

A House Divided Against Itself

By Don & Joy Veinot

The morning of November 3, 2004, which dawned darkly upon liberals, offered a ray of hope to conservatives. George W. Bush was re-elected as the President of the United States.

With his re-election a new psychological disorder was born—dubbed PEST (Post Election Selection Trauma):

More shocked John Kerry supporters on Wednesday sought psychological help with "post-election selection trauma" in South Florida, prompting the American Health Association to officially release symptoms of the disorder and open its doors for free counseling.¹

Some conservatives may wonder why the American Health Association did not offer free counseling after the 1996 election, when Bill Clinton was re-elected against the wishes of so many. We say PEST SHMEST—everyone who has participated in the electoral process has felt the sting of defeat at one time or another. Elections are, by their very nature, risky, and the outcome is not assured. In an essentially two way race, it stands to reason that *someone* is going to be disappointed. A big part of life is learning to deal with disappointment. Historically, American elections have always been fiercely contested affairs; but now more than ever, it seems some people are unwilling or unable to come to grips with the results of this one and move on.

Speaking of "moving on," we have somehow been added to the e-mail list of a liberal organization called Move-on.org. Shortly after this past election, they sent out a very bitter e-mail message about the results and asked their e-mail list respondents their opinions of how they should now proceed. We sent them back a response, in which we helpfully suggested that, since the long and bitter election thankfully is over, can't we just put it all behind us for a time and *move on*? We never heard back whether our idea was given serious consideration, but since they continue to churn

out bitterness and wrath, we must conclude that Move-on is not for moving on. ☺

Far from moving on, many of our liberal countrymen threatened they would be moving *out*-seeking refuge in Canada away from the lesser evolved "Red State" folks-while many of the "lesser evolved" took a sort of "here's-your-hat, what's-your-hurry" attitude towards any potential emigrants. Alternatively, some "Blue Staters" thought it would be a fine thing to take their *states* with them when they left, along with their underwear and other personal possessions. Talk of "Blue State" secession was swirling.

Secession, which didn't work very well when it was tried once before, is suddenly red hot in the blue states. In certain precincts, anyway. One popular map circulating on the Internet shows the 19 blue states won by Sen. John Kerry — Washington, Oregon, California, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois, Maryland and the Northeastern states — conjoined with Canada

to form the "United States of Canada." The 31 red states carried by Mr. Bush are depicted as a separate nation dubbed "Jesusland."²

Since we live in a Blue State, we had to wonder what was to become of us. Would we be exiled to Missouri? Offered a free stay in a re-education camp? ☺ In actual point of fact, we were not too worried, because we don't see anything like that happening anytime soon. Sure enough, talk of secession seems to have abated, but lest some are tempted to be too hard on our secessionist liberal countrymen, we must point out that some fed-up conservatives proposed similar ideas in the not-too-distant past.

Earlier in 2004, Cory Burnell, who is president of the non-profit organization ChristianExodus.org, suggested that at least one state should secede from the Union and selected South Carolina as the likely candidate.³ This is an interesting choice as South

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Carolina was the first state to secede from the Union after the election of President Abraham Lincoln in 1860, and, in hindsight, it seems not to have worked out all that well.

Meeting in Charleston on December 20, that convention passed unanimously the first ordinance of secession, which stated, "We, the people of the State of South Carolina in convention assembled, do declare and ordain... that the Union now subsisting between South Carolina and other States, under the name of 'the United States of America,' is hereby dissolved," making South Carolina a free and independent country. The people of Charleston went wild with joy amid fireworks, booming cannon, and ringing bells. Within six weeks, six other states in the Deep South followed South Carolina out of the Union. Southern diarist Mary Boykin Chesnut wrote, "We are divorced, North and South, because we have hated each other so."⁴

The sobering and sad words of Mary Chestnut seem to ring as true today of liberals and conservatives and they did in 1860 between north and south. The issues at stake were similar then as now: Who gets to set the moral agenda for the nation? Whose ideals should prevail? In 1860, Democrats were essentially the "pro-choice" party—not willing to let the moralist abolitionists deprive them of their "right to choose" to own slaves (slaves were not considered "persons," but property), while Republicans were predominantly the party of abolition. Not to be too simplistic, it must be said that the issues went beyond this bitter "tinderbox" controversy. Southerners believed they were fighting for self-rule and state's rights, and then because their "homeland" was being invaded. Northerners believed they were fighting to preserve the Union. The election of Abraham Lincoln was the last straw for the southern states, because it was clear that their "side" would never be able to prevail at the ballot box, and Lincoln was seen as a dire threat to their perceived rights. Nearly a year-and-a-half earlier, Lincoln had voiced his concerns over the ideological division of the nation in his "House Divided" speech:

In my opinion, [that agitation] will not cease, until a crisis shall have been reached and passed. "A house divided against itself cannot stand." I believe this government cannot endure permanently half

slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved—I do not expect the house to fall—but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing, or all the other. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction; or its advocates will push it forward, till it shall become alike lawful in all the States.⁵

His analysis was only partly correct. The Union didn't dissolve, the "house" didn't fall, and it did cease to be divided; but it took a bitter and bloody civil war to resolve the issue. Trying to resolve the issue through discussion, debate, and vote failed because each side seemingly spoke a different language. Most in the southern states didn't own slaves but defined *personhood* on the basis of skin color and argued for "choice." Many northerners were not particularly enthused about giving their own lives to put an end to slavery. The majority of the citizenry South and North would probably fit into the category of "middle America." Generally, they didn't see that these issues affected them directly. They were busy trying to keep body and soul together, keep their families fed and cared for, raise their kids, and trying to get through life as best they could. Their choice to follow their respective leadership may have had less to do with being particularly for or against slavery and more to do with being opposed to the radicals on the *other* side of the issue. The result was the initiation of a very bloody divorce and the deaths of between 618,000 and 700,000 Americans.

Although it seems unlikely to us that either side of the cultural divide today will actually opt for secession and another bloody Civil War, it is also difficult to see how our deep cultural differences will ever be resolved. Americans used to "meet around the tube," where everyone received the same basic slant on the news. And the media—both print and broadcast journalism—strove to maintain, at least outwardly, neutrality in its presentation of the facts. While we didn't always see things the same way, we all saw the same things. That is no longer true. Each side now has its own sources of information—the liberals own the mainstream media (and have owned it for a *very* long time), but many if not most conservatives have "opted out" of the mainstream media and look to the internet or talk radio to get their information. This is a positive devel-

opment, in our opinion, in the sense that now liberals are not the *only* voices out there; yet it doesn't bring us any closer to resolution of our differences, assuming that resolution is even possible at this stage of our discord. Even more so than during the 1860s, many families are finding themselves bitterly divided over the issues of abortion, war in Iraq, homosexual rights, the UN, and the list goes on and on. And it is clearly becoming more and more an openly *religious* divide, as the sneering reference to "Jesusland" makes clear. It brings to mind Jesus' words at Matthew 10:34-35:

Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be the members of his household.

If you are a Christian in a divided family, you already know it is not necessary to seek out the battle—the battle will come to you, no matter how you may try to avoid the fray.

Is God a Democrat or a Republican?

Contrary to at least some popular thinking, God is not affiliated with any particular party. In fact, ultimately He will carry out His will in spite of which party is in power. Properly seen, this is a great comfort. ☺ He is not a respecter of persons, (Rom. 2:11) nor is He a respecter of parties. It should also be noted that not all Democrats are liberal nor are all Republicans conservative. Many blue-collar union members are quite conservative in their thinking and living, but vote Democrat because they perceive it as the party of labor. Many people are very liberal concerning social issues, but vote Republican for fiscal reasons. Older Americans are, as a group, the most conservative on social issues, but many have been convinced by liberals that Republicans are going to take away their Social Security checks—sentencing them to a life of dire poverty. Similarly, blacks are quite conservative on the issues of homosexual special rights and abortion, but they consistently vote Democrat because they perceive it as the party of "civil rights," or because they continually have been told that Republicans are "racists" at heart. Conservatives often find themselves at odds with the Republican Party on such issues as amnesty for illegal aliens, etc., but feel they have no choice but to vote Republican over the more liberal Democratic candidate. In short, most

of us have our specific reasons for supporting one party over the other and do not necessarily champion the total party platform. Many of us probably vote for the person (or party) whom we perceive to be the lesser of two "undesirables."

Yet it cannot be denied the Republican Party is more ideologically conservative than the Democratic Party. For one example, if you needed one, the state of Illinois (where we reside) recently passed a law guaranteeing equal (really special) rights to homosexuals. The liberal Democrats in the state legislature have been trying to pass such a law for years, but they were blocked by the Republican majority. Now that the legislature is controlled by the Democrats, the roadblock was gone and the measure passed easily with 12 liberal Republicans voting with the Democratic majority.

One backer of the new law optimistically noted that "the last bastion" of discrimination now has been removed from the state. But, of course, that will only be true until the *next* "last bastion" of "discrimination" is brought front and center—such as denying homosexuals the right to "marry" a person of the same sex. That is, in fact, what the Republicans who stood in opposition of the new law are afraid of—that this is just the first step towards legalizing gay marriage. But, of course, there will be more "last bastions" to come to light in the future—likely involving supposed "discrimination" against pedophiles, polygamists, rapists, etc. After all, these are "sexual orientations" as well. If homosexuals were created by God to be the way they are and have no choice in the matter, then pedophiles can certainly make the same claim about their "lifestyle." They could just as easily say, "I never made the decision to be this way—I was created this way. No one gets hurt, and I have a right to pursue happiness in my own way." Anyone who disagrees someday will be seen as a rightwing religious bigot who is trying to "force their religious views" on everyone else. Rape may be a harder sell, but in time, enlightened people will come to see that the rapist also has a right to pursue his "lifestyle"—it is not his fault that he derives pleasure from forcing himself/herself/whatever self upon another person—he was created that way. Should we discriminate against him/her/it because he/she/whatever is different?

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We must be “inclusive,” non-judgmental, and progressive in our thinking. We must “outgrow” our prejudices. And we can be confident that if we do not voluntarily outgrow our prejudices, the ACLU will be there to sue us into submission. Do you think that NOW or other so-called “women’s groups” will stand in the way of equal rights for rapists? Think again—they will do what is expedient—as they did when President Clinton was credibly accused of rape, and they closed ranks around him, *because he was a liberal and could be counted on to protect a “woman’s right to choose.”* Do you hear them speaking up today for their truly oppressed Muslim “sisters” around the world? Just like prominent “civil rights leaders” who care not a whit for the enforced slavery of Christian and Animist blacks in the Sudan, they have been exposed for the phonies they are—they do not truly stand up for “women’s rights”—their primary purpose today is to protect “abortion rights.”

Middle American “Values”

In the 2004 election, both sides of the ideological divide were vying for the authority to set the moral tone and agenda for the nation. This election had the highest actual number of people voting than have *ever* voted in an American election and possibly the highest *percentage* of registered voters since the 1960s. The predominant reason given in exit polls (if we can believe *them*) for how people voted was said to be “values.” Liberals took umbrage at this, pointing out that they too have values. That is true, but the majority of voters seem to have rejected these liberal “values” in favor of the conservative variety. The tide was turned largely by the vote of “middle America”—more a state of mind than a geographical location. Middle America has been conditioned over time to believe that it is wrong to “force one’s views” on others, but they generally hold to at least a residue of Judeo-Christian beliefs. To the consternation of the *New York Times*, this group is more likely to believe in the Virgin Birth of Jesus than in Darwinian evolution:

So here’s a fact appropriate for the day: Americans are three times as likely to believe in the Virgin Birth of Jesus (83 percent) as in evolution (28 percent).⁶

This does not mean that middle Americans are strongly ideological—indeed, they tend to react negatively to the “radicalism” of either side of the ideological spectrum. If groups such as the Rev. Fred Phelps of the Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, KS and his outreach www.godhatesfags.com or Jason Storms of www.repentamerica.com had been the major focus of the media prior to the election, it is quite possible that middle America would have tried to distance themselves from such harsh rhetoric and moved more left of center in their vote. These groups make it a point to arrive at as many media events as possible in order to publicly condemn non-Christians to Hell with signs such as “God Hates Fags” and “No Fags in Heaven.” Phelps, Storms, et. al., are *wrong*-dead wrong-when they say God does not love homosexuals. We do well to remember that clearly God *loves* homosexuals, radical feminists, abortion providers, and all *people*. Christians, themselves, are merely sinners saved by grace. We remember with personal gratitude the Scripture that says:

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8).

We believe Christians certainly should be prepared personally to dialog respectfully with non-Christians about these issues

when the opportunity presents itself. We should feel Christian compassion for those who are outside of God’s family and have not experienced His forgiveness. There is a day of reckoning coming and, perhaps, soon. If there is no love in our hearts for the lost, there is something wrong in our relationship with God.

But these misguided people—who believe it is their duty to viciously condemn to Hell those for whom Christ died—serve as convenient “lightning rods” and poster boys for the radical left in the media. These are the types the media portrays as representing mainstream Christian attitudes and behaviors. This works well in downplaying the media’s own radicalism in the opposite direction. The leftwing ideologues appear nightly, speaking in careful measured tones, and giving the impression that they are neutral observers and reporters on the news of the day. In truth, most of our trusted network anchors, along with such program hosts such as Ted Koppel, Andy Rooney, et al, have simply exchanged the banners of Phelps and Storms for a news desk, hair stylist, and air-waves. True, there is now Fox News Network, which the liberals hate and condemn as leaning to the right—although we think that Fox is far more balanced with liberal viewpoints than the other networks are with conservative ones. We suggest that Fox should admit its rightward bias as soon as CBS, NBC, ABC, CNN, and MSNBC are prepared to admit their leftward one. ☺ Don’t hold your breath.

Middle America Shifted Right

In a very real sense, the “values” question was brought to the front and center of the election campaign in early 2004, when the radical left threw common sense to the wind and started pushing very hard for so-called “gay marriage.” Like the Confederate states of old, the left in this country know well that their agenda cannot prevail at the ballot box, at least not at present, so they count on the courts and activist judges to do their bidding; and the courts usually oblige them as they did in the past with “abortion rights” and other popular left wing causes. In the case of “gay marriage,” however, it was probably not such a good idea to get so far ahead of the electorate.

On February 4, 2004, activist judges on the Massachusetts Supreme Court mandated the state to rewrite their marriage laws to allow for same sex marriage. What followed was an assault on a number of different states and the sensibilities of its citizens who deeply resented the attempt by these extreme leftwing justices to force their immoral will on everyone else. The backlash which resulted was that 11 states placed anti-same-sex marriage amendments on their November ballots, with the result that there was a resounding defeat for “gay marriage” in all 11 states. Interestingly, these “marriage protection” amendments received overwhelming support even from Democratic voters, proving the point we made earlier that not nearly all Democrats embrace the radical leftwing agenda.

In late February of 2004, the ACLU [the Atheist’s Civil Licentiousness Union, or All Crooks Love Us, whichever you prefer ☺] defended NAMBLA (North American Man-Boy Love Association), a group which openly advocates pedophilia, while *at the same time* they attacked the Boy Scouts of America, a traditionally popular group which teaches Middle American morals.⁷ “Values” lines were being drawn in concrete, not in the sand.

March 29 saw federal trials begin in Nebraska, New York, and California to overturn the ban on the especially heinous practice of partial birth abortion—where an infant’s skull is punctured

in the womb, their brain sucked out, and their little skull crushed to ease the delivery of the now-dead, late-term baby. This case forcefully illustrates again that activist liberal judges care nothing for the will of the people, who overwhelmingly reject this procedure as barbaric and inhuman. Though the majority of Christians see abortion at any stage as being patently evil, Middle Americans may accept destroying little “bundles of cells” in Petrie dishes or wombs, but they balk at what is obviously a wantonly cruel murder of infants.

In July, the ACLU made news again as they filed suit against Baltimore and four counties for denying same-sex couples the right to marry. The fact that same-sex marriage is against the law didn't seem to cross the minds of the justices.

It was a case of the liberals pushing their radical agenda too much, too soon, and too openly. The Boy Scouts are evil? NAMBLA is good? Partial birth abortion is necessary? Gay marriage is a civil right? Even non-ideologues could discern the muzzle of the wolf peeking out of the sheepskin covering the beast of liberal decadence. Middle America does not like being pushed, and they were pushed hard. Middle American morality and values were put on public trial. Being pushed hard by radicals, they pushed back and voted accordingly.

Window on the Worldview

Looking at the big picture, there is a fundamental “worldview” difference between ideological liberals and conservatives. Liberals tend to see human beings as inherently good. From this view the role of government and legislation becomes one of protecting the individual from society, and securing his individual “rights” against the “tyranny” of the majority. Conservatives, on the other hand, see individuals as flawed and the role of government and legislation as protecting society *from* the individual. To be honest, both views have their strong points and flaws. We are witnessing what it is like to live in a society of rampant individual rights over the good of society, let alone basic decency and common sense. However, a strong “law and order” society with no individual rights would not be ideal either, to say the least. One leads to anarchy, the other to state tyranny, but both lead ultimately to violence and death. ☹ The ideal society would simultaneously protect the individual and society, but the ideal society is very difficult to create and even harder to keep.

That said, we are scratching our heads at why the liberals-staunch defenders of civil rights—are allying themselves with radical Islamists who would destroy *all* of those rights if they could. It has to be spiritual blindness, there is no other explanation.

Religious War?

Former Clinton Labor Secretary Robert Reich recently has predicted there will be a religious war in our country to decide our future. Commenting on Reich's rather startling statements, Ted Olson of *Christianity Today* quotes Reich:

The true battle will be between modern civilization and anti-modernists; between those who believe in the primacy of the individual and those who believe that human beings owe their allegiance and identity to a higher authority; between those who give priority to life in this world and those who believe that human life is mere preparation for an existence beyond life; between those who believe in science, reason, and logic and those who believe that truth is revealed through Scripture and re-

ligious dogma. Terrorism will disrupt and destroy lives. But terrorism itself is not the greatest danger we face.⁸

Notice that Reich has not demonized *Republicans* here, but all who believe they owe their allegiance to God, and who believe that truth is revealed through Scripture. The war is no longer merely political, but primarily a *religious* conflict. Any Christian who does not yet understand this needs to wake up. It will become increasingly apparent that it is not what you think about the war in Iraq, or your opinion of affirmative action, or how you think the Social Security system should be funded that truly matters. What you believe about Jesus Christ will be the dividing line in our world. “Who do men say that I am,” (Luke 9:18) is as relevant today as ever.

The false belief that there is essentially no difference between Islamic fundamentalists promoting terror and Christian believers in God has been openly promulgated by liberals since 9-11. Now, however, it is increasingly common to see high profile people like Robert Reich put forward the idea that biblical Christianity is even *more* dangerous than radical Islam! And when portraying terrorists in movies or on TV, the “powers that be” seem to bend over backward to avoid suggesting even the hint of Muslim involvement, while portraying the villainous terrorists as Bible-believing nut cakes.

As one recent example, the fictional docudrama “Smallpox,” which aired on FX on Sunday, January 2, 2005, demonstrated how deeply rooted this thinking is within the liberal establishment. The story, done in a documentary style, is a fictional account of a smallpox attack released by terrorists upon New York City, which resulted in a worldwide epidemic in which millions of innocent men, women, and children were killed. The story was well done and compelling. But in the final scene, it is revealed that the terrorist is a Bible-reading individual who is attempting to fulfill biblical plagues. Although never explicitly stated, the viewer is dramatically led to the conclusion that Christianity is dangerous and a threat to the entire world. Radical Islamists had nothing to do with it; but, of course, the tale had to include the storyline that some wrongheaded people prematurely jumped to the prejudiced conclusion that Muslims might be responsible for the terrorist attack. (Now why would any rational individual jump to the conclusion that the terrorists might be linked to radical Islam? It has to be prejudice, pure and simple ...). The producers of this docudrama bent over backwards to shield Islam while pointing the finger of blame at Christianity! This is beyond absurd, but hardly unusual today. As aforementioned, it is bizarre that liberals would bend over backwards to defend a religious system that is diametrically opposed to all the civil liberties they hold dear. Muslim societies do not protect the rights of minorities—they subjugate women, kill homosexuals, and keep their populace absolutely under their heel. Yet to liberals such as Reich and so many others, Bible-believing Christians are the truly dangerous enemy. If it wasn't such a dangerous delusion, it might even be amusing.

Needless to say, liberals have declared war on Christians, whether we care to acknowledge it or not.

Politics Will Not Save Us

Contrary to liberal thinking, democratic (or even Democratic) government will not bring about Utopia—Heaven on earth. And not to burst anyone's bubble, but a Republican-controlled Congress or president will not be able to “turn back the clock” on

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social issues that are tearing our beloved country apart—assuming that all of them even truly want to. Once the feathers are sown to the wind, we’ll not get them back in the pillow.

But we feel that this is no reason to quit voting for whom ever one believes best represents Godly morals, and will best fulfill God’s design for government to protect the innocent and punish the guilty, as well as doing our best to legally influence our society’s direction for as long and as well as we are able. We should not vote according to our race, gender, or our pocketbook. We should vote as Christians to the best of our knowledge and ability.

There are Christians who are opposed to involvement in the political system. In this article, we do not have the space to address the reasons as to why they hold these views. The Bible doesn’t speak directly to whether or not believers should be involved in the political process, so any views on this must be formulated by implicit rather than explicit teaching. Each one of us must make our decisions on these “gray areas” based on our understanding of how the people of God intersected with their particular culture and act according to our conscience as outlined by the Apostle Paul in Romans 14. Politics can be a dirty business, filled with compromise and temptations, but then, so are most human endeavors. Family is not perfect, yet we do not abandon it; and that seems to us to hold for government as well as another institution established by God for our well-being.

Beyond The Voting Booth

The deep division we are seeing is nothing less than the political manifestation of an ancient conflict. One side maintains faith that **“God has said.”** The other sneeringly asks, **“... has God said?”** These three little words in two slightly different arrangements bring a separation which is wider than the sky.

In writing to those in the first century whose worldview was based on **“God has said”** but who resided in a world which predominately lived out the **“... has God said?”** worldview, the Apostle Peter carefully laid out how to challenge and transform the thinking of those around them. He started out with what amounts to an appeal to their heart and mind:

Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul. (1 Peter 2:11)

As believers, we have to learn to think differently. We live in the world, but are not to be *of* the world. Our true citizenship is in Heaven, not here on this earth (Phil. 3:20). Although we as believers live in this world, it isn’t our “home country.” We are just visiting. Moreover, as the Apostle Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:20, we are to be **“ambassadors for Christ.”** Therefore, we shouldn’t expect the unbelievers around us to live like believers, and it is not our job to try to force them to do so. Robert Reich, for example, is acting fully within his worldview as we should expect him to act (cf. 1John 4:5). He views Evangelicals as the main enemies of progress and enlightenment, and so makes false accusations against and declares war on believers. We in America are incredibly blessed to have the freedoms and privileges that we currently enjoy, but in that blessing, we should not forget that false accusations and even outright persecution are not historically alien to the Christian experience. False accusation is a theme which recurs from 1 Peter 2:11 through the end of chapter four.

Unbelievers may falsely accuse us, but at the same time they take note of how we live, act, and react. As they observe our behavior, they may come to a place of glorifying God; or they may reject God based upon what they see in us.

Believers are to be good citizens (2:13-17), good “servants,” or in twenty-first century terms, good employees (2:18-25), promoting solid caring families (3:1-7). It is our Christian love and good conduct that will lead some to inquire about the faith that motivates us. This will give us the opportunity to articulate why we believe what we believe and act as we act:

... but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; (1 Peter 3:15).

Usurping God’s place in the judgment of non-believers with picket signs and condemning rhetoric is clearly not the focus of the Apostles Peter or Paul’s thinking. Cultures cannot be converted—only people can be converted—one heart and mind at a time, not by “in-your-face” sanctimony. Christians should take the time and trouble to prepare themselves to respond to the issues in a gentle and compelling way. Even though believers are strangers, aliens and ambassadors on this earth, we have the God-given opportunity to be involved in the discussions, debates and even the politics of America. We do not see this as a privilege to be eschewed or an opportunity to be wasted.

Scripture teaches that God is the One Who set up governments and grants authority to those who rule. Paul says in Romans 13:1:

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. (NIV)

God is also the One Who ultimately brings authorities down and sets things right.

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written; ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord. On the contrary: ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Rom. 12:18-21)


So we should do what good we can and then trust God—and rest easy in the thought that He is still in control of our twenty-first century lives and world.

Daniel was given the opportunity to influence the government of ancient Babylon. The ruler of Babylon at the time—King Darius—respected him greatly, while others spoke evil of and plotted against him. Daniel lived out his faith, earned a hearing with some, and was hated by others. We all know the story. In living out his faith, he came to a crossroad where he had to choose whether to remain true to God and disobey the law, even if it meant persecution for himself. We know what he did—he chose God. The king was obligated to carry out the law and had Daniel thrown into a den of lions, though he was loathe to do so. In the end though, God delivered Daniel, and the fate which Daniel’s enemies had planned for him became their own fate (see Daniel 6). But even if Daniel had not been delivered, he was determined to do the right thing, whatever the cost. This should be our deter-

mination as well, as we live out our lives in "Babylon."

Will our society continue down the path to destruction? Only God knows, but to us it sadly seems likely. After all, people have free will to listen to reason or to go their own way, to follow God or to follow their own willful desires. But whatever results from our efforts, we are only responsible to be faithful to do what God wants us to do. We know there are many Christians whose theology informs them that the world will get better and better as Christians transform it, and that Christ will return after Christians have brought about the Kingdom of Heaven on earth by their own efforts, but we do not subscribe to that theological perspective. We believe that this world will get worse and worse until Jesus returns and sets things right. (2 Peter 3:7-13) We should not feel defeated or as if our efforts are wasted. Ask yourselves how much worse shape the nation (and the world) might be in if Christians were not exerting a preservative influence on the culture?

...The Hope That Is In You

Let not your heart be troubled. Our lives, our nation, and our future are in His hands—the Lord Jesus Christ. He is still transforming people, one heart at a time, and we as Christians are blessed to take part in this work. When the full measure of the harvest is gathered among mankind, He will return for us, and "*so shall we ever be with the Lord*" (1 Thes. 4:16-17). That is our hope, and we can rest in it. 

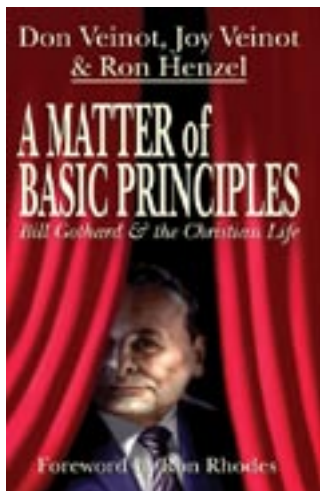
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Golden, CO 80401
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Brooklyn Park Evangelical Free Church
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The Road To Defend Inerrancy Is Not Paved With Good Intentions

By Randal Ming and Randall Birtell

INTRODUCTION

The Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) was formed for a single purpose—to defend the inerrancy of the Bible. It appears that postmodernism has defanged the ETS as it is unable to respond to warning cries of some of its remaining charter members and others against the hermeneutics and interpretations of neotheists¹ John Sanders and Clark Pinnock. The postmodern mind must have had some affect on the organization as it now struggles even to define *inerrancy*, even with the help of charter members who have explained their meaning of *inerrancy* to the current membership. How can an organization defend what it fails to be able to define? Neotheism has undercut the nature of the Being by Whom we can say with confidence that the Bible is inerrant—God. And the ETS is left unable to defend Scripture—their lone purpose.

INERRANCY

Clark Pinnock and John Sanders claim to believe in the inerrancy of Scripture. In fact, both men are adamant that they believe and adhere to the inerrancy position through their works. The ETS took the time to examine the positions, writings, and personal testimony of these men to see if they should remove them from the ETS. Why, with such learned people as make up the membership of the ETS, is it difficult to come to a definite decision? Isn't this a simple “yes” or “no” question? One either adheres to the inerrancy position or a person does not.

A point of contention is how one defines *inerrancy*. *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* (TCSBI) is one attempt to explain the nature and qualities of the Bible. At one point in the *TCSBI* it states: “**The truthfulness of Scripture is not negated by the appearance in it of irregularities of grammar or spelling, phenomenal descriptions of nature, reports of false statements (e.g., the lies of Satan)², or seeming discrepancy between one passage and another.**”³ In other words, the Bible accurately records the mistakes persons of the Bible make. If God made a mistake, the Bible would still be inerrant if it recorded that mistake correctly. This appears to be the position of both Pinnock and Sanders. We believe we should explain the position of Pinnock and Sanders in this way:

- 1) The Bible is without error.
- 2) God is not without error.
- 3) The God who is not without error inspired a Bible that is without error.

In John Sanders response to the ETS charge of breaking the group's inerrancy statement he writes:

Assuming for the sake of argument that a divine change of mind constitutes an error (which I deny it does), this would not imply that Scripture is in error for it correctly records the event. So long as Scripture accurately reports God's 'error' in changing his mind, the inerrancy of Scripture would be preserved.⁴

What Sanders means is if God intends one thing and another happens, He was not erred. We disagree with this position and have explained why in the section on *Truth*. As incredible and improbable as this may sound, we have (in the minds of Pinnock and Sanders) a God Who can commit an error responsible for a text that is without error.

This may keep these men in compliance with the inerrancy requirements for ETS, though it does not pass the smell test. Whose father would not have responded to such logic by saying, “DON'T GET SMART WITH ME!” In other words, the logical thing Pinnock and Sanders should have done was to resign from the ETS. It is our opinion that a neotheistic God logically rules out those who believe this to be the nature of the One Who inspired Scripture from a statement of inerrancy.

Pinnock and Sanders believe that philosophically and logically neotheism does not deny the inerrancy of Scripture. But, it would be wrong for the neotheist to claim that the Bible is inerrant, just yet. Under the neotheist model, God does not have complete foreknowledge of the future. So, we, nor even God, should claim that the Bible is inerrant. It may or it may not be. Only history and time can decide if it should be said the Bible was inerrant. The Bible predicts events such as the Second Coming of Christ, which has not occurred. Unless the future is known for certain we cannot make the claim for inerrancy. Some mad scientist or politician may destroy the earth, and Christ may not have any people to come back to, and He decides not to return. God cannot claim that the Bible is correct when He does not know the future. So we must conclude, if neotheism is correct, that we do not know if the Bible is inerrant. We all—including God—will have to wait for the conclusion of the play. We cannot know the inerrancy of Scripture until the end of time, and we know that all prophecies of the Bible were true.

TRUTH

Philosophers have proposed several definitions for *truth* through the years. A pragmatist, for example, sees truth as “what works.” However, we should define *truth* as *that which corresponds with reality*. Neotheists must use an intentional view of truth to explain why God can wrongly predict future actions of free moral agents and remain “truthful.”

The Britannica series *Great Books of the Western World* differentiates physical truth from moral truth, “**What Dr. Johnson calls moral truth consists in the obligation to say what we mean. In contrast what he calls physical truth depends not on the veracity of what we say but on the validity of what we mean.**”⁵ Neotheists can no longer expect that God knows physical truth despite the fact that He makes predictions about future physical truths. Sanders explains:

Divine expectations of what creatures with libertarian freedom will do are based on perfect knowledge of the probabilities of the situation. Let us say that there was a 71% chance Israel would put away her idols and a 29% chance she would not. I take it that the biblical language of divine surprise is attempting to get at such a notion. In my view, divine omniscience contains both knowledge of certainties and probabilities. In Scripture when God says “I thought” it is referring to God’s knowledge of probabilities or expectations. God expects the higher probability to come about but is not caught off-guard when it does not since he knew there was a smaller probability that it would not.⁶

Neotheists still do believe God is trustworthy about moral truth. God says what He means about what He wants to happen, and it would be wrong, according to neotheists, for us to hold Him accountable when things do not work as He would have liked because of the wrongful use of our free will. This is an intentionalist view of truth. For example: If God intended X, and Y happens; God is still trustworthy. John Sanders gives this example in his response to the ETS charges:

Suppose a mother says to her children, “Tomorrow we will go visit grandpa.” But that evening her husband has a heart attack and has to be hospitalized. Would the children have a valid claim that their mother is untrustworthy because she did not fulfill her promise? Certainly not. The mother spoke truthfully with the full intention [emphasis added] of carrying out what she had promised. But the circumstances changed. Suppose a husband tells his wife that he is going to the grocery store and will be back in twenty minutes to begin grilling for the picnic. However, two hours later he comes in and declares that he has not even been to the store. Instead, he came upon an accident and responded by providing help to the victims. Would his wife be reasonable to respond that her husband was untrustworthy? Hardly! Such situations illustrates that people may be trustworthy who respond appropriately and cancel previous commitments due to changes in the situation.⁷

We would agree with this example, in part, because humans do not know what is going to happen in the future. However, the words of the mother were not true. Human statements are not Scripture because humans *do not know the future* and are unable to make such a bold statement about physical truths. We would agree with this assessment in regard to humans, because humans do not predict the coming of the Messiah or have the sovereign control over world leaders and nations (i.e., Daniel, and the return of Messiah). Determining the nature of God based on human limi-

tations is, however, unwise. What assurance of the future do we have if God’s knowledge of the future is limited and, as neotheists argue, nonexistent?

A question we must answer is whether or not it would be an error for God to intend X and Y to happen? *Great Books of the Western World* says, “**Of course, the man who speaks truthfully may in fact say what is false, just as the man whose intent is to falsify may inadvertently speak the truth. The intention to speak one’s mind does not guarantee that one’s mind is free from error or in possession of the truth.**”⁸ It appears the philosophers and logicians do not agree with Sanders assessment of truth and error. They consider it to be an error for humans to say X and Y happens, though not a moral error, an error nonetheless. Intent does not mean a human would be morally wrong, but intent does not remove error from a statement that is not true. Similarly, if God intends X, and Y happens; this is an error.

Pinnock and Sanders have both admitted error in portions of their books during this debate within ETS.⁹ Both explain this to be unfortunate and poorly chosen wording. Rather, it is the logical conclusion to their thinking and model of God.

With respect to prophecy, Clark Pinnock, in footnote 66 in his book *Most Moved Mover*, says, “**We may not want to admit it but prophecies often go unfulfilled ... God is free in the manner of fulfilling prophecy and is not bound to a script, even his own.**”¹⁰ Part of the problem is Pinnock reads into the text ideas it does not communicate and then explains how God acted differently than He initially intended. For example: He says, “**the Assyrians did not destroy Jerusalem in the eighth century (Mic. 3:9-12).**”¹¹ Micah does not say that Assyria would destroy Jerusalem:

Hear this, you leaders of the house of Jacob, you rulers of the house of Israel, who despise justice and distort all that is right; who build Zion with bloodshed, and Jerusalem with wickedness. Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money. Yet they lean upon the LORD and say, “Is not the LORD among us? No disaster will come upon us.” Therefore because of you, Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble, the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets (Mic. 3:9-12, NIV).

What this text says is that Jerusalem will be destroyed. If one takes the time to read the whole book of *Micah*, a person will find the only reference to Assyria involves its own destruction (Micah 5:5-7). Pinnock answers his own hermeneutical problem:

Regarding Micah 3:9-12, it seem as if the prophet in the eighth century predicted the destruction of Jerusalem as something that might happen in his time but which in fact happened later on. But Micah did not dogmatise [sic] as to when it has to happen. It’s a simple question of prophetic perspective. From his point of view, it must have seemed to be delayed. But in the end, the oracle in Micah was fulfilled in that what was affirmed in this text was the destruction of Jerusalem, not the date of it.¹²

At issue is not what Micah thought. In fact, it is a poor hermeneutical tool to base God’s meaning on human feelings, e. g. Jonah. By this standard, God would have been wrong to spare Nineveh, because it was not what Jonah wanted to happen. The goal of the reader should be to discover what God meant. The examination of people’s thoughts to determine Divine revision is a mistake.

—Continued on page 14

Contemplating Contemplative Prayer: Is It Really Prayer?

By Marcia Montenegro

"God's first language is silence."¹

"Progress in intimacy with God means progress toward silence."²

"The important thing is that we are relaxed and our back is straight so that the vitalizing energies can flow freely."³

Contemplation is "a pure and a virginal knowledge, poor in concepts, poorer still in reasoning, but able, by its very poverty and purity, to follow the Word 'wherever He may go.'"⁴

Contemplative Prayer—also called Centering Prayer or Listening Prayer—has been taught by Roman Catholic monks Thomas Merton, Thomas Keating, and Basil Pennington, as well as Quaker Richard Foster and others. There is no one authority on this method, nor is there necessarily a consistent teaching on it, though most of the founding teachers quote mystics along with Hindu and Buddhist spiritual teachers.

According to www.contemplativeoutreach.org:

Centering Prayer is drawn from ancient prayer practices of the Christian contemplative heritage, notably the Fathers and Mothers of the Desert, Lectio Divina, (praying the scriptures), *The Cloud of Unknowing*, St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila. It was distilled into a simple method of prayer in the 1970's by three Trappist monks, Fr. William Meninger, Fr. Basil Pennington and Abbot Thomas Keating at the Trappist Abbey, St. Joseph's Abbey in Spencer, Massachusetts." It should be added, "During the twenty years (1961-1981) when Keating was abbot, St. Joseph's held dialogues with Buddhist and Hindu representatives, and a Zen master gave a week-long retreat to the monks. A former Trappist monk who had become a Transcendental Meditation teacher also gave a session to the monks."⁵

The influence of Buddhism and Hinduism on Contemplative Prayer (hereafter referred to as CP) is apparent. Words such as "detachment," "transformation," "emptiness," "enlightenment," and "awakening" swim in and out of the waters of these books. The use of such terms certainly mandates a closer inspection of what is being taught, even though Contemplative Prayer is presented as Christian practice.

Themes that one finds echoed in the CP movement include the notions that true prayer is silent, is beyond words, is beyond thought, does away with the "false self," triggers transformation of consciousness, and is an awakening. Suggested techniques often include breathing exercises, visualization, repetition of a word or phrase, and detachment from thinking.

Beyond Words: The Silence

As we see from the quotes above, silence is assumed to be God's "language." This seems contradictory since language usually involves the use of words, or at least symbols. From whence did this idea arise? Some quote Ps. 62:5, "*My soul, wait in silence*

for God only, for my hope is from Him." But the passage is about depending on God for refuge and salvation, not a form of prayer. The emphasis is expectation for God *only* – only God can save. Even if the psalmist was praying, the verse is not telling us that silence is the only way to pray, or that we must approach God in silence. However, Keating states that vocal prayer is not "**the most profound prayer.**"⁶

It is a Zen-Buddhist concept that truth is beyond words (this is also a Taoist view; Zen's roots are in Taoism and Buddhism). Zen teaches that truth must be realized as one practices sitting meditation (*zazen*)—cultivating an empty mind by letting go of thoughts so that rational thinking is transcended; or perhaps, as in the Rinzai school of Zen, one's awareness is triggered by *koans* such as: "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" or "What was your face before you were born?" According to Zen, Buddha's "**real message remained always unspoken, and was such that, when words attempted to express it, they made it seem as if it were nothing at all.**"⁷

Another popular Bible passage used to advocate silent meditation as prayer is Ps. 46:10, "***Be still and know that I am God.***" (NIV) However, this is being taken out of context.⁸ A study of this Psalm shows this is actually a rebuke from God to those striving against Him. Some translations render this as "***Cease striving and know that I am God,***" (NASB, ESV). Charles H. Spurgeon's remarks on verse 10 are "**Hold off your hands, ye enemies! Sit down and wait in patience, ye believers! Acknowledge that Jehovah is God, ye who feel the terrors of his wrath! Adore him, and him only, ye who partake in the protection of his grace.**"⁹

Praying in silence or ruminating on a passage of Scripture in silence is normal, but silence should not be regarded as superior to words; nor does the Bible give any support to the notion that the "language of God" is silence. Interestingly, Foster even warns about silent CP, saying that it is for more mature believers, that "**we are entering deeply into the spiritual realm**" where we may encounter "**spiritual beings**" who are not on God's side. He suggests a prayer of protection in which one surrounds himself with "**the light of Christ,**" saying "**all dark and evil spirits must now leave,**" and other words to keep evil ones at bay.¹⁰ I could not help but think of my New-Age days, when I was taught to invoke a white light of protection before psychic activity or contact with the dead. Jesus, in praying for his disciples said, "**... keep them from the evil one,**" (Jn. 17:15) but this was a petition to guard us from Satan's schemes, not a formula for warding off evil spirits away while we pray.

Silence can be soothing and comforting; we can get deep insights when we are quiet. But simply trying to be quiet is not

prayer, and it does not support the view that real prayer is wordless. After all, God has given us a written revelation, and God's laws and words are acclaimed throughout the Bible; such as Psalm 119, which extols God's word as a treasure and lamp. In Is. 40:8, we learn **"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever,"** and Jesus declares to the Father in Jn. 17:17, **"Thy word is truth."**

Beyond the Mind: No-Thinking

According to Keating, CP should be **"detachment"** from thought, getting into a state of **"no-thinking,"** and that **"it is the time to let go of all thoughts, even the best of thoughts,"** so that only **"pure awareness"** exists.¹¹ He even claims that the Holy Spirit will not **"barge in"** if we are using reason and intellect, and it is **"only when we are willing to abandon our very limited human modes of thought and concepts and open a welcoming space that the Spirit will begin to operate in us at this divine level ... when we Center we practice leaving our human thoughts and reason behind and attending to the Divine, to the Spirit."**¹² This presents a radical redefinition of prayer as well as a false duality between thought or reason and spirituality—a concept common in the New Age.

Pennington discusses **"a shift in consciousness"** and going beyond **"ordinary consciousness"** into a state of **"pure consciousness"** in which we leave the **"false self"** for the **"true self,"** and attaining a **"unity-consciousness"** with God.¹³ He quotes **"the Fathers"**¹⁴ as saying that **"so long as a man is aware he is praying, he is not yet praying,"** and he quotes Merton that we should **"rise above thought."**¹⁵ Pennington has a chapter titled "Pure Consciousness" in which he states that God **"is known in pure consciousness rather than by some subject-object knowledge."**¹⁶

A writer for Youth Specialties, an organization devoted to youth ministries, states that his interest in CP began by reading Dallas Willard and Richard Foster, and later, mystics like Meister Eckhart, Teresa of Avila, and Morton Kelsey.¹⁷ He built a prayer room and reports: **"In that space I lit candles, burned incense, hung rosaries, and listened to tapes of Benedictine monks. I meditated for hours on words, images, and sounds. I reached the point of being able to achieve alpha brain patterns, the state in which dreams occur, while still awake and meditating."** This sounds like going into an altered state of consciousness—a light trance state—which is the same state one enters in Eastern/New-Age meditation, and which parallels techniques of self-hypnosis. In fact, the purpose of Eastern and New-Age meditation is to go beyond the mind because of the belief that the mind is a barrier to spiritual enlightenment. This same writer also states that at a retreat **"We held 'thin place' services in reference to a belief that in prayer, the veil between us and God becomes thinner. Entire nights were devoted to guided meditations, drum circles, and 'soul labs.'"**¹⁸

Yet in the Bible, meditations on God or on the words of God are never presented as an exercise without thinking. Many of the words translated as *meditation* in the Bible are words meaning *to muse, ponder, utter, or make a sound*. Most of these words are in Psalms where David is praising the precepts and words of God and affirming that these are what we should learn, obey, and think upon. This definitely is *not* leaving ordinary thinking for another level of consciousness. Nor do we take actions to make a (non-existent) "veil" between God and us thinner. Did not the death of Jesus on the cross rip the heavy veil in the Holy of Holies of the Temple, forever serving as a symbol of opening the way to God for those who believe?¹⁹

Due to Eastern and New-Age influences in our culture, the word *meditation* has come to mean *a technique to enter another state of consciousness, to go beyond thinking, or to realize spiritual enlightenment*. We cannot read these techniques and purposes into the Biblical word translated as *meditation* which originates from several different Hebrew words. The contexts of these words indicate *an active pondering, thinking and learning*, neither a technique nor a disengagement from the mind.

Beyond Self: The False Self vs. the True Self

Thomas Merton claims that **"the superficial 'I' is not our real self,"** but only our **"individuality"** and **"empirical self,"** not the **"hidden and mysterious person in whom we subsist before the eyes of God."**²⁰ This kind of thinking is found also in Keating and Pennington.

Keating states that CP takes us to a place **"in which the knower, the knowing, and that which is known are all one. Awareness alone remains. The one who is aware disappears along with whatever was the object of consciousness. This is what divine union is."**²¹

Keating and Merton both discuss the false self and the true self. Keating capitalizes **"Self,"** and states, **"God and our true Self are not separate. Though we are not God, God and our true Self are the same thing."**²² According to Merton, our **"external, everyday self"** is mostly a **"fabrication"** and is not **"our true self"** which **"is not easy to find. It is hidden in obscurity and 'nothingness,' at the center, where we are in direct dependence on God."**²³

Buddhism teaches that our identities are merely fleeting images or impressions, like images on film, or a **"sequence of happenings, of processes,"**²⁴ and that we must discover our true nature, the Buddha nature. The **"conventional 'self' or 'person' is composed mainly of a history of consisting of selected memories."**²⁵ As one Zen Buddhist says: **"There is no you to say 'I.' What we call 'I' is just a swinging door which moves when we inhale and when we exhale ... when your mind is pure and calm enough to follow this movement, there is nothing: no 'I,' no world, no mind nor body; just a swinging door."**²⁶ Self is illusory in Hinduism, Taoism, and Buddhism, because the only reality is the Absolute, the Tao, or the Buddha nature.

The CP teachers do not say that we are really God, but they present a dichotomy between a false and true self. The Bible talks about the old sin nature versus the "new creature" in Christ; it is not put in terms of "true" and "false" or illusion and truth, but rather in terms of bondage to sin and regeneration. It is not a matter of awareness, but rather a matter of being born again and being regenerated by the Holy Spirit. Merton does acknowledge this point in one book,²⁷ though he still speaks of false and true selves, sometimes in Jungian psychological terms, sometimes in spiritual terms. Is our sin nature a "false self?" Not false in the sense of not being real, certainly. Such terms echo Eastern concepts and, at the very least, are confusing and misleading.

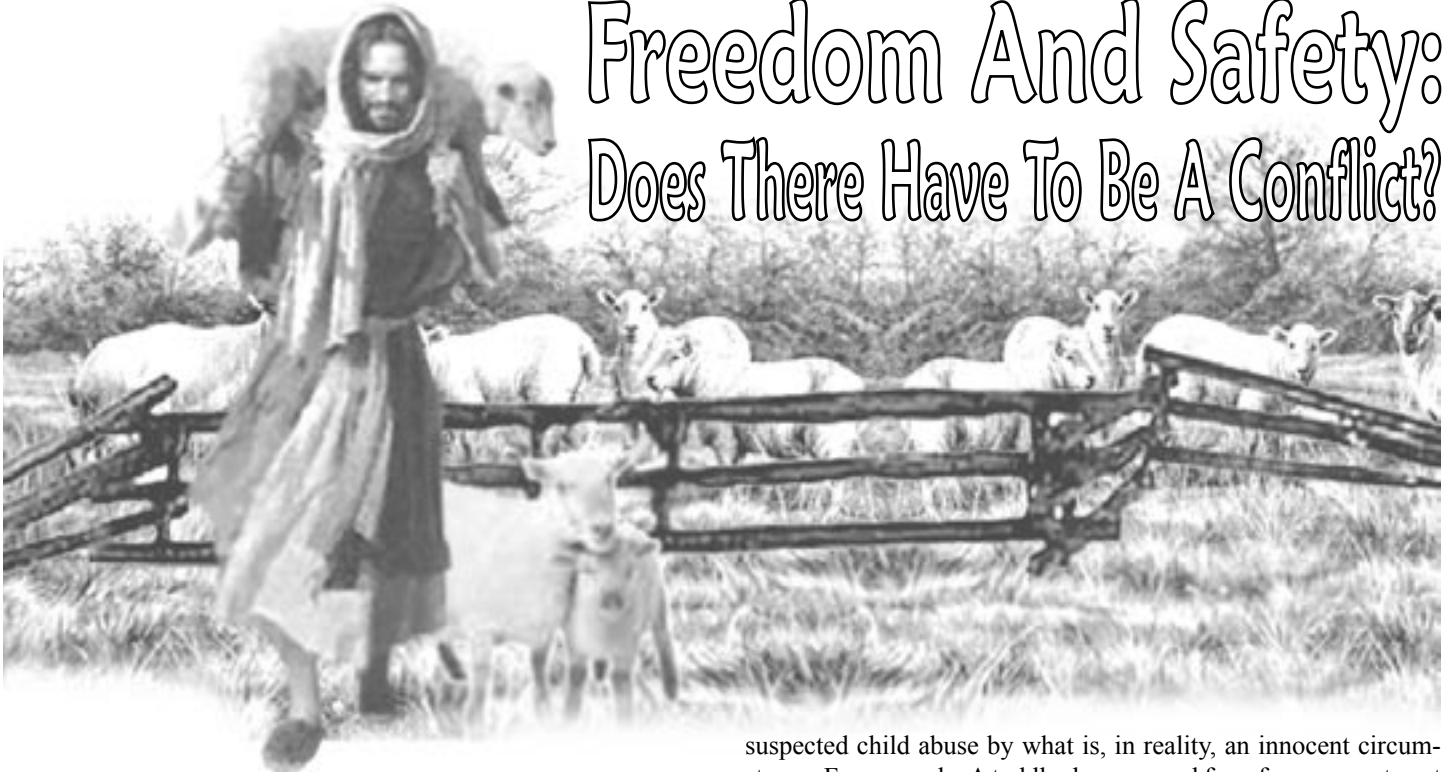
Beyond the Norm: Techniques of Spirituality

Most of the CP teachers announce that CP is not a technique, and then they go on to recommend various techniques. Pennington offers three **"rules or guides,"** which include being relaxed, to be **"in faith and love to God who dwells in the center of your being,"** to **"take up a love word,"** and **"whenever you become aware of anything, simply, gently return to the Lord with the use of your prayer word."**²⁸

Merton, Keating, Pennington, and sometimes Foster suggest

Continued on page 20

Freedom And Safety: Does There Have To Be A Conflict?



An Urgent Personal Message To Christian Home-schoolers

By Jan Fletcher

Our freedom to home-school is precious to us. Home-schooling parents cherish the freedom home-schooling gives our children to learn and grow in the ways we, as parents, think are best.

Keeping our children safe is also important. Dangers to children abound in our society—everything from school violence and stranger dangers to negative peer pressures and cultural influences that can lead a child into making dangerous choices.

Freedom And Safety Are Both Important

If we have freedom to do as we wish with no moral or physical limits on anything at all, neither we, nor our children, would be safe. But if we have safety with no freedom, we would be slaves to whomever we have voluntarily relinquished our freedom.

There Must And Should Be A Wise Balance Between The Two

Both as an American and a committed Christian, I believe in freedom; and I also care very much about keeping my children safe. Because I care deeply about both the gift of freedom and the responsibility to guard and protect my children – a gift from God – I am compelled to share a personal message with you as one home-schooling parent to another.

We home-schooling parents must constantly defend our freedoms. As we have all learned, freedom comes at a cost and that cost is vigilance. Many well-meaning people, who sincerely believe they are protecting children, want to limit our freedom as parents to home-school our children.

Sometimes, these well-meaning people are moved to report

suspected child abuse by what is, in reality, an innocent circumstance. For example: A toddler has escaped for a few moments out the front door sans clothes, and as a result, a person may falsely accuse a home-schooling family of child abuse.

Why does this happen? It happens because some people have a different *worldview* from home-schoolers. In their worldview, safety is more heavily weighted than intellectual and religious freedom. They believe protecting children is the primary responsibility of government, and that even drastic invasions of a family's privacy are justified in the name of keeping children safe. Many home-schoolers know this is wrong, and believe that freedom IS important.

Trying to help people (who oppose home-schooling freedoms) to see this truth is difficult. This is because people's beliefs – their worldview – can color virtually everything that person observes, reads, or hears. Everything they evaluate is filtered through this distorted lens. Understanding a person's worldview is important when we share information about our personal beliefs.

For example, I was an Atheist until the age of 40. I had already been home-schooling for four years before my husband—Jewish by birth—and I became Christians in 1996. During my years as an Atheistic parent I loved my children very much. I took their safety seriously, just as I do now. The only problem, at that time, was regarding my worldview: I believed there was no God. As a result, I conscientiously taught my children that people who believed in God were confused and well meaning but wrong. I viewed through my “colored glasses” any evidence brought before me for consideration that there was a God who loved me. These “glasses” were designed to see everything through the Theory of Evolution, which provided the foundation for my worldview at that time.

Some Christians Falsely Accuse Others Of Child Abuse

Even Bible-believing Christians can have “colored glasses.” When a Christian's worldview is not completely based on a sound

doctrinal understanding of the Scriptures but is, instead, lopsided in certain areas of their understanding of the nature of God and/or man, it can make them more susceptible to rumors and even societal panics.

A well-known example is the “Satanic Panic,” that sprang up in the 1980s and still influences many Christians today. As a result of this, some Christians believe many people have been victims of satanic ritual abuse. These folks also believe young children who experienced abuse can repress those memories so thoroughly that when they grow up and become 30- and 40- years old, they can be under the illusion that they had a normal childhood; but later, after therapy supposedly recovers these memories, these folks come under a delusion and can believe outrageous things about their pasts. For example, some have believed they were forced to eat aborted babies, and to do all kinds of horrible things under the control of a vast army of satanic cult members. They “remember” all these events as adults when they engage in certain therapies that use recovered-memory-therapy techniques.

Sadly, some of these people become totally convinced that these memories are true, even though many scientists, psychologists, and law enforcement officials have discredited this type of therapy. Believing these recovered memories are true, some of these Christians falsely accuse their parents, and sometimes other Christians of abusing them when they were infants or young children.

Many Christians have been falsely accused by patients of Christian counselors who have a worldview that believes in repressed memories. I am a journalist, and I recently wrote a book about a widely used Christian-counseling technique that is causing people to be very confused about the issue of memory and alleged child abuse. This e-book is *Lying Spirits: A Christian Journalist's Report on Theopostic Ministry* and can be accessed at www.lyingspirits.com.

I wrote this book because I care about people's freedom. Some of my fellow Christians have fallen under a deception so great that they have falsely accused other people of child abuse. This grieved me terribly. One of the people I interviewed for the book was falsely accused, arrested, and jailed for a crime he never committed. Gratefully, in this case, the local district attorney recognized the charges were based on discredited recovered-memory-therapy techniques disguised under the cloak of Christian prayer therapy, and dropped the charges after an extensive investigation. At the same time, the district attorney publicly accused the pastor, who had used this therapy on church members, of spiritual abuse. (For more on this read *Lying Spirits*.)

If someone's worldview says that there are secret satanic cults involving local law enforcement, doctors, judges, and even those innocent-looking grandmothers sitting in the pews, even innocuous comments from people can be interpreted as the proof of their guilt as secret Satanists. All it takes is a worldview, a dose of imagination, and encouragement by some “experts”—in this case pastors and therapists who believe in secret satanic cults and repressed memories—and you have someone willing to falsely accuse another person of child abuse without so much as any circumstantial evidence, or to call in an anonymous tip of alleged child abuse based on a recovered memory without any genuine evidence.

It all depends on a person's *worldview* – on what they see through “colored glasses” with preconceived notions they may have about God and man that are not valid.

As home-schoolers know, false accusations of child abuse are one of the ways that well-meaning people oppose our freedom

to home-school our children. These accusations frequently come under the banner of championing safety for children.

Some Christians Oppose Our Freedom In Christ

There are Christians who oppose freedom in the name of safety, too. They may not oppose the freedom to home-school. In fact, they may be champions of home-schooling, but they oppose our *spiritual* freedom, which can be the most serious danger both our children and we, as Christians, will face. They do this because they have a worldview in which safety is weighted more heavily than freedom. In this worldview, they incorrectly interpret Scriptures in a way that gives a false understanding of what freedom in Christ means. Not only have they willingly given up their freedom in Christ, they seek to enslave others in the same way.

What Does God Say About Safety?

“Preserve me, O God: for in thee do I put my trust. [O my soul,] thou hast said unto the LORD, Thou art my Lord: my goodness [extendeth] not to thee; ... The LORD [is] the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot ... thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence [is] fullness of joy; at thy right hand [there are] pleasures for evermore. (Psalm 16: 1,2,5, 10b, 11, KJV)

The psalmist David recognized that God is the only one who can truly preserve us and keep us safe. Not only does God provide safety for us as we live in these perishable bodies, but he preserves us from eternal death. He alone has the power to give us eternal life, and He offers this gift freely through His grace.

When I was still an Atheist, sometimes I would be very sad when I thought of the fact that the precious child I cradled in my arms would one day rot in a grave to be no more. I did not have an answer to this problem. I knew, as a parent, that I had no power to preserve my children from death. My worldview of the random existence of the universe, as explained by Atheistic evolutionists, offered me no hope. I frequently pondered the seemingly meaninglessness of life, but such thoughts made me depressed, and so I refused to think about them for long.

On Valentine's Day in 1996, my attitude changed dramatically when a doctor told me I would die from a cancerous tumor located on my cervix before my 8-week-old fetus could be born seven months later. My only hope, he told me, was to have surgery—surgery that carried a 30-percent risk of killing my unborn child.

This was no longer a philosophical problem of how to keep my children or me safe from death. Now I faced the monster – my biggest fear—up close and personal.

I prayed. For the first time in my adult life, at 39 years old – a mother of four children and one on the way—I prayed a simple prayer of ten words to God: “Please help me. This is more than I can bear.”

As a result of this prayer, God granted me mercy, *even* after 20 years of rejecting Him. In the subsequent days, I bought a Bible. My Jewish husband, who had been raised by Atheist parents and had never looked inside the pages of this book, picked it up with great interest. “I want to learn about my Jewish brother, Jesus,” he said. On Easter Sunday, just a few weeks later, our family went to church for the first time. We heard the Good News that

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John Sanders does not even follow his intentional view of truth with respect to himself. As we will note below and Sanders will explain: He intended to say X, and he said Y; and he calls this a mistake. He uses a correspondent view of truth to apply to himself and an intentional view of truth with respect to God. Sanders states:

In response to this charge let me begin by saying that just as Calvin made continual revisions in his Institutes so I need to revise some of my remarks. In this case, I repent in dust and ashes that I used the word “mistaken” in trying to explain my point. It was a mistake to use the word mistaken. I certainly wish I had expressed the idea differently. So let me now attempt to do so. On pages 132-3 of my *The God Who Risks* I was trying to understand the biblical texts where God is surprised or where it says that what God thought would happen did not happen (e. g. Jer. 3:7; 32:35). I asked if this meant that God was “mistaken.” I was certainly not saying that God was wrong or erroneous. In fact, I said (p. 132) that God would be mistaken only if he declared that X would infallibly come to pass and it did not. But God never makes pronouncements about infallible happenings unless they will infallibly happen. That is, God does not declare with absolute certainty that X will occur unless he knows it as absolute certainty. Hence, God does not make mistakes. Then, I said, speaking more “loosely” it might be said that God would be mistaken if he “believed” X would happen and it did not happen. I take Jeremiah 3:7 and 32:35 to be examples of God believing something will happen yet that does not happen.¹³

He begins by asking for forgiveness because he stated X, and he meant Y. He calls this a mistake. Yet for God to state X and mean Y is not a mistake. He has placed himself on a higher standard than he has placed his Creator.

The intentional view of truth is not adequate to the Christian worldview and the understanding of truth fundamental to biblical study. Most teachers do not use an intentional view of truth when grading a test. In fact, we would not be very happy with a school district whose policy was to make intention the mark for truth. Most people hold themselves and others to a higher standard for truth. That standard is what corresponds to reality. In 2 Kings 18, the Assyrian commander told the people of Jerusalem not to trust the Lord to save Jerusalem. The question is: Should they trust Him? In other words, should they trust a God with an intentional view of truth? Was it God’s *intention* to save Jerusalem or was this *fact*?

When a person has a loved one die, we must ask if or why God’s intent to save their life would bring comfort? God’s response to the loss would sound like this, “I wanted to save them, but the situation surprised me, and that is not what I expected to happen.” Rather, we trust in a God of purpose—that this tragedy can be used to the glory of God—and in the face of pain and suffering, good will come. When God says, “Believe and you will be saved,” is it His *intention* that He speaks of, or is this a *fact*?

Hear the words of Paul: “*And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle—I am telling the truth, I am not lying—and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles*” (1 Tim. 2:7, NIV). Is this intention or fact?

OMNISCIENCE

The Church’s understanding of God’s knowledge has been almost universal and virtually unchanged throughout Church history. This does not mean, however, that this definition is correct.

As stated in the section on Truth, something is not true because we believe it, because it is old, or because it is new. *An idea is true because it corresponds to and with reality.* So, the goal is not to continue to believe the classical view of omniscience because it is what we, as the Church, have always believed. The goal is to see if the classical, the neotheist, or some other understanding of omniscience corresponds to reality.

We find definitions to be extremely important in this debate. When one says one believes in the omniscience of God, we should be asking, “What does that mean?” A neotheist would say he believes in the omniscience of God. Yet, if one takes the time to examine what he means, one will discover the meaning of the word has changed from the classical meaning. Neotheists have gone to great length to define what they mean when speaking about the nature of God’s omniscience. Their definition bares little resemblance to the classical definition of the nature of God’s knowledge. First, we will look at the classical definition of *omniscience* and then define and contrast this understanding with the neotheist interpretation of this concept.

Theistic Omniscience

Several people’s definitions—both contemporary and historic—show the universal agreement, through time, of the Church’s understanding of God’s omniscience. A. W. Tozer, a well-known and a popular theologian, writes, “**To say that God is omniscient is to say that He possesses perfect knowledge and therefore has no need to learn. But it is more: it is to say that God has never learned and cannot learn.**”¹⁴ One might say it is good to learn, and God would be lacking in some way if He were not able to learn. But, this would be a man-centered or humanistic understanding of reality. It is good for those who lack knowledge to learn. The ability to learn is not good in an ultimate sense. The *goodness* of learning has the intuitive understanding that there is the *need* to learn. So for humans, who do not have full knowledge, learning is good. This is not the case for God as Tozer has described Him. God’s attributes of perfection and pure actuality mean that everything that can be known is known, past, present, and future, by an eternal God. God, as an eternal being, does not come to know. He KNOWS.

Pinnock in the *Most Moved Mover* mentions the book, *The Battle for God*, as an antagonist to those who follow Neotheism. H. Wayne House and Norman Geisler, the writers of *The Battle for God*, define omniscience as:

God’s knowledge of Himself and His creation is infinite. It is exhaustive of everything external to Him (Isa. 40:28) and internal to Himself within the members of the Trinity (Matt. 11:27; 1 Cor. 2:11). He has perfect knowledge of Himself (*scientia necessaria*, “necessary Knowledge”), and He has exhaustive knowledge of all else. He knows everything immediately, not by acquired understanding (Ps. 139:1-6).¹⁵

God does not acquire knowledge. This is an important element to the classical understanding of omniscience.

Saint Anselm explains omniscience to be indistinguishable from truth. He says, “**But, since knowing is the same to the supreme Spirit as conceiving or expressing, he must know all things that he knows in the same way in which he expresses or conceives of them. Therefore, just as all things are in his Word life and truth, so are they in his knowledge.**”¹⁶ The knowledge of God is truth. Remember our definition of truth. Anselm’s definition eliminates an intentional view of truth, and so God’s

knowledge of the future cannot be intent. As we will show in the following section, the neotheist believes the future does not yet exist; so Anselm and the classical understanding of omniscience distances itself from the neotheistic definition. God's knowledge of the future, from a neotheistic view, can only be His *intentions* about the future. For Anselm, His knowledge is true just as His Word is true. **“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth”** (John 1:14, NKJV).

Neotheistic omniscience

John Sanders defines *omniscience* in this way, “[T]he omniscient God knows all that is logically possible to know. God knows the past and present with exhaustive definite knowledge and knows the future as partly definite (closed) and partly indefinite (open).”¹⁷ Sanders however has equivocated on the term “know.” In the same article he states, **“the ‘future’ does not yet exist so there is nothing ‘there’ to be known.”**¹⁸

God, from a neotheistic position, does not know that Christ will return in the same way that He knows Christ died on the cross. From the classical position of omniscience, Sanders *could* claim the future is “closed” regarding Christ's Return because we understand that God *knows* the future from the eternal now. God has the same knowledge of the past as He does of the future. This is a standard that Sanders rejected above. Sanders would have rightly stated his position had he said God has intentions about some parts of the future. For example, the Father intends to have Christ return and other parts of the future are open to human free will.

Let us hear Sanders words: **“Hence, you incorrectly state our view when you say we believe that ‘God’s knowledge of the future is limited.’ We believe that God knows all that can be known, and to say that it is a limitation for God not to know ‘nothing’ is ridiculous.”**¹⁹ So, as Sanders has defined *omniscience*, a neotheist should say, “it is ridiculous to say that God knows Christ will return in the future because there is nothing to know.” Thus, to be consistent with his definitions, Sanders should say that God intends for Christ to return. It would appear that an accurate explanation of God's knowledge of future events is that God has intentions about part of the future and other parts are open. Therefore, to be consistent with this definition, a neotheist should explain omniscience in the following way: *God has exhaustive knowledge of the past and present with clear intentions about some parts of the future.*

It does not seem that God's knowledge of the present, as defined by neotheists, holds up under scrutiny either. The position of neotheism is that God has exhaustive knowledge of the present. This is not the definition used in the exegesis of Genesis 18-19. A favorite text of the neotheist—the destruction of Sodom—to show the ability of God to change His mind exposes His limited knowledge of the present. Richard Rice, coauthor of *The Openness of God* along with Pinnock, Sanders, and others, writes:

When God announced that he planned to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham asked him to spare Sodom in order to avoid killing righteous people along with the wicked. “Far be it from you to do such a thing,” he exclaimed, “to kill the righteous with the wicked ... Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen 18:25). Carefully negotiating in time-honored Middle Eastern fashion, Abraham persuaded God to spare the city if it had as few as ten righteous inhabitants (Gen 18:23-32).²⁰

If God knew, as Sanders stated previously, all that can be

known about the present, then what sense does it make for Abraham to negotiate with God? God already would have known there were or were not ten righteous people in Sodom. While not intentional, their exegesis suggests, that Abraham was more righteous than God and God's knowledge of the present is limited. In a *Christianity Today* article, Christopher A. Hall comes to a similar conclusion regarding Genesis 22: **“If God must test Abraham to find out what is in his heart, this surely calls into question God’s ‘present knowledge of Abraham’s inner spiritual, psychological, mental, and emotional state.’”**²¹

Omniscience from Scripture

In *The God Who Risks*, John Sanders has a subsection of his book titled “Excursus on Prediction and Foreknowledge” in which he sights Ps. 139:1-6 as describing God's **“depth of knowledge.”**²² Had Sanders read this Psalm through to the 15 and 16 verses, he would have refuted his own definition for the depth of God's knowledge: **“My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be”** (Ps. 139:15-16, NIV). If God does not know the future, the point of this Psalm is unclear.

Sanders and neotheists shutter at such an interpretation because they confuse the knowledge of God with the control of God. What a neotheist hears is that God has written the book of our life and, therefore, men are not free. It is true that many do hold to just such an understanding, but many others do not. God can know the future, and mankind can still be free. Despite the efforts of John Sanders, God's knowledge of the future does not necessitate the loss of human free will.

ETS and Open Theism

The Evangelical Theological Society met for the first time in Cincinnati on December 27, 1949 under the chairmanship of Edward R. Dalglish. The common desire of the society was **“scholarship based on the concept of biblical inerrancy.”**²³ The very foundation upon which ETS was founded is what has come under attack the past several years.

On November 19, 2003 members of the ETS voted to retain Pinnock and Sanders. Some 388 out of 619 votes were cast to dismiss Sanders, while only 212 out of 644 voted to expel Pinnock. While the votes to expel Sanders were a simple majority it lacked the 2/3 majority needed to affirm his expulsion.²⁴

The attempt at expulsion from the ETS centered around the issue of the inerrancy of the Bible. Posted on the ETS web site, we read their doctrinal basis: **“The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs. God is a Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each an uncreated person, one in essence, equal in power and glory.”**²⁵ This doctrinal basis must be subscribed to by its members yearly.

Pinnock and Sanders both say they agree with this statement. We have previously argued that Pinnock and Sanders state they subscribe to inerrancy, but they transfer a different meaning into the word.

The plain meaning behind the phrase **“inerrant in the autographs”** is that *every word given by God and recorded by the man of God corresponds to reality—without failure.* It is a state-

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ment about what the Bible *declares*, not about how the Bible is *interpreted*. Divine infallibility accounts for the perfection in what the Bible declares. Human fallibility accounts for the variety of interpretations a particular passage may generate. Inerrancy is a statement about the text, not the interpreter.

The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, printed in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* in 1978,²⁶ gives a clear and cogent understanding of biblical inerrancy.

First, *TCSBI* confirms the object of inerrancy is the Bible, not one’s interpretation of it. Second, *TCSBI* underscores the inerrant nature of the Bible as it pertains to acts of God and world history. Item 4 under the summary statement reads: **“Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God’s acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God’s saving grace in individual lives.”**²⁷

Clearly those who constructed *TCSBI* had a correspondent view of truth. They believed that the Bible inerrantly describes all that has taken place and all that will take place in this universe. Following the construction of *TCSBI*, R. C. Sproul wrote a commentary clarifying key points contained in it. In his commentary on Article XIII titled “Truth,” Sproul writes: **“By biblical standards of truth and error is meant the view used both in the Bible and in everyday life, viz., a correspondence view of truth. This part of the article is directed toward those who would redefine truth to relate merely to redemptive intent, [emphasis added] the purely personal or the like, rather than to mean that which corresponds with reality.”**²⁸

By *redefining* inerrancy, Sanders and Pinnock claim to subscribe to the doctrinal basis of the ETS. Pinnock notes that the word *inerrancy* as stated in the ETS doctrinal basis means that, **“it signifies pretty much what a member thinks of it.”**²⁹ Further, according to the ETS Executive Committee Report dated October 23, 2003, Sanders confessed agreement with *The Chicago Statement on Inerrancy*.³⁰ As noted above, the framers of *TCSBI* clearly had in mind a correspondent view of truth when they defined *inerrancy*. There is little excuse for Pinnock and Sanders to be confused or unaware of the theological meaning of the word *inerrancy*.


At the November 2004 meeting, members of the ETS voted to include a statement that officially “advises” its members to refer to *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* for a clear understanding of what *inerrancy* means. This will probably make little difference in moving Sanders or Pinnock to resign from the ETS as many have already “advised” them to leave.

By defining *truth* as *that which is intended*, neotheists are left with a God Who is not without error. This is heresy. The ETS should not allow such theology to find rest amongst its members. Pinnock and Sanders should resign. Since they have chosen not to, the members of the ETS should have voted to expel them.

If allowed an ongoing platform within the ETS, the neotheist system will have a crushing effect on the Church. A.W. Tozer begins his excellent book *The Knowledge of the Holy* with these strong words: **“What comes to our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”**³¹ Misrepresenting the nature of God is no small matter (Deut. 32:4; Mal. 3:6; Isa. 17:10).

Pinnock and Sanders have made a God Whose nature closely resembles the nature of man. They have taken the imminence of God and such attributes as love and elevated them above ideas of transcendence and justice. The attributes of God must be kept in

balance. He is a simple being. He is not a God of parts that ebb and flow with changing situations.

It is not too late for the ETS to act. It is not too late for Pinnock and Sanders to act. A line must be drawn. All too often in our day pluralism reigns. The level of sincerity of the person holding an idea seems to be more important than the idea itself. If neotheism is allowed to stand along side true biblical theism, what is next? The ETS must draw a line in the sand and say to neotheism—no further! 



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Endnotes

- ¹We chose the term *neotheism* over *open theism* to denote a clear distinction from *biblical theism*. This is a new theism rather than merely a revision of orthodox theism. Although the term *open theism* is the popular phrase used to describe the views of Pinnock and Sanders, we feel that *neotheism* more accurately describes their position. ²In the case of Pinnock and Sanders, the *TCBSI* should additionally include the *false predictions by God*. Our reasons for saying this will be explained following this section of the article. ³*The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 21, no.4 (December 1978): 295. ⁴John Sanders full response to charges on-line at <<http://www.etsjets.org/members/challenge/response-sanders-full.html>>. ⁵Robert M. Hutchins, Ed., *Great Books of the Western World* vol. 3 (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1986), 650. ⁶John Sanders full response to charges on-line at <<http://www.etsjets.org/members/challenge/response-sanders-full.html>>. ⁷*Ibid.* ⁸*Great Books*, 650. ⁹John Sanders full response to charges on-line at <<http://www.etsjets.org/members/challenge/response-sanders-full.html>> and Pinnock, *Revision of Most Moved Mover*, 10/17/03 on-line at <<http://www.etsjets.org/members/challenge/execcomm/A-Pinnock-Response-10-1703.html>>. ¹⁰Clark H. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 51. ¹¹*Ibid.* ¹²Pinnock, *Revision of Most Moved Mover*, 10/17/03. ¹³John Sanders full response to charges on-line at <<http://www.etsjets.org/members/challenge/response-sanders-full.html>>. ¹⁴A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, (San Francisco: Harper, 1978), 55. ¹⁵Norman L. Geisler and H. Wayne House, *The Battle for God* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001), 21. ¹⁶St. Anselm, *St. Anselm Basic Writings*, 2nd, trans. S. N. Deane (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 1962), 145. ¹⁷John Sanders and Christopher A. Hall, “Does God Know Your Next Move?,” *Christianity Today*, 21 May 2001, 43. ¹⁸*Ibid.* ¹⁹*Ibid.* ²⁰Clark Pinnock and others, eds., *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 29. ²¹John Sanders and Christopher A. Hall, “Does God Know Your Next Move?,” *Christianity Today*, 21 May 2001, 44. ²²John Sanders, *The God Who Risks* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 129. ²³*Records of the Evangelical Theological Society Collection* 243, 3 March 2001, <<http://www.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/GUIDES/243.htm>> (6 January 2005). ²⁴David Neff, “Dispatch from Atlanta: What Fireworks?,” *Christianity Today*, (20 November 2003), <<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/11/20/11.0.html>> (6 January 2005). ²⁵Evangelical Theological Society, *Doctrinal Basis*, <<http://www.etsjets.org/doctrine.html>> (6 January 2005). ²⁶“The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 21, no.4 (December 1978). ²⁷*Ibid.*, 290. ²⁸R. C. Sproul, *Explaining Inerrancy: A Commentary* (Oakland: ICBI, 1980), 31. ²⁹Pinnock’s Response to ETS Charges are on-line at <<http://www.etsjets.org/members/challenge/response-pinnock.html>>. ³⁰ETS Executive Committee Report on John E. Sanders, October 23, 2003 on-line at <<http://www.etsjets.org/members/challenge/execcomm/A-Sanders-ExecComm-10-23-03.html>>. ³¹A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, (San Francisco: Harper, 1978), 1.

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God Himself raises the dead. Within a few months, we became Christians.

Through God's grace and mercy, I rejected the doctor's recommendation for surgery, got a second opinion and a new doctor, and trusted in God to take care of both my unborn child and me. Due to medical incompetence, I came within five minutes of dying from heart failure 15 minutes after my healthy baby was born (Sept. 6, 1996). Yet, God is mighty to save! He spared both my child and me. Eight weeks later, I finally had surgery to remove the tumor. Five days after that, we all rejoiced to hear that it was not cancer. (For those who want to read my Christian testimony, visit www.undergroundbride.com/ebook.html.)

Through this experience and the resulting trials God has allowed our family to strengthen our faith in Him (just as God allowed the psalmist David to be tested), I have learned the true meaning of safety. True safety is found only in God's power, not ours.

In Psalm 16:1, the word to keep *safe*, or to *preserve* (depending on the translation) in Hebrew is *shamar*, which means *to keep, watch, observe, guard*. God himself keeps us safe. Is this always a physical safety?

In my case, God preserved my physical life for a time for His purpose; although, unless I'm raptured, I do expect one day to physically die.

When we look at the story of Job, we see that Job, himself, understood very well that God is worthy of praise both when He gives blessings in this world, and when He takes them away through allowing His children to suffer death and destruction. However, even in the midst of Job's suffering, he affirmed the true preservative power of God – the power to redeem us from eternal death:

For I know [that] my redeemer liveth, and [that] he shall stand at the latter [day] upon the earth: And [though] after my skin [worms] destroy this [body], yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; [though] my reins be consumed within me. (Job 19:25-27, KJV)

Job was like no one else on earth at that time according to Scripture. God said Job was blameless and upright (Job 1: 8). The tragedy that happened to Job did not occur because Job did anything wrong. (Job 2:3) To the contrary: he was a righteous man who pleased God very much. Yet, in one day, more disasters fell upon him than most of us will ever see. Was he safe? In the physical sense, Job experienced every parent's nightmare: the death of all his children. But in the spiritual sense, Job knew God, believed God's promise of eternal life, and knew that he was in very safe hands. His soul was secure from eternal death, and Job knew that true safety in our bodies (and the end of all distress and pain) would only come at that "latter day," the day of our redemption—when God resurrects our bodies, and we dwell in complete security with God in a new heaven and new earth.

Scripture demonstrates that God never guarantees a safe life *physically* for us, or our children, although, obviously, God gives us a physical existence for the purpose of knowing Him as our Savior. Yet, He alone controls our physical destiny. He numbers our days according to His will and His purposes. No formula, effort, or works on our part can force God into a contractual obligation to prolong our lives or protect us from disasters.

As parents, we do everything we can, within reason, to protect our children from danger, and we should! God has given us our

children, and He expects us to care for them in love and devotion. We have a responsibility to protect them from danger. However, we must also realize the ultimate power to protect our families lies in the hands of God, and sometimes He allows trials to come into our lives. Sadly, in an effort to deny this obvious fact of life, some parents look for formulas, techniques, special prayers, and anything else they can find to ward off disasters like the one that happened to Job. Surely, they reason, they can provide a hedge against pain and suffering. But can they really?

Unfortunately, in the never-ending quest for the sure-fire way to avoid pain and suffering, people haven't yet found a technique that works every time. Instead, in the process of looking for one, they find themselves venturing into real spiritual danger.

The Danger Of False Teaching In The Church

One of the dangers that almost all home-schoolers can agree upon is the danger of evil influences upon our children. We take our responsibility seriously to guard against negative cultural influences. Some families guard what their children watch or listen to in the media; what associations their children have with other children and families; and other religious teachings they may be exposed to. For Christians, these can include atheism and evolution; Eastern-style religious beliefs, such as reincarnation; and strange cults.

These kinds of strange doctrines and teachings are easy to spot. However, strange teachings have also "crept in unawares," (Jude 1:4) right into the Church. These strange teachings are brought in by those wearing sheep's clothing. (If they wore wolves' clothing they would be very easy to see, wouldn't they?) False teachings cloaked in garments of righteous-looking behavior, liberally sprinkled with Bible verses, and taught by humble-appearing men can seem like scriptural teaching. It takes a discerning eye and a willingness to search the Scriptures to detect the falsity in some teachings. This is the kind of diligent spiritual safekeeping God expects of Christian parents.

Bill Gothard's Umbrella Of Protection

As a home-school leader you may have heard of Bill Gothard, who is one of the most popular teachers in the home-schooling movement. He has had a vast influence on how home-schooling families order their lives through his ministries which include the Institute in Basic Life Principles (IBLP) and the Advanced Training Institute of America (ATIA, his home-schooling arm). He encourages parents to keep their families safe; and his teachings (proliferated through his seminars, books, and home-schooling curriculum) is very appealing, because parents very much want their children to be safe. These parents are wonderfully devoted Christians, and many are home-schooling parents. They have the best interests of their children at heart.

Gothard is a Christian teacher who believes God has promised *physical* safety as well as spiritual safety to those who follow his rulebook for life. The most important basis for attaining this safety, according to Gothard, is for a home-school family to come under the "**umbrella of protection.**" This concept of a protective umbrella arises from Gothard's belief about authority in a Christian's life combined with his belief in God's promise of safety for those who follow certain procedures.

... according to Gothard, all human relationships are governed by a chain of command similar to that in

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the military. It is only when we find our place in God’s chain of command and get under our proper authority that God will be able to protect us. Once we get under proper authority and implement the proper amount and types of mechanical steps and principles that Gothard prescribes, we ensure God’s blessing in our life and family.¹

In Gothard’s teaching, as long as everyone follows all the rules Gothard teaches, tragedies like what happened to Job just won’t happen. It’s like a contract with God. “I do this, God; and You’ll do that in return.”

That sounds wonderful doesn’t it? I would like to have an umbrella of protection against pain and suffering in this world, wouldn’t you? How do we get that umbrella? How much does it cost? Is that umbrella really from God?

Remember what I said earlier about people who long to take away the freedom of home-schooling in order to protect the safety of children from child abuse? Such people weigh safety on the scale more heavily than freedom.

There really are unfortunate cases of people who are abusing children using the cover of “home-schooling” – people who are not true home-schoolers. Some believe we could stop all harm to all children at the hands of their families if we established a big enough hedge – a big enough fence. That fence is called a police state. Many millions of people have lived in such police states under totalitarian regimes. The problem with that idea is that the solution is far more severe in its consequences than the problem ever was.

Even so, many people with liberal political viewpoints believe that a privacy-intrusive fence is a great solution and makes a wonderful protective umbrella for innocent children who are silent victims of child abuse. They ascribe to such views not because they want a police state – in fact, they care very much about their own personal freedom and would object very strongly if their freedom was impinged. The sad fact is that these folks do not understand the long-term consequences of the authoritarian protective umbrella they advocate. They do not think it through and envision what the end result will be: a complete loss of freedom for everyone sooner or later. In fact, an “authority-driven” solution for child abuse – an umbrella protection plan – is a much bigger threat than the danger it proposes to solve, because it destroys our freedom.

The same thing can be true of Christians. We can get so focused on being safe from evil, that we give up being free.

The consequences of the authoritarian protective umbrella Bill Gothard and his followers advocate are immensely serious, as such an umbrella robs families of their spiritual freedom, while offering no real protection at all.

What Does God Says About Freedom?

Earlier I explained that true safety only comes from God through His sovereign will in His dealings with His children. We cannot *do* anything to manipulate God’s sovereign will in order to get a guarantee from tragedies in our physical lives. Now, let’s take a look at what God says about freedom.

In Galatians 5:1, Scripture warns us to:

Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. (KJV) In the New International Version, it’s worded this way: ***“It is for freedom that Christ has set***

us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. (NIV)

What Does God Free Us From?

God’s unmerited grace through Jesus Christ frees us from sin (John 8:34-36). As a result, we are also given freedom from the bondage of the law. The New International Version commentary says, of Galatians 5:1:

Since the Jews of Paul’s time spoke of taking the yoke of the law upon themselves, Paul probably alludes to such an expression here. To the Jews taking up the law’s yoke was the essence of religion; to Paul it was assuming the yoke of slavery. He may also be remembering Jesus’ reference to Christians taking his yoke upon them (Mt 11:29-30), but his yoke was “easy” and “light.”

As home-schoolers know, home-schooling is a “light” yoke. Although we all have experienced the frustration of parenting, home-schooling our children is not a heavy burden because it’s a relationship grounded in love between parent and child. On the other hand, many home-schoolers view government schooling as a burdensome yoke for families because it’s based on law, not love. Many of us chose to home-school because we didn’t want to carry that “yoke” of the law. We know public school teachers will never deal with our children in the same loving way we do, as their parents. We all know the difference, don’t we?

How Does God Set Us Free?

God gave us our freedom through the sacrificial Lamb of God – Jesus.

[There is] therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. (Romans 8:1-4, KJV)

What does God say about responding to teaching that encourages us to return to our previous enslavement?

In Matthew 16:12, Jesus warns us:

Then understood they how that he bade [them] not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees. (KJV)

These same teachers, Jesus says in Matthew 23:4, tied up “heavy loads” and put them on the backs of the people. These “heavy loads” came in the form of the Jewish *Talmud*—a collection of oral Jewish traditions first codified during the Babylonian exile and expanded upon until its completion several hundred years after Jesus ascended to Heaven.

Rabbis in Israel today do exactly the same thing. They have created additional fences around the law, because people attempting to follow Judaism now have no way to become “cleansed” should they violate one of the ceremonial laws. They have no grace and have rejected the Messiah who offered them grace.

An example of the difficulty this creates for Orthodox Jews was addressed in an exposé piece in the *International Jerusalem Post* published Nov. 22, 2002: “Pure but not simple.” This article

detailed the *mikvah* (cleansing bath) requirements that rabbis have expanded by defining a woman's unclean days in such a way that causes some women to have "**Halacha infertility.**" Here's a quote from page 23:

Since the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE it was no longer possible for a man to atone for accidentally having sexual relations with a menstruating woman. Therefore, the rabbis went to great lengths to prevent this from happening by establishing a 'fence' around the law. They ruled that a man may not touch his wife even in the most casual way during the time of her menstruation plus seven days and not until she purifies herself in the mikve. He may not even touch her if she is ill and needs assistance, or from the time she begins labor and until she finishes all bleeding and has waited seven clean days. [Joseph must have violated this law when Jesus was born as he helped Mary off the donkey.]

Another restriction was added for women who may spot during the month. The rabbis became experts on various types of uterine bleeding, and depending on the size and color of the stain, a woman must wait seven "clean" days. Women who because of various medical conditions bleed frequently may find themselves unable to have sexual relations with their husbands at all.

The article detailed the reactions of certain Orthodox women who were objecting to the humiliation of submitting to "**underwear police,**" and some who were also grieving their infertility. They were unable to conceive, because they had unusually short cycles of ovulation and were, therefore, "unclean" when they were fertile.

A Fence Built On Man's Opinions Offers No Safety

Don Veinot, Joy Veinot, and Ron Henzel, authors of *A Matter of Basic Principles: Bill Gothard and the Christian Life*, make the case that Gothard has essentially created an Evangelical Talmud for Christians. Gothard's fence is constructed deep and wide in an effort to keep Christians safe from temptation, sickness, and poverty. Unfortunately, the pickets of this fence may appear to be constructed from Bible verses, but they are:

... largely Christian oral traditions which, like the opinions and oral traditions of the Pharisees, have been given a level of authority [by Gothard] nearly equal to scripture.²

Gothard Turns Circumcision Into A Sacrament

Take Gothard's teaching on circumcision, for example, in which he teaches that Christians should circumcise their sons on the eighth day after birth. He even offers printed certificates acknowledging the religious significance of the event with spaces for the signature of a medical attendant and a minister.³

Ultimately, however, Gothard does not seek to justify "Christian Circumcision" on medical grounds but as a matter of biblical "morality." He [Gothard] writes:

'Because this is one subject which is so strongly commanded and reinforced in Scripture, there is no question what the decision of Christian parents should be on the matter.

'It is important to note that circumcision was established before the Law was given. Circumcision goes back to the faith of Abraham. Thus, those who would seek to dismiss circumcision with the Law, have no Scriptural basis to do so.⁴

The Apostle Peter said the requirement of circumcision was

a yoke his people could not bear. While arguing at the council at Jerusalem over whether Gentile believers should be circumcised, Peter said:

Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are. (Acts 15:10-11, NIV).

Gothard's teaching is nothing more than slavery to the law—the very same yoke that Peter so strenuously warned against. Sadly, just as the Jewish people in Israel are bearing the same heavy burdens today that they were when Jesus walked among them 2,000 years ago, Christians, who should walk in freedom, have traded faith in the grace of God for a formula based on works to win God's favor.

Why Is That Yoke Hard To Bear?

A Baptist pastor, home-schooling father, and list-owner of a Yahoo group devoted to discussing the teachings of Bill Gothard (http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Gothard_discussion) explains why neither the Jews of Peter's day nor today's believers can bear this yoke:

The promises for obedience to the law only applied to TOTAL obedience to the law—which no one ever accomplished. This is why the curse of the law always applied—and this is why it makes no sense today to try to preach that WE can gain these so-called "benefits" from picking out some of the laws from here and there and trying to keep them. It didn't work that way back then—and it certainly doesn't work that way now.

Paul tells us, in GAL. 5:3, that to allow oneself to be circumcised was to obligate oneself to keep the **WHOLE** law. The Judaizers had convinced some people to try to keep the law in addition to having faith in Christ—and in the context of the book, it is clear that some had turned to law-keeping **AFTER** having already been saved by faith. That makes this a sanctification issue, not just a justification issue.

What did Paul mean by what he wrote in GAL. 5:3? When a Gentile wanted to become a Jew—he was required to do two things: undergo circumcision, and make a sacrifice at the temple. This signified his decision to put himself UNDER the Law of Moses—and this placed him INTO that covenant that the Israelites promised, back in EX. 24, to obey completely.

Paul was saying that to undergo circumcision was tantamount to admitting that one had to keep the **WHOLE** law. But look at what **JAMES** says about this, in **JAMES 2:10**. He says that if someone keeps the **WHOLE** law—**EXCEPT** for one part of it—he is still **GUILTY** of breaking the whole law. You see the futility of this approach?

Now remember—the failure to obey the whole law brought the curse of the law. And James says that keeping **ALL** of it but one part **IS** breaking the law. This is why Paul says, in GAL. 3:10, that everyone under that law **IS**—automatically, as it were—under its curse—because the law required absolute, total obedience as the only passing grade.

So what did Jesus do about that? Well—Gothard says that we are saved by grace **IN ORDER TO BE ABLE TO KEEP THE LAW**. Is that what the Bible says? Quite the opposite: Paul—just three verses later in GAL.—in GAL.

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repeating a word or phrase such as Jesus, Lord, Father, Friend, or the Jesus Prayer²⁹ during CP. This can be repeated aloud, **"deep within,"** or used as a word to return to when one becomes aware of anything else. Pennington advises, **"Memorize it and slowly repeat it to yourself, allowing it to interact with your inner world of concerns, memories, and ideas."**³⁰ Keating credits the mystical *Cloud of Unknowing* for this idea, and states that it should be a **"love word"** which will take us **"beyond our ordinary consciousness"** as **"an outreach of love to the Infinite."**³¹

In Hinduism, Tibetan Buddhism, Transcendental Meditation, and sometimes in New-Age meditation, a word—called a mantra—is given to the meditator to repeat. This is often the name of a deity, or sometimes a phrase meaning, "I am That," "Not this, not that," or simply, "I am." The purpose of this mantra is self-purification, and to become open to spiritual truths. Repeating a word or phrase over and over is also one of the tools of self-hypnosis.³² Many of the terms used by CP teachers are the same terms used in hypnosis and in Eastern/New-Age teachings (i.e., **"shift in consciousness," "pure consciousness," "emptying the mind," "creating a space," "go beyond thought,"** etc.).³³

Foster quotes heavily from CP teachers and mystics. There are problematic statements such as, **"Let me suggest we take an experiential attitude toward spiritual realities," "We are working with God to determine the future! Certain things will happen in history if we pray rightly;"** and, when praying for others, we should not pray **"if it be Thy will"** to God.³⁴ He advocates using a visualization technique when praying in order to bring about the results.³⁵ He also comments that **"God is not a male deity as opposed to a female deity."**³⁶

The focus on relaxation, repeating a word or phrase, concentrating on breath, detaching from thought, and trying to go beyond reasoning should cause concern. Having learned and practiced various forms of Eastern and New-Age meditation for many years before becoming a Christian, I can attest to the ability to enter a light trance state using the techniques suggested by CP advocates. This state is one which New Agers and others call **"pure consciousness,"** where one is suspended from active thought and the ability to make judgments. In fact, Zen Buddhism teaches that one needs to cultivate the ability to detach and to set aside judgment. The mind is open and receptive, without critical thinking skills in place.³⁷ Although Christians are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, we are not immune to deception or delusion; otherwise, the Bible would not so consistently warn believers about deception and false teachers.

Do techniques bring closeness to God, especially when such techniques are parallel to Eastern religious practices? Ephesians 2:13 tells us, **"But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ."** We draw near to God through Christ (Heb. 4:16), not through techniques. When First John talks about abiding in Christ, it speaks of following Christ's commandments and showing love for each other.

Beyond the West: Wisdom from the East

Keating quotes from a major Buddhist text, the *Diamond Sutra*, to discuss **"letting go"** and tells the reader that although psychic powers such as levitation may result from CP, such powers **"are like the frosting on a cake and we cannot survive on frosting alone,"** and so, if the reader is interested in psychic phenomena, to **"be sure to practice them under an approved master."**³⁸ Such warnings about getting attracted to psychic gifts

resulting from meditation are commonly issued by those teaching Hindu and Buddhist meditation.

Pennington writes of his admiration for **"the great Yogi, Swami Satchidanandaji"** and his (Pennington's) approval of an American professor who, **"in search of true wisdom,"** had gone to India to study under a Hindu Swami.³⁹ He states that for **"most Hindus, Jesus is just one of the many manifestations of the one God"** but that **"each person is entitled to have his or her own chosen deity or manifestation of God. Jesus is the manifestation for the West."**⁴⁰ Pennington also acknowledges that both Merton and another person saw the parallels of CP with Sufi meditation and prayer⁴¹ and he approves of Christians' participation in Transcendental Meditation.⁴² He writes that CP can be learned and used effectively by anyone (i.e., non-Christians), and that he has not **"hesitated"** to share it with anyone.⁴³ One cannot help but wonder: Where is Christ in this?

Another CP teacher heavily influenced by the East is Thomas Merton. Merton was a man of great intelligence, and this is apparent in his writings. But he writes of his meetings with the Dalai Lama in Asia, saying he felt a **"spiritual bond"** with him; he stated that he found parallels between the meditation concepts and methods of the Catholic monks with the Tibetan-Buddhists, and he was even discussing establishing a Tibetan-Buddhist meditation center in the U.S.⁴⁴ He also called Tibetan-Buddhist leader Chogyam Trungpa **"wise"** and a **"genuine spiritual master."**⁴⁵ Merton was even considering being initiated into *dzogchen*, an esoteric Tibetan-Buddhist meditation practice and was thinking of editing a book of Buddhist writings.⁴⁶ These projects were cut short by his sudden accidental death in Asia in December, 1968, although he had previously written books on Zen Buddhism.

Merton's *Asian Journals*, the last words he penned, reveal his fascination with Eastern beliefs and practices. While never showing an inclination to substitute Eastern beliefs for Christianity, he seemed to acknowledge Eastern religions as equally valid and showed a willingness to adapt some of their beliefs into his Christian ones. What else can one think when he writes of seeking advice on initiation into *dzogchen* and thinking of helping to establish a Tibetan-Buddhist meditation center? As a Christian believer, my thoughts would be to dialogue with these Buddhists in order to present Christ to them, not to seek initiation into their practices or to spread their teachings.⁴⁷

Beyond Contemplative Prayer: Back to God's Word

Reflecting on God's Word, in the sense of *thinking it over and letting it sink in*, is a normal way of learning and understanding. Using our mind is not a barrier to understanding God or His Word. In fact, in Matt. 22:37-38 (NIV), Jesus says, **"... love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment."** This references Deut. 6:5, which is rendered in many versions as loving God with all one's **"heart,"** soul, and strength (or might).

The NET Bible gives this explanation about the Hebrew word *lebab* which is translated **"heart"** in Deut. 6.5: **"Heb 'heart.' In OT physiology the heart was considered the seat of the mind or intellect, so that one could think with one's heart."**⁴⁸ Even the Greek word for *heart* (*kardia*) used in Matt. 22 is translated as **"mind"** in other passages. Another explanation: **"The Hebrew word for heart is 'LEB' ... The Greek counterpart is 'KARDIA.' Zodhiates says in his Hebrew Lexicon that the main use of the word heart refers to 'the totality of man's inner or imma-**

rial mature' ... The heart is the seat of your intellect, feelings and will. It is 'almost a synonym for mind.'⁴⁹ *Vine's Expository Dictionary* states: "The heart, in its moral significance in the O.T., includes the emotions, the reason and the will."⁵⁰ The words translated as "understanding," "mind," and "heart" are often interchangeable in the Bible. "The heart in the Scripture is variously used; sometimes for the mind and understanding, sometimes for the will, sometimes for the affections, sometimes for the conscience, sometimes for the whole soul. Generally, it denotes the whole soul of man and all the faculties of it, not absolutely, but as they are all one principle of moral operations, as they all concur in our doing good or evil."⁵¹

The false dichotomy in our culture between mind and heart does not exist in the Bible! Our culture associates feelings and, often, spirituality with the heart, and separates that from thinking; but this is a modern concept (possibly a legacy of the Romantics), not a Biblical one.

We see this fictitious dichotomy in CP between the mind (or reasoning) on the one hand and feelings (or spiritual experiences) on the other. Foster creates a theme of this in one of his books in which he endorses the prayer of the mind apart from the prayer of the heart.⁵² The message comes across clearly that if one is using one's mind, one is unable to truly commune with God – one must go beyond the rational in order to actually experience closeness with God. One must go beyond words into silence to have true union with God. Not only are these concepts not supported by the Bible, but they also set up false expectations and are likely to evoke artificial experiences.

Christian prayer should be taught as it is modeled in the Bible, particularly in the New Testament. Some key passages include: Matt. 5:43-45 (pray for our enemies); Matt. 6:6 (pray without showing off); Matt. 6:9-13 (the Lord's Prayer); Matt. 7:6 (do not pray with repetitions); Matt. 9:38 (pray for God to send workers into His harvest); Matt. 21:22 and James 1:6 (pray in faith); Lk. 18:1-8 (pray/petition without losing heart); ask in the name of Christ (Jn 16:23-24); Rom. 8:25-27 (the Holy Spirit prays for us when we do not know how to pray); 1 Cor. 14:15 (pray with the spirit and with the mind); 1 Thess. 5:17 (pray without ceasing – not mindlessly, but having an attitude of prayer and being in the Lord in all things); and James 5:14-16 (pray for the sick). These prayers use words and thoughts, (except for when the Holy Spirit prays for us); but that does not require techniques or a state of non-thinking, because the Holy Spirit is interceding for us.

A feature article on the Catholic Answers website warns:

Many people assume centering prayer is compatible with Catholic tradition, but in fact the techniques of centering prayer are neither Christian nor prayer. They are at the level of human faculties and as such are an operation of man, not of God. The deception and dangers can be grave.⁵³

Final Words

People promoting CP often present a false dilemma between "neatly packaged" evangelical Christianity oriented toward logic and reason, versus the experiential, mystical aspects of CP. This idea is now becoming more common with the influence of postmodernism. This has been shown to be a false dilemma. By supporting reason and thinking as part of communication with God, one is not discriminating against silent prayer, feelings, or experiences.

Nowhere in the Bible is prayer a technique or a way to go beyond thinking. Creating a whole theology of prayer apart from the Bible is dangerous precisely because we are entering an area

fraught with subjectivism, truth based on experience, and therefore, an area where we can be deceived. CP teachers tell us that prayer is listening to and having "divine union" with God,⁵⁴ but the Bible presents prayer as words and thoughts. CP tells us to focus inward, but the Bible admonishes us to focus outward on the Lord. An evaluation of CP reveals it to be a mélange of New-Age and Eastern-tinged techniques and concepts that exist outside the Bible.

CP is a misnomer since it is neither contemplation nor prayer as found in the Bible. We should be wary of any instruction that advises us to:

- ♦ Breathe a certain way before or during prayer
- ♦ Maintain a certain posture or bodily position
- ♦ Repeat a word or phrase, or use a word or phrase to stay "focused"
- ♦ Go beyond thinking or thought
- ♦ Be in silence in order to truly pray
- ♦ Believe that CP is true prayer

All Scripture is quoted from the NASB unless otherwise noted.



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ENDNOTES

¹ Thomas Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart* (Rockport, MA: Benedict's Monastery, 1992), 57. ² Richard Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (NY: HarperCollins, 1992), 155.

³ M. Basil Pennington, *An Invitation to Centering Prayer* (Liguori, MO: Cistercian Abbey of Spencer, Inc., 2001), 20. ⁴ Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (Abbey of Gethsemani, Inc., 1961), 4. ⁵ The Rev. John D. Dreher, "The Danger of Contemplative Prayer," <http://www.catholic.com/thisrock/1997/9711fea1.asp>; also <http://www.saint-mike.org/Library/Occult/CenteringPrayer.html>

⁶ Keating, 89. ⁷ Alan Watts, *The Way of Zen* (NY: Pantheon Books, Inc., 1957), 55. The writer of this article studied both Tibetan and Zen Buddhism and was taught Tibetan and Zen-Buddhist meditation by teachers in those traditions; she practiced both forms of meditation.

⁸ For a fuller discussion of this passage, see my article at http://cana.userworld.com/cana_meditation_Psalms.html

⁹ The Treasury of David at (<http://bible.crosswalk.com/Commentaries/TreasuryofDavid/tod.cgi?book=ps&chapter=046&verse=010>). ¹⁰ Foster, 156-157. ¹¹ Keating, 44, 57, 74, 90, 91. ¹² *Ibid.*, 36.

¹³ M. Basil Pennington, *Centered Living: The Way of Centering Prayer* (NY: Image, Doubleday, 1988), 51, 92-93, 192. ¹⁴ Catholic mystics known as the "desert fathers." ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 53, 77. ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 95. ¹⁷ Mike Perschon, "Desert Youth Worker," <http://youthspecialties.com/articles/topics/spirituality/desert.php>

¹⁸ *Ibid.* ¹⁹ Matt. 27:51; Mk. 15:38; Lk. 23:45; Heb. 10:19-20. ²⁰ Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 7. ²¹ Keating, 74. ²² *Ibid.*, 127. ²³ Thomas Merton, *Contemplative Prayer* (The Merton Legacy Trust, 1969; Garden City, NY: Image Books Edition, Division of Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1971), 70.

²⁴ Joseph Goldstein, "Exercise/Easting" in Jean Smith, ed., *Breath Sweeps Mind: A First Guide to Meditation Practice* (NY: Riverhead Books, 1998), 184. ²⁵ Watts, 20. ²⁶ Shunryu Suzuki, "The Swinging Door" in *Breath Sweeps Mind: A First Guide to Meditation Practice*, 158. ²⁷ Merton, *Seeds of New Contemplation*, ²⁸ Pennington, *Centered Living*, 199.

²⁹ "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." ³⁰ Pennington, *An Invitation to Centered Prayer*, 50. ³¹ Keating, 51. ³² "A Lesson in Self-Hypnosis," <http://www.barbaraford-hammond.com/selfhyp.htm>; "How Can I Learn Self-Hypnosis?" http://www.ingenious.com/ingenious_page_24_self_hypnosis.htm; "A Short Essay on Auto-Hypnosis," http://p2.hostingprod.com/@mystinar.net/A_Short_Essay_on_Auto-hypnosis.htm; "Live More of Your Life with Self-Hypnosis," <http://www.maxpages.com/autohypnosis>

³³ See *Breath Sweeps Mind and Thich Nhat Hanh, The Miracle of Mindfulness* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976). ³⁴ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (NY: HarperCollins, HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 23, 35, 37. ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 41-44. ³⁶ Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, xi. ³⁷ The meditator is conscious, but there are alterations in the brain patterns. ³⁸ Keating, 7, 8, 74. ³⁹ Pennington, *Centered Living*, 7. ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 7, 191.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 191. Sufism is a mystical offshoot of Islam that started in Persia. ⁴² Dreher, Note: Transcendental Meditation involves an initiation honoring dead gurus, and the mantras are usually the names of Hindu deities.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 192. ⁴⁴ Merton, *The Asian Journals* (New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1975), 125, 166, 179. ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 30. Note: Trungpa was the leader of the particular school of Tibetan Buddhism I studied in the late 1970's. Trungpa established several centers in the U.S. ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 30, 31. ⁴⁷ In fact, it is from these very teachings (Tibetan Buddhism and others) that I was delivered in late 1990!

⁴⁸ NET Bible, <http://netbible.bible.org/> ⁴⁹ Greg Brown, "The Dangers of Hypnosis," <http://logosresourcepages.org/hypnosis.html> ⁵⁰ "Heart=Mind: A Biblical Perspective," <http://www.biblestudymanuals.net/heart.htm> [W. E. Vine, ed. F. F. Bruce, *Vines Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Revell Co., 1981) 206-207]. ⁵¹ Greg Herrick, "The Seat of Sin, The Heart," http://www.bible.org/page.asp?page_id=858 ⁵² Foster, *Prayer: The Heart's True Home*, 136 (this theme is found throughout the book). ⁵³ Dreher. ⁵⁴ Foster, *Prayer: The Heart's True Home*, 159 (this view is also found in Keating and Pennington).

“Freedom” Continued From page 19

3:13—says that Christ REDEEMED us from the curse of the law. To be redeemed is to be bought from slavery.

To be UNDER the law was to be under its curse automatically—to be in slavery to it. But Jesus died to redeem us from that curse. Some say—sure, we are free from the CURSE, but not free from the law itself. But that is manifestly absurd; a law without a penalty is a nullity—and to be free from the penalty automatically means we are free from the law that IMPOSED that penalty. And it makes no sense at all to say we are under the AUTHORITY of a command, but not under the PENALTY attached TO that command.

Besides—the Bible says too many times that “we are not UNDER the Law”—and that clearly means “not under its jurisdiction.” And Paul says, in the very next chapter of Galatians, that Jesus came to redeem those who were under the law. That is—to buy their freedom from the bondage of the law.

In 5:1, Paul refers to the law as a “yoke of slavery.” Peter, in ACTS 15, calls the law “a yoke that neither we nor our fathers were able to bear”—and they both opposed the efforts to put Gentiles under that burden. The decision of the council in ACTS 15 was to NOT put the Gentiles under that burden.

Gothard says that obeying those laws brings prosperity and health. The Bible says that NO ONE ever did this – or could do it. Paul and Peter say that going back to that old law is going back to slavery – and Paul tells us to stand firm in our freedom and do NOT let that happen! Whom should we listen to?

The biggest danger to a Christian is not a physical danger like sickness, disease or poverty. All these things are temporary, and besides, no true formula is available to us to prevent tragedies such as Job experienced. Because of Adam’s sin, we have bodies that decay, and we live in a fallen world filled with pain and suffering for all of humanity. That’s a fact. Seeking spiritual formulas is nothing more than idolatry, because we are trying to reach God based on procedures rather than pursuing a relationship with Him based on His love for us and our love for Him. This love comes from the indwelling Holy Spirit who gives us the mind of Christ so that we can know what loving God really means.

The Biggest Danger We All Face Is OURSELVES:

- Our depraved nature;
- Our tendency to be deceived; and
- Our efforts to elevate our desire for physical comfort above our relationship to God in Christ Jesus.

It is for these reasons that false teaching can be difficult to spot.

Is It Always Safe To Follow The Leader?

Many Christians may look to experts—nationally known Christian leaders—for help in understanding Scripture. They figure that such leaders surely cannot be deceived. If respected leaders say something is biblical, then there is no need to look further. It must be true.

Is Such Blanket Trust In Church Leaders Warranted?

Scripture gives a warning in the Book of John chapter seven.

As Jesus taught the people during the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles, “*many in the crowd put their faith in him*” (John 7:31). The Pharisees, who, in their time, were experts in interpreting the Scriptures, heard the crowd whispering and exclaiming Jesus was the Messiah. As a result, they tried to arrest him. They had already decided Jesus was a false prophet.

Then a funny thing happened. The temple guards came back empty handed. There was no Jesus in handcuffs, just amazed guards.

“*Why didn’t you bring him in?*” the Pharisees asked. (v.45)

“*No one ever spoke the way this man does,*” the guards replied (v.46).

Furious, the Pharisees said, “*You mean he has deceived you also? Has any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him?*” (v.47-48) Then, they proceeded to curse the “mob” that did believe, saying these common folk knew nothing of the law.

Hmm . . . how interesting they would said that, because standing right there among them was, in fact, a Pharisee who did believe. “*One of their own number*” (v.50), Nicodemus, thought it wise to quietly ask a question without revealing his allegiance: “*Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?*” (v.51) Earlier in v.13, we find no one would publicly say what they thought of Jesus because they feared the Jews.

Here is an important lesson for us today: Putting blind faith in our religious leaders is not a good thing. The Pharisees had not looked at Jesus’ teaching in-depth. They made a shallow appraisal. In fact, they exposed their ignorance when they said they didn’t even know where Jesus had come from.

Instead, we find a strong degree of self-interest at work, as these leaders were more concerned about maintaining the favor of men and their position than accepting God’s truth. (John 11:48, 12:42-43) They thought it more convenient not to investigate fully Jesus’ claim to be the Messiah.

In this account, many of the most prominent religious leaders of God’s people were wrong, while some in the “mob”—in Greek the word translated *mob* can indicate *common folk*—were more discerning than their leaders and understood the truth.

Just because a famous Christian leader says something is biblical is not enough to assuage all doubts. Instead, we are to be like the Bereans. (Acts 17:11) These people, some of them common folk, were called “noble” by God because they searched the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul preached was true.

Is Bill Gothard teaching the truth? The question is an urgent one for home-schooling families who cherish freedom, because Gothard doesn’t think you are capable of being free without boxing yourself in with his Evangelical Talmud.

Consider the following excerpt from *A Matter of Basic Principles*:

The Apostle Paul wanted the Christians in Galatia to understand that when it comes to relating to God, there are only two ways. You can try to relate to Him on the basis of law or on the basis of grace. If you try law, you will always fail. You will be a slave and you will never be free. But if you try grace, you will not only succeed in having a relationship with God, but you will be one of His adopted sons! This was amazing stuff back in the first century because Paul made it very clear in Galatians that even women, who were by no means treated as equals in Roman society, would share the same status before God as men did.

Very frequently, one’s starting-point determines

one's ending point, and when it comes to having a close and fruitful relationship with God, everything hinges on one's understanding of His grace. Starting with a definition of grace that's based on what is earned, will lead to a never-ending bondage to performance. In his essay "How His Teachings Will Put You Into The Bondage of Legalism" John A Miller observes:

'Mr. Gothard teaches a definition of the Grace of God that is in complete opposition to what is taught in scripture. His definition of grace is "An active force within us giving us the desire and the power to do things God's way." This definition has nothing to do with the complete and unmerited favor of God that I've come to know and understand. Consider the following verse: For it is by grace you have been saved through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — Ephesians 2:8.

'You can't read these verses and come away believing anything like what Gothard teaches as a definition of Grace. And if there is heresy at the cornerstone of his belief system, how can you accept anything Mr. Gothard teaches?'

Miller raises a valid point. Bill Gothard is in the business (and a very lucrative business it has been) of telling Christians how they should live. But if his teachings on the very basics of the Christian life are faulty, how much more faulty must they be when he addresses the deeper issues of living out the faith in the real world?

So how does Bill Gothard expect believers to relate to their Heavenly Father? Don Veinot interviewed the father of a family who had been involved with IBLP [Institute in Basic Life Principles] for nearly 30 years. The family left in large part due to seeing how the Institute actually operated "up close and personal." The family's daughter had gone to work at the orphanage which IBLP operates in Russia. The father and mother began receiving long distance calls from their daughter who was very distressed by what she was seeing there. They flew to Russia and spent time at the orphanage. What did they experience?

'... we sat in on a meeting with seven orphanage couples and Bill. We were discussing rules, law, grace, etc. and Bill made the statement, "Christians can't handle freedom." The way he said it appeared to us that he was there to set the boundaries for us.'⁵

Don't Let Someone Else Build A Wall Between You And Christ

Just as there are many public school advocates who want to set boundaries for home-schooling families, there are also false teachers advocating legalism who want to set boundaries for Christians.

As a home-school leader, you willingly pay the price for maintaining the freedom to home-school. Won't you also consider the importance of protecting and defending the spiritual freedom God gave you through the sacrifice of his son, Jesus Christ?

God wouldn't give us something at such a great cost if He did not want us, in fact, *long* for us, to have that very thing. True *freedom* in Christ has no real tension with true *spiritual safety*. The two are in perfect harmony. It is only in our seeking to avoid pain and suffering in this life by legalistic practices that we find there is a conflict between freedom and safety. When we allow the yeast of the Pharisees into our homes, we give up our freedom and gain no real safety, either, because legalism's fence has no true

power to protect us or to wall us off from danger. Instead, it walls us in as we lose both our spiritual freedom and our spiritual safety when we stop depending solely on God, Who alone, can give us the spiritual life we long for. We also gradually become enslaved to the fear that always comes when we approach God through our own efforts of legalistically trying to please Him instead of depending upon His grace to work His sanctifying power in us. We are walled off from the grace of God—"alienated from Christ" (Gal. 5:4, NIV).

There is no power to restrain sin – and no spiritual safety in Bill Gothard's Institute in Basic Life Principles. His principles are the principles of this world, based on human commands.

It is when we follow the basic principles of this world that we find these principles are in direct opposition to the spiritual truth that comes from Heaven—the truth of freedom that Christ wants us to have. He suffered a sinner's death on a cross so we could have it!

What does the Bible say about these basic principles?

So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world. (Gal. 4:3, NIV)

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ ... Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: 'Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!' These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence. (Col. 2:8, 20-23, NIV).

Won't you defend your spiritual freedom for the sake of your children? Won't you help alert other home-schoolers to this threat to our freedom in Christ? The Apostle Paul warned the Galatians about false brothers who infiltrate the ranks of Christians "... *to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves.*" (Gal. 2:4, NIV). This very thing is happening in home-school groups across our country. Please share this message with others. 📢

For a free copy of this tract in PDF and HTML formats, visit www.undergroundbride.com/gothard.html.

Visit www.midwestoutreach.org for information on Veinots' and Henzel's research on Bill Gothard's teachings.



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Endnotes

¹ Don Veinot, Joy Veinot and Ron Henzel, *A Matter of Basic Principles: Bill Gothard and the Christian Life*, Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc., Lombard, Ill. 2003 p. 251-252.

² Ibid p. 46.

³ [MTIA] *How to Make a Wise Medical Decision on Circumcision* (1990; Oak Brook, IL Medical Training Institute of America [IBLP], rev. 1992). In *A Matter of Basic Principles: Bill Gothard and the Christian Life* on page 84, Ron Henzel asserts, in a dialogue with Bill Gothard, that, in one of Gothard's proposed revisions of materials discussing the topic of circumcision, "circumcision has been elevated to a sacrament of the church!"

⁴ Veinot, etal. p. 130-131.

⁵ Ibid, p. 159-161.

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