (*Doctrine and Covenants* 130:22; see *History of the Church*, V:613). The God of Mormonism is not the God of the Bible (John 4:24; Luke 24:39).

2. Joseph Smith, Jr. fails the accuracy test for a true prophet. Among his failed prophecies is the one made in 1835 that “the coming of the Lord, which was nigh — even fifty-six years should wind up the scene” (*History of the Church*, II:182). Jesus did not return by 1891 as Smith predicted. He presumptuously spoke in the name of God, but his word did not come to pass. Therefore, Joseph Smith, Jr. was not a prophet of God (Deut. 18:20-22; Jer. 28:7-9).

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP AND GROWTH

From the time of its establishment the Mormon Church has generated fascination, skepticism and even violence from its opponents. The early history of Mormonism is filled with scenes of religious zealotry, oddity, isolationism, persecution and retribution (depending on one’s point of view). Its formative years and subsequent expansion across the American continent parallels the westward push of pioneers and frontiersmen. But, Mormonism did not stop at the shores of the Pacific in its search for converts. From the beginning its missionary program recruited members from Europe, and that program now spans the globe. There are currently about 61,000 LDS missionaries (usually ages 19-21) voluntarily serving missions of eighteen months to two years and preaching the Mormon gospel to unsuspecting souls.

In 2002 the reported worldwide membership of the LDS Church was 11,721,548. It is commonly reported in the media that the LDS Church is one of the fastest growing faiths in the world. But, at least one Mormon source calls this a “pervasive myth” (“Trends in LDS Church Growth,” www.cumorah.com/trends.doc). Although its worldwide membership grew from five million in 1982 to eleven million in 2000, the LDS Church experienced “persistent trends of decelerating growth” in the 1990s. “While LDS church membership continues to increase, there has been a significant decline in the rate of growth” (*Ibid.*).

WORSHIP IN THE MORMON CHURCH

The local congregation in the Mormon Church is called a “ward,” and a number of wards constitute a “stake.” Sunday worship services in each ward consist of singing and prayer, the bishop’s message, personal testimonials, and various “blessings” (of infants, for example). The Lord’s supper (called the “Sacrament”) is eaten, but the ele-

ments are not unleavened bread and fruit of the vine as the Bible teaches, but water and leavened bread (Matt. 26:26-29). According to Mormonism, Joseph Smith, Jr. received a revelation that allows such changes:

Listen to the voice of Jesus Christ, your Lord, your God, and your Redeemer, whose word is quick and powerful. For, behold, I say to you, that it mattereth not what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink when ye partake of the sacrament, if it so be that ye do it with an eye single to my glory — remembering unto the Father my body which was laid down for you, and my blood which was shed for the remission of sins (*Doctrine & Covenants* 27:1-2).

In addition to weekly worship services, faithful Mormons are expected to do temple work (for instance, personal endowments and work for the dead, such as baptisms and marital sealings). The local bishop annually interviews the members of his ward, either approving or disallowing their temple entrance (a “temple recommend” is issued to those he deems worthy to enter the temple). The genealogical work for which the Mormon Church is famous enables them to do this temple work for the dead, with the expectation that the dead will accept their work so that they, too, may progress to the blessings of the celestial kingdom.

MORAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES

The LDS Church takes conservative stands toward moral and social issues. It is to their credit that at a time when many churches are either endorsing or otherwise tolerating moral diversity and depravity, the LDS Church officially refuses to do so. Here are some examples:

1. Abortion: “The Church opposes abortion and counsels its members not to submit to or perform an abortion except in the rare cases where, in the opinion of competent medical counsel, the life or good health of the mother is seriously endangered

or where the pregnancy was caused by rape and produces serious emotional trauma in the mother. Even then it should be done only after counseling with the local presiding priesthood authority and after receiving divine confirmation through prayer” (1973 statement of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, cited on www.mormon.org).

2. Homosexuality and same-sex marriage: “We believe that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God. We believe that marriage may be eternal through exercise of the power of the everlasting priesthood in the house of the Lord.

People inquire about our position on those who consider themselves so-called gays and lesbians. My response is that we love them as sons and daughters of God. They may have certain inclinations which are powerful and which may be difficult to control. Most people have inclinations of one kind or another at various times. If they do not act upon these inclinations, then they can go forward as do all other members of the Church. If they violate the law of chastity and the moral standards of the Church, then they are subject to the discipline of the Church, just as others are.

We want to help these people, to strengthen them, to assist them with their problems and to help them with their difficulties. But we cannot stand idle if they indulge in immoral activity, if they try to uphold and defend and live in a so-called same-sex marriage situation. To permit such would be to make light of the very serious and sacred foundation of God-sanctioned marriage and its very purpose, the rearing of families (Gordon B. Hinckley, President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Ensign, Nov. 1998, 71, cited on www.mormon.org).

3. Women in church leadership roles. “Women do not hold the priesthood because the Lord has put it that way. It is part of His program. Women have a very prominent place in this Church. Men hold the priesthood offices of the Church. But women have a tremendous place in this Church. They have their own organization. It was started in 1842 by the Prophet Joseph Smith, called the Relief Society, because its initial purpose was to administer help to those in need. It has grown to be, I think, the largest women’s organization in the world with a membership of more than three million. They have their own offices, their own presidency, their own board. That reaches down to the smallest unit of the Church everywhere in the world . . .

“The men hold the priesthood, yes. But my wife is my companion. In this Church the man neither walks ahead

of his wife nor behind his wife but at her side. They are co-equals in this life in a great enterprise” (Gordon B. Hinckley, cited on www.mormon.org).

The Mormon Church is a strong advocate for the family, which is due in large part to their doctrine that families are forever (literally): “It is possible for individuals to return to the presence of God and for families to be united eternally” (www.mormon.org). Only faithful Mormons who are married in a Mormon temple are joined “for time and all eternity.” Similar marriage ceremonies are also conducted in Mormon temples for dead ancestors so that family members can be together throughout eternity. The Bible teaches a strong family unit, but it assures us that marriage and family is an earthly relationship that does not extend into heaven and eternity (Matt. 22:29-30).

LONGING FOR ACCEPTANCE AS “CHRISTIANS”

The term “Mormon” derives from a character in the *Book of Mormon* named Mormon, an ancient American prophet warrior who supposedly lived approximately A.D. 310-385. The book bears his name because he is said to be the major abridger/writer of the gold plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated

by Joseph Smith, Jr. (Mormon’s son was Moroni, the angel who allegedly appeared to Smith and led him to the gold plates.)

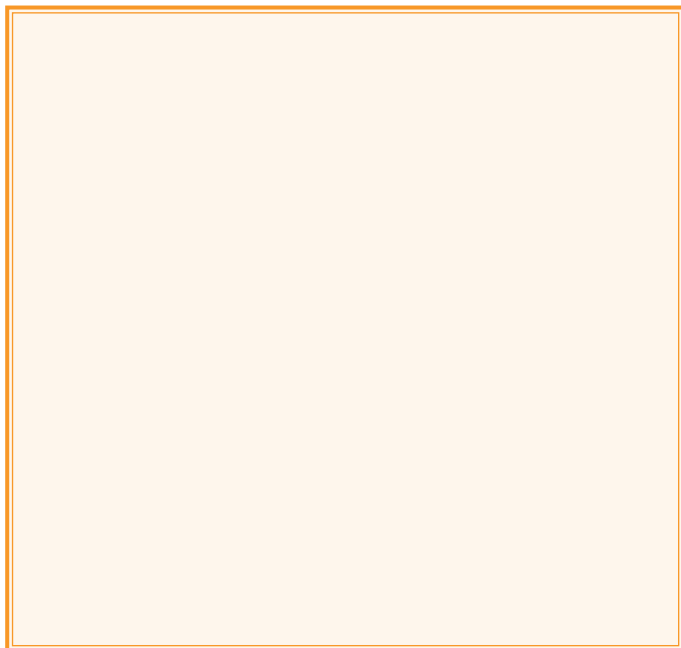
Officially, Mormons prefer to be called “Latter-day Saints” or simply, “Saints.” How to identify Mormons and their church surfaced during the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, Utah when church leaders discouraged the use of the term “Mormon Church.” “I don’t mind being called a Mormon, but I don’t want it said that I belong to the Mormon Church” (Elder Dallin H. Oaks, member of the Council of the 12 Apostles, “Adapting ‘Mormon’ to Emphasize Christianity,” Gustav Niebuhr, *New York Times*, 2/19/2001, www.rickross.com/reference/mormon/mormon36.html).

Mormons desperately want to be understood as a “Christian tradition.” Former LDS Apostle Bruce R. McConkie noted that “the term Christianity” was “a synonym for Mormonism.” He further wrote, “Mormons are true Christians; their worship is the pure, unadulterated Christianity authored by Christ and accepted by Peter, James, and John and all the ancient saints” (*Mormon Doctrine*, 512-513). In 1995 the Mormons adopted a new church logo that emphasizes Jesus Christ (“The Mormon Church and Jesus”, Joe R. Price, http://www.bibleanswer.com/2002_No_19_25Aug.htm#mormon). Feeling the need to impress the point, the

present Mormon President and Prophet, Gordon B. Hinckley affirmed:

We are Christians in a very real sense and that is coming to be more and more widely recognized. Once upon a time people everywhere said we are not Christians. They have come to recognize that we are, and that we have a very vital and dynamic religion based on the teachings of Jesus Christ (Gordon B. Hinckley, President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "Are you Christians?", Mormon.org).

Regardless of such affirmations, the LDS Church's theological, doctrinal and organizational underpinnings are decidedly foreign to the Bible. Space prevents a complete analysis of Mormon doctrine, however, its views of God (that God is a man who came to be God), of Jesus Christ (the first spirit child born to God the Father in the spirit world) and of man (that man may become a god) — just to name a few — are all decidedly against the teaching of the Bible (Num. 23:19; Job 9:32; Isa. 31:3; 43:10-12; 44:6-8; John 1:1-3, 14). The view that the Bible is corrupt and that man is in need of additional revelation (such as the Book of Mormon and living prophets) will continue to contradict the New Testament teaching of Christ's apostles and prophets, who preached an incorruptible word to save corrupted man (1 Pet. 1:22-25; Gal. 1:6-9; John 16:8-13). No, Mormons are not Christians. There are no "Mormon Christians" to be found in the New Testament (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet. 4:16). (For a fuller doctrinal study, see my *Mormonism: The Word and Wisdom of Man*, www.bibleanswer.com/ldspart1.htm, and *Contradictions, Inconsistencies and Errors in the Book of Mormon*, www.bibleanswer.com/bom_cont.htm.)



The LDS Church recently extended an ecumenical hand to its non-Mormon neighbors. In November 2004, Ravi Zacharias, a Protestant apologist, spoke at the Mormon Tabernacle — the first non-Mormon to speak there in over one hundred years (see www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/146/11.0.html).

The yearning to be regarded as mainstream Christianity is a double-edged sword for the LDS Church. For instance, Joseph Smith, Jr. claimed God the Father told him in his first vision that all the churches were wrong and to join none of them (*History* 1:19). The LDS Church began on this basis. Therefore, the LDS doctrine that it is the one true church, restored by latter-day revelation, runs counter to the spirit of ecumenism. Non-Mormons cannot enter Mormon temples to attend — much less participate in — the rites and rituals of Mormonism (temple weddings, baptism for the dead, etc.). Still, the LDS Church offers the façade of religious tolerance to the world as it promotes itself as a "Christian" church.

INTERNAL UNREST

All is not well in Zion. The credibility of Joseph Smith, Jr. as a prophet continues to be questioned in spite of attempts to silence such skepticism. In December 2004,

a church tribunal in Utah disfellowshipped Grant Palmer, a retired teacher and executive for classes the church provides to high school and college students, because his "An Insider's View of Mormon Origins" says evidence for Smith's claims is "either nonexistent or problematic" (Richard N. Ostling, "Joseph Smith's legacy reexamined in bicentennial year," heraldsun.com).

You cannot have a legitimate church originating from an illegitimate prophet, now can you?

The validity of the *Book of Mormon* is also being questioned by an increasing number of Mormon scholars. Over ten years ago one Mormon elder and apologist I knew was coming to the conclusion that the story contained in the *Book of Mormon* was simply a myth that was intended to convey spiritual truth. The problem with that conclusion is obvious: How can you have real gold plates (from which the *Book of Mormon* was supposedly translated) if the story of their very existence is mythological? The entire LDS Church would rest on a myth. Well, maybe he was on the right track after all!

Now, DNA evidence is being offered that discredits the Book of Mormon's claim that Native Americans are descendants of ancient Israel (See *American Apocrypha*, Dan Vogel and Brent Metcalfe, editors, 2002, Signature Books). Science is helping to show the fantasy and fallacy of Mormonism.

The Blueprint for Mega-churches

Michael Hardin

“Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:18-20 NKJV). Jesus Christ commanded the apostles to take the gospel to a lost and dying world. Those of us who have learned the truth of the gospel of Christ have the same obligation that the apostles of Jesus Christ had, and that is to share the truth of the gospel with anyone and everyone who is willing to learn.

There are many religious groups in America today who claim to be driven by the desire to fulfill Christ’s commission to the apostles. The dominant ideal in American religion today is that you must establish a mega-church in order to evangelize the sinful world. The belief is that these mega-churches can recapture the community through their good works.

What is the blueprint that is being used to establish and draw individuals to these mega-churches? These community churches each have its own unique beginning and its own vision or mission statement. Yet, there are many characteristics that they all seem to share. Our purpose in this study is to examine what is necessary to establish a mega-church. We also want to consider the question, “Should the Lord’s church be following this blueprint for our spiritual growth?”

ENLARGEMENT

The philosophy in American religion today is that we must build a massive and luxurious worship center and the people will come. The thought is “bigger is better.” Many of the modern community church structures resemble a small college campus rather than a simple church building. The prevailing idea in modern religion is that we must have an enormous structure to draw the public. This philosophy is evidenced by such structures as “the Crystal Cathedral” (an all glass building) in Garden Grove, California. There is

CONCLUSION

Each Mormon believes he or she has experienced a direct, personal encounter with and revelation from God. This is perhaps the most difficult thing to “undo” when trying to teach them the gospel of Christ that is taught in the New Testament. Today, God speaks to us in his Son (Heb. 1:1-2). The Son’s words are conveyed to us by the inspired Scriptures of his apostles and prophets (John 16:12-13; Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; 1 Thess. 2:13; 1 Cor. 14:37). The Book of Mormon is not a companion to the Bible, it is a corruption of it (2 Pet. 3:16; Gal. 1:6-9). Members of the Mormon Church must be brought back to the Bible and confidence in it as the complete, sufficient, and final word of God (John 16:13; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3-4).

The Mormon Church will continue to offer itself as “the only true and living church upon the face of the whole

earth” (*Doctrine & Covenants* 1:30). The Mormon Church will continue to sing, “We Thank Thee, O God, For A Prophet,” confident that following the Mormon prophet is the way to salvation: “Our peace, safety and salvation lie in following the prophet” (Gordon B. Hinckley). Therefore, it must continue to be met with resistance by all who respect the Bible as the complete and final revelation of God to mankind, knowing that even an angelic message that contradicts the New Testament of Christ is cursed by God (Jude 3; Gal. 1:8-9). The church of Christ does indeed exist today, but it is not the Mormon Church (Matt. 16:18; Acts 2:36-41; Rom. 16:16).

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a religious group near Dayton, Ohio known as the “Solid Rock Church” that has a fifty foot statue of Jesus in the front of its structure. This is reported to be the largest statue of Jesus in the world. There is also a Community Church in Dayton that has spent more than ten million dollars for new religious buildings that resemble a college campus. The reported 2005 operating budget for this “Community Church is \$2,657,800.¹ The thought is, “If we build it, they will come.” This Community Church in Dayton offers guided tours of their building to prospective members.

ECUMENICAL

The prevailing philosophy of modern religion suggests that no one is really wrong in religion. Whatever one believes is right for him. The mega-church is built on a spirit of tolerance for all points of view. The ecumenical spirit is to accept everyone as brothers and sisters, without regard to differences in both teaching and practice, as the “loving thing to do.” Most of the community churches require only a confession of your faith in Jesus Christ accompanied by some involvement in their “evangelical program.” The Vineyard of Dayton says, “Salvation is a gift from God to man. Man can never make up for his sin by self-improvement or good works. Only by trusting in Jesus Christ as God’s offer of forgiveness can man be saved from sin’s penalty. Eternal life begins the moment one receives Jesus Christ into his life by faith.”² The pressure both in society and religion is that of being “politically correct,” which simply means we must be non-judgmental. Whatever anyone desires to do about anything or everything should be his own business. In religion this means accepting everyone and never asking anyone to examine his beliefs and behavior. The Vineyard, which is a Community Church in Dayton, Ohio, has as its slogan, “A pretty good church.”³ They claim to be a group who has “openness, acceptance, and warmth to allow people from diverse backgrounds and acceptance to all who enter.”⁴ In other words, you do not have to be righteous or live in harmony with God’s will, just be “pretty good” and you can join their fellowship.

EMOTION

The periods of worship in these mega-churches is one based on exciting the emotions of the audience. In some places there is a movement away from preaching toward some form of entertainment, audience appeal, and multimedia presentation. In order to develop this emotional appeal these churches employ choirs, soloists, all forms of musical instruments, rock bands, and anything else that will dazzle the audience. Speeches that make the audience feel good enjoy greater popularity than the boldness of divine truth. There is a great demand for visual and external excitement. Instead of worshiping God in spirit and truth, these community churches adapt their worship to the changing desires of the public. They offer customer satisfaction instead of preaching the gospel. The Solid

Rock Church says, “We do it (worship) with a lot of fun, excitement, and pizzazz!”⁵

ENTERTAINMENT

The emphasis on numbers leads directly to the introduction of modern marketing strategy into these community churches. The outcome is, “give the people what they want.” Instead of being followers of Christ, they follow the public and give them what they want to increase their attendance and contribution. The Far Hills Community Church of Dayton offers a “360 Sports and Rec Ministry that includes golf ministry, basketball ministry, volleyball ministry, baseball and softball ministry, a fitness and wellness ministry, and a crafts ministry.”⁶ The Far Hills Community Church says, “We have special events, a bookstore and café, a library and gyms that provide an opportunity for fellowship and to develop your mind, body, and spirit.”⁷ The modern community church is more like a country club than a religious organization. Most have broken their attachment to their parent organization or religious affiliation, and therefore there are no rules or regulations they must adhere to, so anything is acceptable.

EMPATHY

Today in American religion, there is little interest in serious Bible study. Interest in serving social needs and financing social causes is the ruling power in Community churches today. The social gospel is alive and prospering in these mega-churches. The stated goal of most community churches is to make this world a better place to live. They try to accomplish this goal through counseling, physical fitness, various kinds of therapy, and sometimes political activism. The Solid Rock Church has a “prison ministry, food pantry, clothing closet, nursing home, business resource ministry, and a home for unwed mothers.”⁸ As Christians, we should be concerned about the feelings and misfortunes of others, but it is not the work of the church to resolve all of the world’s physical problems.

What should be the attitude of the Lord’s church concerning these concepts? Should we as the Lord’s body be implementing this blueprint into our evangelism? Jesus Christ said that simply being religious or even being zealously religious is not all that is involved in our service to God. “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Matt. 7:21, NKJV). The concept of recognizing Jesus Christ as Lord or ruler is not all that is necessary to be pleasing to God. Christ said we must do God’s will if we want to be acceptable to God and enter heaven. “But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46, NKJV). It is meaningless to call Jesus the ruler in our life and fail to obey his will.

Jesus Christ also condemned the religious leaders of his day for establishing their own plans of salvation and reject-

ing the simple truth of the gospel of Christ. “Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (Matt. 7:22-23, NKJV). A program or work that is not authorized by God is lawlessness, no matter how much good men claim that it will accomplish. There will be a number of religious leaders who will be condemned in eternity because they established their own plan of work, rather than simply following God’s pattern.

ENLARGEMENT.

Is it wrong for the Lord’s body to own and maintain a building for the purpose of worship and service to God? No, we are commanded to assemble for edification and worship to God. That necessitates a place to assemble that is both convenient and accessible to the community. But, do we need the most elaborate and expensive building in the community in order to draw the public to the gospel of Christ? The drawing power of the Lord’s body should be the truth of the gospel of Christ and not the luxurious nature of the building where we meet. I believe that the Lord’s people are sometimes wasting the Lord’s funds trying to out do the community churches in our physical structures.

ECUMENICAL

Should we as the Lord’s body accept anyone and everyone into our fellowship? The basic idea in the biblical word “fellowship” is a mutual sharing, a partnership, a joint participation, or communion with God. Fellowship with men can never be effective unless and until we are in fellowship with God through Jesus Christ. Fellowship with God is contingent upon our continuing to “walk in the light” of divine truth. “This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is

in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:5-7, NKJV). If any individual is unwilling to live according to the truth of God’s word, should we ignore his sin and encourage his participation with us in our service to God? The Apostle Paul answered this question. “Finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them” (Eph. 5:10-11, NKJV). We cannot save another’s soul by simply ignoring his transgressions before God. Christians are commanded to expose all who are in a sinful condition before God.

EMOTION

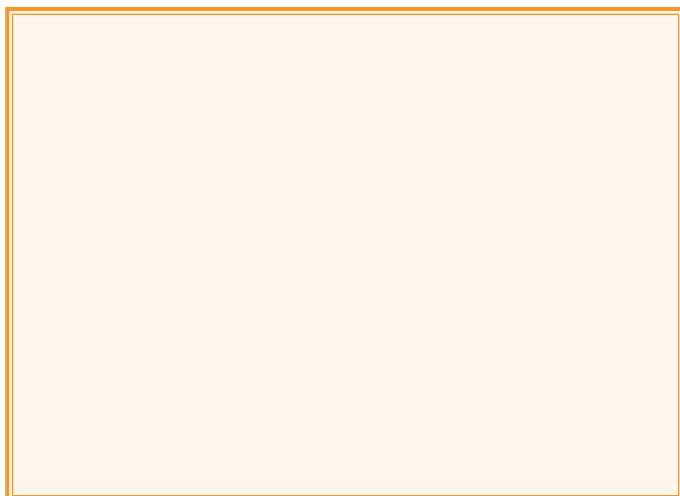
What should be the Christian’s motivation for all service to God? Jesus Christ said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30, NKJV). Love for God and Jesus Christ should cause me to desire to offer praise and adoration to God in worship. How can an individual develop a love for God? We learn to love God by a study of his word and realization of the wonderful blessings that God has provided for mankind. Love for God is an emotion that is based upon our intellect and is not dependent upon outside stimuli in order to be effective. We should not need choirs, rock bands, and musical instruments to make us feel good about our worship or service to God. If we love God, we will have a sincere desire to serve him. “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15, NKJV).

ENTERTAINMENT

Did Jesus and the apostles offer entertainment to attract individuals to the gospel of Christ? The apostle Paul said that the truth of the gospel should be the power that draws people to Jesus Christ. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek” (Rom. 1:16, NKJV). Will God be pleased if we employ entertainment and recreation as a ministry to bring individuals to Christ? “Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: ‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men’” (Matt. 15:7-9, NKJV). When we substitute man-made schemes and concepts for the pure truth of the gospel we make our worship and service to God vain, empty or of no benefit.

EMPATHY

What should be the role of the Lord’s church in changing the physical condition of the world? Does the Lord’s church have an obligation to make this world a better place? The work of the Lord’s church is to preach the gospel to a lost and dying world, to build up and strengthen the members of the Lord’s body by teaching them the truth contained



Denominationalism

Donald Townsley

It is hard for most people to conceive of Christianity apart from denominationalism. When you begin to try to teach them they must leave denominationalism and simply become New Testament Christians, they look at you with an expression of bewilderment. Many people in the religious world have not stopped to think just how contradictory and Christ-denying denominationalism is to New Testament teaching. Let us look at a few things it does:

1. *Denominationalism* mocks the prayer of Christ and encourages infidelity (John 17:20-21).
2. *Denominationalism* repudiates the passages on unity (1 Cor. 1:10; Phil. 1:27; Eph. 4:1-7).
3. *Denominationalism* exalts human names above the divine (Acts 4:12).
4. *Denominationalism* makes the God of heaven contradict himself, having one preach one thing and another to preach something entirely different.
5. *Denominationalism* declares that God's way is not sufficient by its use of the creeds of men (2 Tim. 3:16-17).
6. *Denominationalism* demands the acceptance of other gospels (Gal. 1:6-9).
7. *Denominationalism* would make Christ a polygamist, having many wives (Rom. 7:1-4).

Friend, if you are a member of a denomination, will you consider these truths, flee denominationalism and become a New Testament Christian before it is everlastingly too late?

in God's word, and to provide for the benevolent needs of the members of the body as they arise. The church should be concerned about the spiritual needs of all men. "As we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10, NKJV). The God-given pattern for making this world a better place is to instruct everyone to follow the teaching of God's word and repent of the areas where they sin. "Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil" (1 Thess. 5:21-22, NKJV).

God's pattern for the growth and evangelism of the Church has been the same for 2000 years. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:19-20, NKJV). Every congregation and every disciple of Christ is to go into the world and make disciples for Christ by teaching them the pure and simple

gospel of Christ. We accomplish this purpose one person at a time, not by man-made schemes or the grand designs of man, but by the power of the Gospel of Christ.

Footnotes

- ¹ Far Hills Community Church, 5800 Clyo Road Dayton, OH 45459, Annual Report 2005.
- ² The Vineyard, 4051 Indian Ripple Road, Beavercreek, OH 45440, Welcome Brochure 6.
- ³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁵ Solid Rock Church, 904 N. Union Road, Monroe, OH 45050, Welcome Brochure.
- ⁶ Far Hills Community Church, 5800 Clyo Road Dayton, OH 45459, 360 Sports+Rec Ministry, Issue Oct. 2004
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, Welcome Brochure 2.
- ⁸ Solid Rock Church, 904 N. Union Road, Monroe, OH 45050, Welcome Brochure.

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What People Say About The Trip

Tom Roberts: Making a trip to Israel is usually a “once in a life time” event, but I hope to go more than once. If possible, my wife and I plan to go in November of 2005. Of course, the ones with whom one goes is really important. Traveling with other Christians adds a dimension that should not be ignored. Mike had prepared song sheets and we sang everywhere we went on the bus. There was a lot of laughter and banter that made the time fly by. Of course, standing where Jesus and the apostles stood is very impressive. While the land is no longer a “holy land,” holy things were done there and walking in those places made Bible study come alive. The very names of the places excite a Bible student: Capernaum, Chorazin, Sea of Galilee, Dead Sea, Bethlehem, Nazareth and, of course, Jerusalem. One of the events that really remains in my memory is sitting in the Garden Tomb and reading of the crucifixion and resurrection. Despite the debates as to the actual place of burial, we were not far from it.

Yvonne Staley: Was the trip worth it? We would unhesitatingly say “YES.” We were uneasy about making the trip at first — dreading the long flight and also going to Israel where there was a lot of unrest, etc., but we were surprised at how smoothly everything occurred. . . . The experience was something we’ll always cherish. Being able to actually visit the land of the Bible was great. Traveling in the company of other Christians made it even more special. . . . The Sea of Galilee is still there, cities such as Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth, Jericho, Beersheba, Caesarea and many, many more still exist. Maybe not the same ones as the biblical cities, but exist in the same general area. Jacob’s Well is authentic. All the ruins verify that, yes, the Bible is true. We have no doubt that some of the places where we walked were the same places that our Lord had walked. We are so thankful to God that we could make such a trip. Of all the trips we have made with you, this one has to be the most special and we thank you so much for it. Crossing the Sea of Galilee and going through the Old City of Jerusalem was an experience that we will never, never forget.

Safety: Since I have been to Israel on several occasions, I have wanted to go back since the conflict broke out several years ago. I have watched the news to see when it is safe to return. Over the past year, violence has decreased and tourism is returning to Israel. What convinced me that it was safe to lead a tour to Israel was Indiana University’s offering their students a course in archaeology in June, in which I hope to participate. Their program had been put on hold for several years. I became convinced that, if Indiana University thinks it is safe to send their students there, the situation must be safe enough for tourism.

Catholic Church, continued from front page

known as the “bishop” of that church. The term “bishop” was used to distinguish him from the other elders (although no distinction is made in the New Testament). Within a relatively short time, the bishop not only had a different name from the elders, he also had more power — and that power continued to grow. In the years that followed, this pattern of organization continued: the bishops were assigned specific territories, known as a “diocese” to oversee. “Country Bishops” were appointed to help oversee some of the rural areas, elders became known as “presbyters” and eventually, when the bishops and presbyters felt it necessary to come together in councils to discuss some of the problems facing the church, the presiding bishop of these councils became known as the president of the council or the “metropolitan.” He could now hand down rulings and decrees on church doctrine to be carried out by the lower bishops and presbyters.

In the early part of the fourth century these metropolitans were organized into larger territories and a “chief father” or “patriarch” was appointed over each territory. Originally, there were only three patriarchs: the bishops of Rome, Antioch, and Alexandria. Eventually, the bishops of Jerusalem and Constantinople were also made patriarchs, bringing the total number to five. These five men had oversight of the entire church! The New Testament pattern of elders in every local church had become patriarchs over metropolitans over city bishops over country bishops over presbyters.

While the development of the Catholic Church was now well under way, it was not truly established until around A.D. 300-600. During that period, a number of changes took place. In A.D. 313, the Roman Emperor Constantine issued his edict of toleration, ending all Roman persecution of Christians and recognizing Christianity as a legal religion. However, he not only recognized Christianity, he adopted it himself. What followed was an influx of such worldliness that by A.D. 320 we have the birth of monasticism as some Christians felt they had to separate themselves from the world and the church to live pure lives as monks or nuns. In A.D. 325 Constantine called the Council of Nicea and the Nicene Creed was adopted as the standard for Christianity. This firmly established the Catholic Church as a man-made religion.

THE POPE

It was also in A.D. 325 that another interesting development took place. That year, the patriarch of Rome, in an attempt to secure more power, took the name “papa, father” or “pope.” However, the other patriarchs did not recognize him as having any authority over them and a struggle ensued among the five patriarchs as to who would be the greatest. In A.D. 588 the bishop of Constantinople attempted to turn the tide in his favor, taking on the title of “Universal Bishop of the Church,” but this was not well

received. In fact, the bishop of Rome at the time denounced such a title and his successor declared that anyone who took this title, was a forerunner of the antichrist! However, in A.D. 606, the Roman Emperor took the title away from John the Faster (bishop of Constantinople) and gave it to Boniface III, the Pope of Rome. Now, the Roman Catholic Church was firmly established with the Pope as its head.

Throughout the dark ages, the Pope gained more power and eventually ruled over not only the church, but also civil government. In 1870, the Vatican Council declared the Pope infallible. Here are some statements that have been made concerning the Pope: “The Pope is of so great dignity and so exalted that he is not a mere man, but as it were, God, and the Vicar of Christ. . . . He is likewise the Divine Monarch and Supreme Emperor, and King of Kings” (*Converted Catholic Magazine*, January 1946). “The Church is in all ages as much in need of a Supreme Ruler as it was in the days of the Apostles. Nay, more; . . . it is more than ever in need of a central power to preserve its unity of faith and uniformity of discipline” (Archbishop Gibbons, *Faith of Our Fathers*). The Pope remains a central figure in the Roman Catholic Church.

The Catholic belief in the infallibility of the Pope and his right to rule over the church is based on their belief that the apostle Peter had supremacy over the other apostles, that he was the bishop of Rome, and that this supremacy did not end when Peter died, but was instead passed on to his successors (other bishops of Rome) until this day. The three “proof” texts used to support this are: Matthew 16:18-19; Luke 22:31-32; and John 21:15-17. But the New Testament does not teach that Peter had supremacy over the church! Instead, the same “authority” given to Peter in Matthew 16 was granted to all the disciples in Matthew 18, which was not really “authority” at all, but rather the ability to understand what God had determined. In addition, the same commandments given to Peter that he feed Christ’s sheep and strengthen his fellow Christians are given to elders and teachers and all believers. Peter was not “above” the other Christians. In fact, we are told that Paul even withstood Peter to his face.

THE CHURCH AND TRADITION

The Catholic view of the church is similar to their view of the Pope. They believe the church is infallible and that it is the protector and preserver of the faith. In all aspects of life, Catholics turn to the church for guidance. For example, only the church can interpret Scripture, forgive sins, extend grace, and offer the sacraments. Therefore, it is extremely important that Catholics not alienate themselves from the church. However, they have a major misunderstanding concerning the nature of the church. Instead of viewing the church as the body of believers, Catholics view the church as a separate entity or organization, made up of the clergy or priesthood.

Since the Roman Catholic Church has been developing and changing over the last 1400-1800 years, they have adopted a large number of unscriptural beliefs, including doctrines concerning the virgin Mary, confession, penance, celibacy of priests, Holy Water, prayer to the Saints, purgatory, original sin, transubstantiation, sprinkling (baptizing) infants, indulgences, the sacraments, and many other rituals and practices. We could take time now to look at all of these and see what the Bible says, but even if we showed how they were unscriptural, it would not necessarily go very far in the Catholic mind. Why? Because the Catholic Church teaches that the Bible alone is insufficient, that it does not teach us everything we need (a denial of 2 Tim. 3:17 and 2 Pet. 1:3). Instead, Catholics believe in the Bible and tradition (consider Matt. 15:9). Also, Catholicism teaches that no Scripture is subject to private or individual interpretation. In other words, the passage means only what the Church says it means. As such, the Church is the only entity that can properly interpret Scripture. In the past, this even prompted the Catholic Church to discourage its members from reading the Bible.

In addition, over the years the Catholic Church has constantly tried to adapt itself to fit the times. As a result, many of the teachings of the church have changed. What was opposed in one era may become acceptable in another. We see this with the current debates concerning the role of women, celibacy in the priesthood and homosexuality. They have forgotten Hebrews 13:8.

A CHURCH IN CRISIS

The modern day Catholic Church is a church in crisis. Having abandoned the Scriptures, they find themselves “tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine.” Having argued for the infallibility of the church and the exaltation of the priesthood, they find themselves without an explanation for the charges of sexual misconduct and criminal activity leveled against the church. Having made it their goal to adapt to the times, they find themselves unable to appeal to a general population with such diverse beliefs. In almost every way, the Roman Catholic Church stands as the supreme example of a man-made religion and the chaos it causes.

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“**Jehovah’s Witnesses**” continued from page 2 of respectability strong enough to bring notice. Frederick Franz succeeded Knorr as president of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, with its headquarters in Brooklyn, New York.

WHAT ARE THEIR DISTINCTIVE DOCTRINES

There are a number of Bible subjects¹ in which those who claim to be Jehovah’s Witnesses have accurately replicated the Bible’s teaching, such as:

- The Bible is God’s word and is truth (2 Tim. 3:16, 17; 2 Pet. 1:20, 21; John 17:17).
- Christ’s one sacrifice was sufficient (Rom. 6:10; Heb. 9:25-28).
- There is only one road to life (Matt. 7:13, 14; Eph. 4:4, 5).
- New covenant is made with spiritual Israel (Jer. 31:31; Heb. 8:10-13).
- Christ’s congregation is built upon himself (Eph. 2:20; Isa. 28:16; Matt. 21:42).
- Sabbath observance was given only to Israel and ended with the Mosaic Law (Deut. 5:15; Exod. 31:13; Rom. 10:4; Gal. 4:9, 10; Col. 2:16, 17).

There is a far greater list of issues in which they have left behind what God has revealed and followed after their own hearts. It will not be possible to survey them in their entirety but we shall make note of the more common errors and answer them with the standard of the Bible.

Error Regarding the Christ	Passages Twisted
Christ was the first of God’s creations	Col. 1:15; Rev. 3:14
Christ was raised from the dead as an immortal spirit person.	1 Pet. 3:18; Rom. 6:9; Rev. 1:17, 18

The Jehovah’s Witness’s do not believe Jesus was God with us (Matt. 1:23) when he came to do his work upon the earth. They refuse to teach what John wrote in John 1:1, 14: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. . .” They say:

As he is the highest of Jehovah’s creation, so also he was the first, the direct creation of God, the only begotten (*Studies in the Scriptures* V:84).

Those present who heard Jesus speak accurately noted that he made himself equal with God when he said in John 8:58: “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.” With regard to Jesus, Witnesses teach a form of polytheism, in that Jesus is a lesser god. The Witnesses also deny his resurrection.

Our Lord’s human body was, however, supernaturally removed from the tomb, because had it remained there, it would have been an insurmountable obstacle to the faith of the disciples. We know nothing about what became of it, except that it did not decay or corrupt. Whether it was dissolved into gases, or whether it is still preserved somewhere as the grand memorial of God’s love, of Christ’s obedience, and of our redemption, no one knows; nor is such knowledge necessary (*Ibid.* II:25-130).

It was necessary, not only that the man Christ Jesus should die, but just as necessary that the man Christ Jesus should never live again, should remain dead, should remain our ransom-price for all eternity (*Ibid.* V:443).

In 1 Corinthians 15:17 Paul, the inspired apostle of Christ, put to rest the resurrection of the son of God, when he wrote: “And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.”

Error in Understanding Salvation and Faithfulness	Passages Twisted
Baptism by complete immersion symbolizes dedication.	Mark 1:9, 10; John 3:23; Acts 19:4, 5

The most pertinent question a student of the Bible should ask is found in these words: “What must I do to be saved?” The Jehovah’s Witnesses answer this vital component differently than the apostle Peter. In their doctrine, they deny that one being baptized in water has any connection with salvation, teaching. Like most of the religious world, they teach that baptism merely symbolizes ones dedication to Christ and does nothing more.

What then does Christian baptism signify? It is not a washing away of one’s sins, because cleansing from sin come only through faith in Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:7). Rather, it is a public demonstration, testifying that one has made a solemn dedication to Jehovah God and is presenting himself to do His will (*The Truth* 183-4).

The Bible teaches that baptism is for the remission of your sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16) and that one is baptized in order to be saved (Mark 16:15-16; 1 Pet. 3:21).

Error in Denying the Existence of Eternal Punishment	Passages Twisted
Earth will never be destroyed or depopulated	Eccl. 1:4; Isa. 45:18; Ps. 78:69
God will eliminate present system of things in the battle at Har-Magedon	Rev. 16:14, 16; Zeph. 3:8; Dan. 2:44; Isa. 34:2; 55:10, 11

Jesus spoke plainly about destination of the wicked and their habitation in his word (Matt. 5:22, 29; 10:28, 18:9, 23:15, Mark 9:43, 45, 47 and Luke 12:5), but the Jehovah’s

Witness’s deny its existence. Jesus described it as a “place of fire and brimstone” (Rev. 21:8), a “fate worse than death without mercy” (Heb 10:29) and a “place of torment” (Rev. 14:11).

Error in Denying That Man Has an Immortal Soul	Passages Twisted
Wicked will be eternally destroyed	Matt. 25:41-46; 2 Thess. 1:6-9
The human soul ceases to exist at death	Ezek. 18:4; Eccl. 9:10; Ps. 6:5; 146:4; John 11:11-14

Their failure to recognize the existence of hell is connected to their belief that the soul is annihilated at death. Jesus taught that the soul is not annihilated at death, but will be raised to judgment (John 5:28-29; Matt. 25:31-46) and placed in hell for eternal punishment if found deserving.

The Jehovah’s Witnesses teach that when one dies, no a single portion of them continues to live. Jesus spoke of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as living despite that their bodies had been dead for centuries (Matt. 22:32). The Bible teaches us that we all have a spirit that survives the death of our bodies (Matt. 10:28; Acts 2:27; Rev. 6:9; 20:4; Jas. 5:20).

WHERE THEY ARE TODAY

Today the Jehovah’s Witnesses number over six million followers, with more than a million of those residing in the U.S. as of 2003.² Due to the tight control exhibited by its central headquarters the Jehovah’s Witnesses have experienced little change in the last forty years. The have yet to succumb to many of the common attacks on more populous denominations.

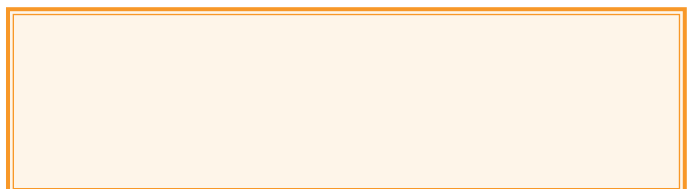
CONCLUSION

The Jehovah’s Witnesses is a false organization from start to finish. It is extremely difficult to study with one of its members, because they are forbidden by the organization to accept study or material from non-members. This should be telling, but to many it is not.

Footnotes

- ¹ Jehovah’s Witnesses — Who Are They? What Do They Believe? <http://www.watchtower.org/library/jt/index.htm>.
- ² http://www.watchtower.org/statistics/worldwide_report.htm.

PO Box 1002, Wilsonville, Oregon 97070



Quips & Quotes

Finally, Church Growth

“Canada — Three polls conducted since 2000 — by Focus on the Family Canada, Time Canada, and the Vanier Institute of the Family — show weekly church attendance going up in Canada for the first time in a generation. Research shows weekly attendance at a religious service, which was down to 20 percent a few years ago, is up to 25 percent. Monthly attendance is as high as 37 percent.

“That’s the highest level for monthly attendance since the early 1980s,’ said sociologist Reg Bibby, who has been tracking Canadian church attendance for 30 years. ‘My sense is that something intriguing is happening. I feel that all the more because I genuinely didn’t expect it’” (Christianity Today [February 2005], 24-25).

A Question of Trusts

“In a judgment that has implications for mainline Protestant property disputes across the country, a California congregation has won the right to keep its property after breaking its affiliation with the United Methodist Church (UMC).

“In December the Supreme Court of California ruled against the nation’s third-largest denomination — rejecting a request to review an earlier court decision that awarded the Fresno-based property, worth more than \$1.5 million, to a breakaway Methodist congregation.

“. . . The 180-member congregation severed ties with the UMC in 2000. Members, believing the denomination has departed from biblical teachings, sought to retain the church building, which parishioners had paid for over a 50-year period.

“Since, according to Methodist church law, all church property is held in trust for the national church, the local Methodist jurisdiction, the California-Nevada Annual Conference, sued for ownership. It won the initial trial in 2002. But the Fifth District Court of Appeal overturned that decision last August. The appeals panel ruled that St. Luke’s had indeed entered into a trust agreement. But it said that California statutes allows such trusts to be revoked.

“The California Supreme Court’s decision not to review the case made St. Luke’s one of just two congregations nationally to win a denominational property dispute in a high court in recent years.

“The Episcopal Church U.S.A., the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

all have similiar property trust laws” (Christianity Today [February 2005], 21).

Biblical Quote No Reason to Free Rapist

“Cincinnati — A judge’s quotation of a Bible passage in sentencing a convicted rapist to prison does not warrant setting aside the penalty, a federal appeals court has ruled.

“The 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals voted 2-1 this month to reject James Arnett’s argument that a Hamilton, Ohio, County judge violated his rights by citing the Bible as an influence when she sentenced him to 51 years in prison.

“. . . During sentencing, Common Pleas Judge Melba Marsh cited Matthew 18:6: ‘And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name, receiveth me. But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.’

“. . . ‘We reach this conclusion despite the fact that reasonable minds could certainly question the propriety’ of the trial judge’s mentioning the Bible” (The Indianapolis Star [January 22, 2005], B7).

Episcopalians React to Bishops’ Statement on Gay Dispute

“Pittsburgh — The leader of a network of Episcopal Church conservatives said the statement from the denomination’s bishops, expressing ‘sincere regret’ for the pain caused by the consecration of an openly gay bishop, falls short of what’s needed.

“Bishop Robert Duncan of Pittsburgh was among 21 of 150 bishops who said the denomination must express regret for its actions, which have disrupted world Anglicans, and must agree to impose requested moratoriums on consecrations of gay bishops and conducting same-sex blessing rites (The Indianapolis Star [January 22, 2005], B5).

Preacher Needed

Fairmont, West Virginia: The Eastside Church of Christ is needing a full-time preacher. Fairmont is a University town with many opportunities. The membership is 20 to 25. They are the only sound congregation in the county. The congregation has its building paid for and can supply partial support. The one who works with them must be in sound doctrine and willing to work with the community. If interested contact William Wright at 304-366-4523 or Allen Yeager 304-879-5483 or e-mail jayeager@westco.net.



The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible

Second Annual Truth Magazine Lectures

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: Historical Reliability David Dann	Evidences: Prophecy: Kevin Maxey	Evidences: Unity of Bible: Steve Wallace
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
Lunch Break			
Ladies Classes			
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
Auditorium			
2:00 - 4:00	Open Forum		Elders & Work of the Church
Singing 7:00 - 7:30			
What Does the Bible Claim For Itself? Donnie V. Rader	Is the Bible Applicable to the Modern World? Walton Weaver	Oh How I Love Thy Law: Johnie Edwards (After Wednesday evening Bible Study)	First Centuryh Morals for the Twenty-first Century: Andy Alexander



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