

# Emergent Detergent:

## Hating for Jesus — How NOT to clean the morals of the USA

By L.L. (Don) & Joy Veinot

**T**he Marriage Amendment is much in the news these days. The lines are being drawn between those who believe the definition of marriage as it has been held for millennia, and those who glibly would redefine the very bedrock institution of civilization. Even within Evangelical circles there are those who are unsure what to think or teach on this issue. For example, Emergent Church leader Brian McLaren writes:

**Frankly, many of us don't know what we should think about homosexuality. We've heard all sides but no position has yet won our confidence so that we can say "it seems good to the Holy Spirit and us."<sup>1</sup>**

So uncertain is McLaren of what to think about homosexuality, that he proposes the Church takes *no position on it at all* for at least five years:

**Perhaps we need a five-year moratorium on making pronouncements. In the meantime, we'll practice prayerful Christian dialogue, listening respectfully, disagreeing agreeably. When decisions need to be made, they'll be admittedly provisional. We'll keep our ears attuned to scholars in biblical studies, theology, ethics, psychology, genetics, sociology, and related fields. Then in five years, if we have clarity, we'll speak; if not, we'll set another five years for ongoing reflection.<sup>2</sup>**

Many are probably shocked that he would take such a position since the Bible could not be clearer about the subject; and the Bible is, ostensibly at least, still the Evangelical's guide in moral matters.

Some of McLaren's concerns stem from the abusiveness with which he believes homosexuals are treated by Evangelicals.

We disagree with McLaren that Evangelicals, as a group, are abusive toward homosexuals; unless *abusive* is redefined as believing and teaching that homosexuality is a sin. However, there are groups in the public square—*commonly believed to be Evangelicals*—who are *very* abusive, even hateful, towards homosexuals.

The truth is, however, that these groups *are not* Evangelical and are as far from Biblical thinking and teaching as is Brian McLaren though, perhaps, on opposite ends of the heretical spectrum.



### A Picketing Law

Up until recently, if we mentioned the name *Fred Phelps* and/or *Westboro Baptist Church* within an Evangelical setting, almost no one would know who we were talking about. On the other hand, it would be difficult to find a member of the liberal media or a homosexual activist who was not familiar with

both the man and his so-called church.

Fred Phelps started out picketing homosexual events with signs proclaiming "**God Hates Fags**" and "**No Fags in Heaven.**" Once Phelps and his crew realized they were no longer receiving much press coverage from their picketing of these homosexual events, they decided that a change of venue was in order. So, to call more attention to themselves and reach the public with their inflammatory "gospel," they began picketing the funerals of soldiers who had died in Iraq. If you have a hard time connecting the logical dots between picketing at homosexual events and soldier's funerals, you must realize that their "gospel" is still evolving, and their god is merely following their twisted logic:

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### "Detergent" Continued from page 1

Before members of the Westboro Baptist Church started appearing at the funerals of slain American soldiers to get out their message that "God hates fags" (and any country that tolerates them), they used to show up at the funerals of AIDS victims. It is their view that AIDS is God's way of punishing gays for behaving sinfully. That view has now evolved to this one: **Dead soldiers are God's way of punishing America for tolerating gay people.**<sup>3</sup>

Following Phelps' lead are other groups such as [www.repentamerica.com](http://www.repentamerica.com) and [www.streetpreach.com](http://www.streetpreach.com).

Harry Brooks, a friend of the MCOI ministry who has spent the last few years researching this phenomenon for us, recently told us:

**The common thread among all these groups is that they hate homosexuals in particular and other sinners on the side. You'll see banners condemning other sins, but the biggest ones concern gays. I've personally seen t-shirts with "Got Aids Yet?" on them and have seen them with their banners deliberately charge into a group of homosexuals, forcing the police to come to their assistance. I have heard them use megaphones to call the homosexuals all kinds of derogatory names. Trust me when I say this: If I was not already a Christian and ran into them, I would not be inspired to become a Christian. And this is the greatest danger with these groups—that, and the fact that with their outrageous antics, they open the door for persecution of real Christians.**

Who is Fred Phelps, and what motivates him? After all, such behavior will not aid in any true Christian outreach, nor does it have the slightest chance of bringing lost sinners to real repentance and salvation. No, contrarily, what drives him *is not* the love of God for lost people, but it can be summed up in one word: *Hate*. He gives his bio on his web site:

**Fred Phelps was born Nov. 13, 1929, in Meridian, Mississippi. Graduated Meridian High at 16 with highest academic honors, American Legion Citizenship Award, track letter, Bausch-Lomb Science Award, Eagle Scout, Principal Appointment to West Point Military Academy. The summer following graduation, he had a profound religious experience, gave up West Point, enrolled instead for Bible/ministerial training at Bob Jones College, Cleveland, Tennessee (later moving with them as they transitioned to Bob Jones University, Greenville, South Carolina). Ordained by the Southern Baptists Sept. 8, 1947. Met his wife, Margie M. Phelps, in 1951 while preaching at the Arizona Bible Institute in Phoenix, Arizona. Their marriage May 15, 1952 has been blessed of God with 13 children, 54 grandchildren (to date) and 5 great-grandchildren (to date). Has served as Pastor of Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, Kansas, since Nov. 1955. WBC has conducted more than 22,000 picketing demonstrations across America and some foreign countries during the past 12 years—aimed at showing Americans their transgression (Isa. 58:1) and causing America to know her abominations. Ezek. 16:12.<sup>4</sup>**

**Fred Phelps is a Five-Point Calvinist\* who urges all people to carefully study and discern what are the signs of the times (Mat. 16:3) in the light of the Scriptures rightly divided (2 Tim. 2:15) and church history from Adam to now. For more biographical info, pictorial record including stills and video footage, and to hear his sermons — Bread from Westboro Oven — please consult [www.godhatesfags.com](http://www.godhatesfags.com), [www.god-hatesamerica.com](http://www.god-hatesamerica.com), and [www.fredthemovie.com](http://www.fredthemovie.com).**

Although Fred Phelps was ordained as a Southern Baptist, neither he nor his church are affiliated with the Southern Baptists. According to an entry about him in Wikipedia:

**His group has slightly less than 100 members, 90 of whom are related to Phelps through blood or marriage, although his daughter Shirley claims that only 80% are related.<sup>5</sup>**

In addition to being an ordained pastor, Fred was a licensed attorney until he was disbarred in 1991. Eleven of his thirteen children are also attorneys, and it appears that the church raises much of its funding through litigation. Will the recent passing of anti-picketing laws prove to be a financial windfall for Phelps and the Westboro Baptist Church?

It would be a mistake to regard them as either Fundamentalist or Evangelical. The Phelpsians, as we refer to them, do not regard themselves in either camp, but they are cultic in their views. Anyone outside of their little group is part of "Christendom" and fair game. Shirley Phelps-Roper says:

**They can pass all the laws in Christendom, but they can never stop us from telling them that God is punishing them. If they interfere with our capacity to cause America to know her abominations, we have no choice, we have to sue them.<sup>6</sup>**

Keep in mind that when a supposedly Christian group derogatorily refers to the Church at large as “Christendom,” they are usually a cult group—outside of the faith. But we digress ...

In the Phelpsian view, America is a Christian nation with a Christian government and is, therefore, the “Christendom” against whom God has called Phelps and Westboro (His faithful remnant) to speak judgment. Sort of a modern-day Jeremiah ...

Westboro’s first picket occurred in their hometown of Topeka, KS in 1991 (the same year he was disbarred), but they gained national notoriety in 1998 when they picketed the funeral of Matthew Shepherd with their giant signs. Wikipedia states:

**Phelps rose to national prominence in 1998 when he and congregants from Westboro picketed the funeral of gay murder victim Matthew Shepard, delivering an obscenity-laden sermon (with focus given to graphic descriptions of homosexual sex acts) informing the mourners that Shepard had gone to hell and that everyone in attendance would join him there. Ever since, Phelps and Westboro have remained in the national limelight for their regular pickets of events ranging from gay pride parades to the funerals of soldiers killed in the Iraq War to grand opening of Starbucks.<sup>7</sup>**

Rather than being brokenhearted and compassionate about the plight of sinners who know not the Savior, Phelps *glories* in the death and damnation of the lost:

He runs the infamous “**God Hates Fags**” web site, featuring among other things, a timeclock: “**Matthew Shepard has been in hell for 1607 days.**” Phelpsisms:

**“You can’t preach the Bible without preaching hatred.”**

**“God doesn’t hate them because they’re fags; they’re fags because God hates them.”<sup>8</sup>**

Turning the true Gospel—that God so *loved* the world that he gave His only Son as its hope of redemption (John 3:16-18)—on its head; according to Phelps, *God so hates the world that he created them homosexual!*

Phelps is not preaching the Gospel (the Death, Burial and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, 1 Cor. 15:1-4) in order to bring about repentance and restoration, but rather he is simply proclaiming his message of how much God hates sinners—especially homosexuals—and personally demonstrating that he hates them as well. Regardless of how we may feel about Phelps’ repulsive tactics, the question at hand is: Is he right? Does God hate sinners—especially homosexuals, and does He want us to hate them as well? Or has Phelps done a number on Scripture to arrive at his conclusions and message, and does he *not* represent God at all? It is very easy to hate sinners—especially if we “forget” *our own* sinfulness.

## Prophet to a Theocratic Nation

It may be that at some time in the past, Phelps possessed sound hermeneutics and exegesis;<sup>\*\*</sup> but if he did, he has long-since abandoned both in favor of Scripture twisting. We don’t have to go much farther than the two theme verses cited in his bio as to what he claims is his calling:

**WBC has conducted more than 22,000 picketing demonstrations across America and some foreign countries during the past 12 years—aimed at showing Americans their transgression (Isa. 58:1) and causing America to know her abominations. Ezek. 16:2.<sup>9</sup>**

Isaiah and Ezekiel were *prophets called by God* to speak to God’s people (Israel) who were living in a theocracy (a nation ruled by God). The nation of Israel was in rebellion, and God was using these two prophets to show Israel her transgressions. By drawing on these passages and applying them to himself and the Westboro Baptist Church, Phelps is claiming the same prophetic status as that of Isaiah and Ezekiel. If we apply the biblical tests to identify true prophets,<sup>10</sup> we discover that although Fred Phelps and his group may, indeed, be a prophet, they are a false prophet and not a prophet of God.

The misuse of the Isaiah and Ezekiel passages is also exposed when one remembers that *America is not the nation of Israel!* True, many of our nation’s foundational principles were from a Judeo-Christian world view and America’s development was strongly influenced by that world view. Nevertheless, it was *not* founded as a theocracy but has always maintained a separation of church and state. Originally, the separation was designed to *keep the government out of the church;*<sup>11</sup> whereas today, it is being misused to keep the church from influencing the government—but that is another article for another day. ☺ The point here is that the entire basis for the Phelpsian ministry is biblically false. No matter how

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### **"Detergent" Continued from page 3**

some may *wish* America was God's land in God's hand, it is simply not so. Ripping Old Testament verses concerning theocratic Israel out of their context and applying these texts to secular and pluralistic twenty-first century America is completely unbiblical. There are many Christians in America, but if you think America is a "Christian nation" with a majority of *Christian lawmakers*, I have a bridge in Brooklyn to sell you. ☺

## **God Created Them That Way**

One of the arguments that is used by homosexuals to legitimize their sexual choices is that "God made me this way." We and many others have written and taught that homosexuality is a sin like all other sexual sin. It is a *choice* people make to engage in homosexual behavior, just as people *choose* to engage in adultery, sex outside of marriage, pedophilia, etc. People may be predisposed *to desire* to commit one type of sin over another—one may be more susceptible to temptation to cheat on their spouse, one may be tempted to pornography, one may be tempted to have sex with children or people of the same sex—but *temptation is not destiny!* Being *tempted* to steal does not make you a thief; *stealing makes you a thief!* Lying makes you a liar! Temptation only makes you desire to do wrong; it cannot *make* you do wrong. Even if in the future evidence is discovered showing a physical (i.e. genetic) reason behind homosexual temptation, or other temptations, that wouldn't demonstrate it was God's doing. Rather, like all other sin, it would be the result of the Fall.

Well, strangely enough, Fred Phelps is putting forth the same argument that the gay activists are using. To paraphrase one of his quotes we used earlier, God doesn't hate homosexuals because they are gay—rather, He created them gay *because He hates them*. According to Phelps, they were predestined from before the foundations of the world to be gay and they never had—do not now have and never will have—a choice to be anything other than gay. Phelps and the Westboro Baptist Church have appointed themselves to communicate God's hatred (of the gays He supposedly predestined!) publicly and as often as possible. It seems ridiculous to despise people for doing or being the very thing you teach that God purposely created them to do and to be. And what kind of god would this be who would purposely create people completely unable to control their homosexual *behavior*—again, not to be confused with homosexual *temptation*—and then hate them for it and condemn them to everlasting torment?

How do we reconcile such a hate-filled message with the biblical message that God *LOVES* sinners—so much that He gave His only Son in order to reconcile lost and rebellious sinners to Himself? (John 3:16-21) Because of this *loving* sacrifice, a clear choice—between perishing and receiving eternal life—was offered to all of us.

In Romans 3:21-30, the Apostle Paul outlines that *all* people are sinners (*every* human being; Romans 3:23), and we may be justified by *grace* (*grace* means *unmerited kindness*) through

simple faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). Because all of us are sinners, there is no room for pride or boasting on our part because our redemption comes *entirely from the hand of God* (Romans 3:26-27).

We do not live in ancient theocratic Israel. We are not called to be prophets of doom and damnation to our nation, the world, and lost sinners. No, we are called to be "... *Christ's ambassadors* ..." (2 Corinthians 5:18-21) urging sinners—pleading with them—to "*be reconciled to God*" who *loves* them, so they *will not* have to face judgment and damnation! And what is an *ambassador*? He or she is a *diplomat*! We are supposed to be *diplomatic*, not harshly confrontational. If there is one thing Phelps cannot be accused of, it is diplomacy!

## **A Blind Eye to Sin?**

There are some who may be asking the question, "Are you suggesting that we turn a blind eye to sin?" Our answer, although biblical, may prove to be unsatisfying for some, particularly those who are proud, like the Pharisees of old, that they are not like other sinners (see Luke 18:11). The clearest teaching on this is found in 1 Corinthians 5:9-13:

*I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people*

*of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES.*

The Apostle Paul's point is abundantly clear. We are not to pronounce judgment on those *outside the church*—that is God's domain alone. Rather, we are to

live as representatives (ambassadors) of the Redeemer and Reconciler and proclaim not a message of hate, but one of hope.

Sin *within the Church* should be addressed by the Church. Believers are to live in a state of grace, not in bondage to fear, and *forever accepted* in Christ their Redeemer. Yet, believers are called to strive to live a holy and pure life. None of us will ever achieve perfection or freedom from temptation, but our attitude should never be one of *accepting* our besetting sins. Instead, we should continue to fight the good fight and never give up. Sin that is brought to light *within the Church* should be judged. It is so much easier to do the opposite, isn't it: To judge outsiders, while pretending that we and fellow Christians are, if not perfect, at least not so bad?

## **Why Does Phelps Matter?**

What is the point of writing about Phelps and his little hate gig? After all, he leads a very small cult group, and there are so many more, bigger and, perhaps, more dangerous cult groups about whom to write. Basically, there are several reasons that we decided to write about Phelps.




First, Phelps is seen and portrayed as an *Evangelical Christian* by the news media, who are only too happy to show Evangelicals behaving badly. As we have pointed out, Phelps is *not* an Evangelical Christian—he preaches another god and a different gospel. To even call Phelps’ hate-filled message a “gospel” is extremely far fetched since the word *gospel* means *good news*, and Phelps has none to offer.

But since Phelps is *mistakenly seen* as an Evangelical by people who aren’t able to discern the difference, he hurts our efforts to evangelize the lost with the true Gospel of God’s love and reconciliation. If people equate Evangelicals as being like Phelps or see the Christian God as being the way Phelps represents Him, they likely would run the other way. He is a *false prophet*, an embarrassment, and an impediment.

Secondly, in reaction to Phelps and company and to score a few cheap points with the public, our ever-helpful government has passed a law (rarely a good thing) that keeps people from picketing at soldiers’ funerals, which was both unneeded and a further erosion of freedom of speech. The Phelpsian picketing was being taken care of already—by veterans’ groups that showed up to counter Phelps’ presence. These veterans completely overwhelmed the numbers of the Phelpsians, and the Phelpsians ... well ... skedaddled. ☺

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, Phelps is a good example to us—to show us how *NOT* to behave, and indeed, how not to *regard* the lost. If we are honest, we can admit that it is just not natural to love people who we consider as contributing greatly to the moral downfall of the nation we love. In fact, it is natural for people who love their country to fear and loathe people who are hell bent on taking America further down the road to Sodom and Gomorrah.

But the Bible *clearly* tells us that our battle “... *is NOT against flesh and blood, but against ... spiritual forces of evil ...*” (Eph. 6:12, emphasis ours). The flesh and blood PEOPLE, whom we so easily can view as “the enemy,” are deeply loved by God and are utterly lost without Him. So, it behooves

us to take a good, hard look at Phelps to remind us of our mission and of our own sinful nature, to take stock and, perhaps, correct our attitude toward the lost. No, we would surely never carry a hateful placard, but do we carry a hateful heart? We should not, and we must fight against that with the Lord’s help. 

\*5-Point Calvinists believe:

- Total depravity of man,
- Unconditional election by God,
- Limited atonement only for God’s elect,
- Irresistible grace of God,
- Perseverance of saints’ salvation

\*\*hermeneutics=in theology, the standard laws for biblical interpretation, exegesis=critical analysis of a text.



Don and Joy Veinot are co-founders of Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc., which is a national apologetics ministry and mission to new religious movements based in Wonder Lake, IL. He and Joy, his wife of 35 years, have been involved in discernment ministry as missionaries to New Religious Movements since 1987. Don is on the Board of Directors for Evangelical Ministries to New Religions (EMNR), a consortium of discernment ministries. In addition to being staff researchers and writers for the *Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc. Journal* and co-authors of *A Matter of Basic Principles: Bill Gothard and the Christian Life*, they have been published in the *CRI Journal*, *PFO Quarterly Journal*, *Campus Life Magazine* and other periodicals. Don was ordained to the ministry by West Suburban Community Church of Lombard, IL at the Garden of Gethsemane in Jerusalem, Israel in March of 1997. They have two adult children and two grandchildren.

#### Endnotes:

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3. You connect your dots, they connect theirs; Gil Spencer, of the Times Staff, 06/07/2006, [delcotimes.com](http://www.delcotimes.com/site/news.cfm?BRD=1675&dept_id=18168&newsid=16748677&PAG=461&rft=9); [http://www.delcotimes.com/site/news.cfm?BRD=1675&dept\\_id=18168&newsid=16748677&PAG=461&rft=9](http://www.delcotimes.com/site/news.cfm?BRD=1675&dept_id=18168&newsid=16748677&PAG=461&rft=9)
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5. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rev.\\_Fred\\_Phelps](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rev._Fred_Phelps)
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7. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rev.\\_Fred\\_Phelps](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rev._Fred_Phelps)
8. <http://www.rotten.com/library/bio/religion/fred-phelps/>
9. Brief Bio of Fred Phelps; <http://www.godhatesfags.com/main/phelps-bio.html>
10. In Deuteronomy 13:1-5, a false prophet may perform miraculous signs but proclaim a false message. To our knowledge Phelps has not performed a miraculous sign but does proclaim a false message. In Deuteronomy 18:20-22, false and prophets who spoke “presumptuously” and those who lived in that theocracy were to stone false prophets. Since we do not live in a theocracy, we do not follow this injunction; but we should expose them as false teachers
11. Library of Congress copy of Jefferson’s original letter found at <http://www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/9806/danpre.html>:  
*“Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should “make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,” thus building a wall of separation between Church & State.”*

## We're Sorry

We apologize for the delay of this issue of the *MCOI Journal* due to moving (both the ministry headquarters and Don and Joy’s home). We thank you for your prayers and encouragement during this process as we have been focusing primarily on answering e-mails, phone calls, and letters while we were getting set up and organized. The new facilities are a blessing and will allow us to function much better, but it did put us behind schedule by a few months.

Thank you for your understanding.

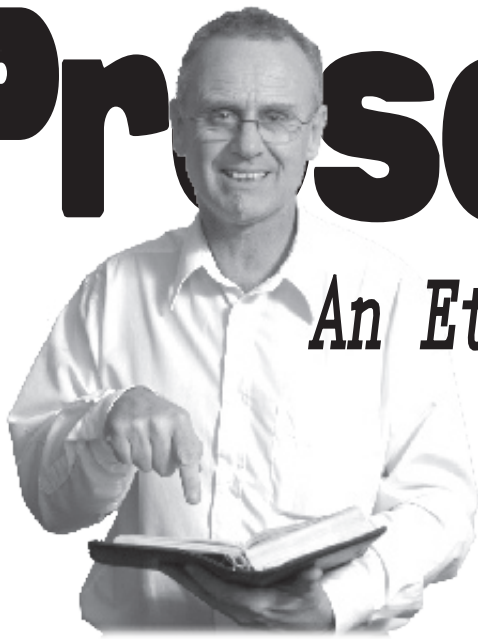
*Don, Joy and the MCOI team*

# Proselytizing:

## An Ethical or Unethical Act?

### Defending the Ethics of Persuasion

By Jonathan Miles



**P**roselytizing, especially Christian proselytizing in foreign contexts, has come under much fire of late. Some recent indications of the growing discontent with proselytizing include India's anti-conversion movement and Sri Lanka's pending "Act to Safe Guard Religious Freedom" which states:

**No person shall convert or attempt to convert or aid or abet acts of conversion of another to a different religion.<sup>1</sup>**

This is not to say that misgivings and resentment about proselytizing haven't been prevalent since at least the Middle Ages. However, there has been a subtle shift in the modern view of proselytism. It seemed that in the past, the objections were against *methods* of proselytizing (forced baptisms, crusades, and such). However, in the last two decades or so, there have arisen cries against any form of proselytism—usually characterized as "forcing one's beliefs" upon others. Christianity has had some very black moments in which power overrode love, and despicable methods of proselytizing were employed. Today, however, the objections to proselytizing are not on the basis of the method. Today, the objections are to the *mere attempt* to persuade others to accept Christian views. The *very act* is seen as unethical; and if proselytizing is unethical, then the thought of Christian Americans or Europeans proselytizing in foreign countries is considered even worse.

### The Constraints of the Argument

This article concentrates on the ethics of proselytizing as an activity of persuasion. I will not address, except in passing, Christianity's long history of violence and blatantly coercive activities. I do not intend to ignore or whitewash the past, but the philosophical objections I want to address are substantive even apart from those horrid moments. I think those who raise these ethical objections would argue that proselytizing—in whatever form—constitutes "forcing your beliefs on others." If they are right, their objections should carry all of their bite *whether or not* there was any history of Christian violence and exploitation in the past.

Also, if Christianity's past is a side issue, so is its future. By

this I mean that all ethical objections would still be valid even if all the consequences of proselytizing actually turned out to be very good or very bad. In other words, if evangelism eventually created a peaceable kingdom, I suspect very few of the proselytizing opponents would accept evangelism as an ethical activity.<sup>2</sup>

Lastly, while Christian evangelism is the paradigm, I also should note that the ethics of proselytizing I am advocating are applicable for defending other religious persuasions and, indeed, other kinds of persuasions in general (i.e. political persuasion).

### Defining Some Terms

I want to defend traditional proselytizing as an ethical activity that celebrates human dignity. Therefore, measures to prohibit evangelism—such as Sri Lanka's legislation—are unnecessary and unethical. Before we look at the ethical objections to proselytizing, it would be helpful to define our terms. By *proselytizing*, I mean *any act that seeks to persuade people to adopt a belief or set of beliefs that would affect their way of life*. Religious commitment has the effect of not only changing one's beliefs, but it often changes one's morals, allegiances, and customs. Thus, it is something that affects the whole person. The proselytizing I mainly have in mind here is the *evangelism* in which Christians engage when they seek to convince people of other religions that the essential doctrines of Christianity (i.e.: Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ) are true, and that everyone should believe and follow the teachings of Jesus. As such, I will use *proselytizing* and *evangelism* interchangeably.

The modern objections to evangelistic persuasion of this kind often include charges that all proselytizing is coercive at worst and exploitive at best. What is the difference between a *coercive*, an *exploitive*, and a *persuasive* offer? These are three other terms we need to define.

*Coercion* normally is defined as *a situation in which person "A" manipulates person "B's" circumstances to ensure that the alternative to doing "A's" will is intolerable.*<sup>3</sup> An example of pure coercion would be blackmail. One person creates a situation in which another must do his will or face an unacceptable alternative: disclosure of some information. Another important point regarding coercion is that the alternative to the offer must be *unacceptable*—not just uncomfortable. The famous "casting couch," while being despicable, isn't coercive. The alternative to not sleeping with the director is not hunger, destitution, or even



unemployment; it's just not getting an acting job.

An *exploitive* offer is a bit harder to pin down. Here *person "A" clearly takes advantage of an already existing unacceptable/vicious alternative in order to manipulate person "B" to do their will*. The "taking advantage of" element is dependent upon notions of intent. Normally, the intent is for personal gain.<sup>4</sup> Thus, price gouging for building materials during a major disaster is exploitive because the price-gouging company gains a higher profit margin for its own benefit. With all that in mind, are traditional acts of evangelism coercive, exploitive, or are they merely persuasive?

While there are many different kinds of persuasive acts that count as proselytizing, most of them can be broken down into a few examples. For the sake of simplicity, let's classify four types of proselytizing:

- 1) Proselytizing while providing humanitarian aid
- 2) Proselytizing while providing education
- 3) Bible studies and church planting
- 4) Bible translating and distribution

Types 1) and 2) differ from 3) and 4) in that they both are "*A's*" attempts to persuade that coincide with (not necessarily depend on) some other altruistic offer of benefit. These are what we will call "mixed offers." Mixed offers are different from offers 3) and 4) in that the persuasion in these latter cases is *not mixed with any other benefit to the one being proselytized*. Intuitively, it seems that mixed offers—like proselytizing while offering aid or education—would be the strongest candidates for the charge of exploitation. So, let's see if they are, indeed, exploitive.

We have already determined that a mixed offer is not explicitly coercive unless it is tied to some requirement, and that the alternative to accepting the offer would be unacceptable and, therefore, unethical. However, an exploitive offer is such that the evangelistic party need not create the situation, but they merely take advantage of it. Is it exploitive to offer food to the hungry while attempting to persuade them to accept Christianity?

First, I know of only a few examples of evangelical proselytizing that engages in full-blown persuasive argument for Christianity while at the same time offering humanitarian aid. That does not mean there isn't one. Most of what is called "proselytizing" in regard to aid is a simple, "Jesus loves you, and that is why I am giving you this food," or some such statement.

Second, exploitation has with it the connotation of personal profit. In other words, in exploitative offers, there is usually the idea that the exploitation garners the exploiting party some personal benefit, and to gain that benefit is the intent of the exploitation. Thus, the director gains sexual gratification for himself when he exploits the employment environment of Hollywood as he propositions the actress for sex. The hotel gains increased profits when it raises its prices as it exploits the destruction after a hurricane.

There is a subtle difference in the case of proselytizing. Here we have exploitation—if it is exploitation—by taking advantage

of a bad situation with the ostensible motive of providing something good for the exploited and with no ostensible personal gain for the proselytizer. Now, there are those who would argue that the gain for the evangelical proselytizer is some sort of "personal satisfaction" or "renown" for saving souls. However, such a gain would be garnered regardless of whether or not that was the motive. If we are to discount any aid as exploitive if it produces a gain of satisfaction for the aid giver, then purely non-sectarian acts are just as exploitive, for presumably there is a level of personal satisfaction and renown received even by the most secular altruism. This would make every act of charity exploitive.<sup>5</sup>

Now is there any difference between an offer mixed with aid and an offer mixed with education? It seems that the same conditions are present. The exploitation, if it can be called that, is to take advantage of a situation—that of poor education—in order to provide a good education to the uneducated. True, there may be greater forms of personal satisfaction tied to the act of teaching, but there is also a more lasting good tied to an education as opposed to a hand out of food. In other words, if an offer tied to food isn't exploitive in the traditional sense; then *a fortiori*,\* neither is an offer tied to education.

Now if mixed proselytizing isn't exploitive in itself, it seems that pure acts of proselytizing—such as Bible studies and Bible distribution—would be even harder to charge with exploitation,

since there is no unacceptable alternative presented to the target of the persuasive offer. If a foreign national doesn't accept the offer, it doesn't present them with anything but continuing their life as it was.<sup>6</sup>

What I have shown is that none of our four kinds of proselytizing are coercive or exploitive *in themselves*. Instead, what we have are four acts that are merely persuasive. But, the opponent of proselytizing might object, "All you have proven is that persuasion, mixed and pure,

about *anything* is not coercive or exploitive. There could be factors about *the nature of Christian belief itself* or *the nature of the target culture* that would turn your innocent proselytizing into an unethical act." Are there specific factors about Christian belief or issues of human culture that would render these acts of persuasion unethical where other acts of persuasion would not be? There are, in fact, three major objections along this line. What they all have in common is that they argue there are factors unique to religious proselytizing—specifically Christian proselytizing—that make such actions unethical.

1) *The Pluralism Objection*: The idea that Christian proselytizing is unethical because all religions are paths to the spiritual and to argue for one above the others is unethical coercion.

2) *The Cultural Objection*: The idea that Christian proselytizing is inexorably tied to Western culture and any proselytizing of non-Westerners is unethical coercion of culture.

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3) *The Psychological Objection*: The idea that Christian proselytizing is taking advantage of people when they are weak, vulnerable, and not able to defend against such coercion.

I briefly will deal with the first two of these only because more than adequate philosophical work by others has been done on these. The Psychological Objection is relatively new territory, and so I will spend the majority of my time on this argument.

## **The Pluralism Objection**

What I call the "Pluralism Objection" maintains the idea that traditional Christian proselytizing is unethical because all religions ultimately point to the same spiritual truth, and to aggrandize one faith over another is to commit an unethical act of hubris. This objection targets the nature of any religion that claims exclusivity to the truth. Religious pluralist Joseph Runzo says:

**Ethically, Religious Exclusivism has the morally repugnant result of making those who have privileged knowledge, or who are intellectually astute, a religious elite, while penalizing those who happen to have no access to the putatively correct religious view, or who are incapable of advanced understanding.<sup>7</sup>**

One of the most outspoken proponents of this Pluralism Objection is the late philosopher John Hick. Hick stated that when religious belief takes on the mantle of exclusive claims of truth:

**... its sense of its own validity and worth is expressed in doctrines implying an exclusive or a decisively superior access to the truth or the power to save.<sup>8</sup>**

It's clear that Christianity does make the claims its tenets are, in fact, true, and that it is the only belief set with the power to justify before God. Christianity gets this mandate from Jesus' statement:

***I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.<sup>9</sup>***

This is clearly an exclusivist claim. Note that both Hick's and Runzo's objections refer to the holding of Christian belief as exclusive. In other words, Hick and Runzo assert that *merely holding this exclusive religious belief* is, itself, arrogant and repugnant. Therefore, it is assumed that proselytizing is even more repugnant.

By Hick's lights, Christianity qualifies as exclusivist and, therefore, injurious. Hick's argument against exclusive claims stems from his understanding of the nature of God. God, for Hick, is the ineffable "real" that cannot be described by any positive doctrine. According to Hick, the only properties we can apply to God are logical properties (self-identity, non-contradiction) or negative properties (not finite, not a horse, etc.) Since we cannot know God in His nature, we can only describe God as we can conceive of God related to our cultures and lives. Thus, all religious expressions are equally valid because all religious expressions fall equally short of the "real" nature of God.<sup>10</sup>

These expressions do relate to the Divine in one important way: the ethical. **"All religions have the benefit of providing an ethical element of transformation of human existence from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness."<sup>11</sup>**

Presumably, this means that what makes religion in any way substantive is that through promoting the virtue of other-centeredness, it is closer to what God favors. So, to the extent

that religions promote altruism, charity, etc., they are being transformed into something the Divine favors. It follows that any religious tradition that claims to be THE expression of God, is *prima facie*<sup>\*\*</sup> asserting a privilege that cannot—under any circumstances—be true, because no expression can ever be a positive claim about God. Only to the extent that religions foster selflessness are they legitimate.

In rebuttal to this argument it should be noted first that Christianity never "claims" specifically to be the sole possessor of truth. Its founder did claim to be the sole means to the truth that leads to salvation. However, this is not a claim, per se, of exclusivity. The property of exclusivity is necessarily attached to *any* claim when confronted with its opposite. If Christianity claims "*p*" is true, all religions that claim "*not-p*" must be false.<sup>\*\*\*</sup> In other words, if Christianity is making claims about matters of fact, such claims are *always* exclusive because of the nature of logic *not* the nature of the Christian claim. Hick would respond that Christianity cannot make claims about God, because no such properties can ever express the Divine. Only negative and logical properties can be attributed to God. Therefore, Christianity's claims are misdirected; there is no positive fact of which they can claim knowledge. But even if this were true, how does the Christian truth claim (that in Hick's mind is false) automatically mean that it is either coercive or exploitive as we have defined those terms? I cannot not see how a putative† false claim necessarily translates into a coercive or exploitive claim.

Second, as Christian philosopher Alvin Plantinga has pointed out, the claim that no positive properties can be attributed to God is extremely problematic. Plantinga argues that by Hick's lights, the Divine has several positive properties necessarily.<sup>12</sup> If we accept Hick's theology, then we do know there is at least one positive property of God: God is ethical. And it is not just the case that God has ethical values, but God favors *traditional* concepts of morality—such as selflessness and helping others—because these values are the elements in all religious expression that draws humans closer to God.<sup>13</sup>

Third, the charge of arrogance seems to be what Plantinga calls a "tar baby" †† in the sense that if the Pluralist uses such an argument, it can be turned back on the Pluralist. The Pluralist argument seems to be:

- 1) The religious exclusivist holds a position with which others disagree.
- 2) Even though one knows this, they continue to believe in this exclusive right to truth.
- 3) One is arrogant or egotistical by preferring one's own beliefs to others.<sup>14</sup>

But if this is true, then the Pluralist is guilty of the same arrogance! The Pluralist holds a belief about the way things are (i.e.: There are no positive properties attributable to God.), and the Pluralist knows there are millions of religious believers who disagree. Yet, the Pluralist harbors the same egotistical preference for Pluralism. Is the Pluralist guilty of the same arrogance? By the Pluralist's own argument . . . he is! The Pluralist has imbedded in his own doctrine the same odor of exclusivity of which he charges the religious exclusivist. But, there is nothing wrong with this. The Pluralist is entitled to his exclusive claim just as much as the religious exclusivist. The arrogance charge is merely an inflammatory red herring. Further, what goes for religious *belief* seems to go for religious *persuasion* (evangelism).



What holds for belief holds even more tenaciously regarding the act of persuasion to believe.<sup>15</sup> The Pluralism Objection cannot be attached to religious proselytizing without attaching it to the Pluralism doctrine itself.

### The Cultural Objection

The second objection embraces the notion that Christianity is inexorably tied to Western—frequently American—culture, and thus, any effort to proselytize is forcing Western culture onto the person being proselytized. Christian evangelism is perceived as merely a tool or a veneer for Western imperialism. This attack against proselytizing is voiced strongly by Hindus in India, which has a long and bloody struggle with conversion. Because leaders like Gandhi historically linked Indian identity to the Hindu religion, conversion has been and is seen as cultural violence and political manipulation. An anti-conversion organization called “Indians Against Christian Aggression” excerpts articles and stories that support anti-conversion movements. Quotes proselytizing opponent Major T.R. Vendantam:

**The motivation for Christian evangelism is simple. Disrupt and destroy. The missions make no secret of it. It is a mistake to think that Christian missionary enterprise is a religious movement. The Christians themselves never claimed it to be a religious movement. It was a declaration of war and an attack on the religious and cultural set up of the people of Asia and Africa, and it was always politically motivated.**<sup>16</sup>

This is not a new charge. It was leveled against David Livingstone who argued that English culture and the Christian message both would transform Africa.<sup>17</sup> It is also true that colonialism and Christianity were inseparable during much of Church history. Is the Christian Gospel inseparable from Western culture? Can Christian evangelism ever extricate itself from its Western cultural and political baggage?

Interestingly enough, it is a voice from one of these colonized cultures who argues that Christian mission can and does flourish in ways that don't attach Western imperialism. Lamin Sanneh, a native of Gambia (in western Africa) and professor at Yale Divinity School, argues that Christian belief in Africa particularly has extricated itself from the colonialism that accompanied the original Christian mission and has developed a vital and wonderful expression of Christianity that is both faithful to Jesus' teachings and undeniably African.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, if Christianity gains its power from its Western political baggage, then when the Western influence is removed, the Christian mission should dwindle. —But, in fact, that is not the case. Sanneh reports that when the colonial elements left Africa, Christianity did not dwindle; it thrived.<sup>19</sup> Christian doctrine was born with ties to middle-eastern culture. From the moment Jesus commanded His followers to “... *make disciples of all nations* ....” (Mt. 28:19). Christianity has faced the problem of proselytizing in foreign contexts. The Book of Acts gives testament to how Christian belief has been packaged in many different ways in order to translate first into the Greek culture, then the Roman, and finally, European.<sup>20</sup> The history of Christianity includes constantly changing methods to communicate a core of unchanging beliefs.

I have no doubt that evangelism has been used as a tool of Western culture, and that the Christian mission has been compromised by getting itself involved with foreign politics. However, from such a past, it does not follow that all evangelism

leads to Westernized colonialism. As I said, my intuition is that even if Christianity did not have such a dark past, it would still be objected that Christianity is unethical because it allegedly forces others to abandon their cultural identity. What Sanneh reveals is that while there are some elements of culture—such as idol worship—that are incompatible with Christianity, culture is not obliterated with the adoption of Christianity. Rather culture evolves and expands to create new expressions of faith. Therefore, since at least Christian evangelism is trans-cultural, it cannot be unethical simply because some evangelists come from the West.

### The Psychological Objection

The Psychological Objection maintains the concept that religious persuasion is unethical because it preys on the weak, the vulnerable, and those that are not equipped to defend themselves against what they deem are coercive tactics. An assumption here is that any persuasion that causes a person to change something fundamental about oneself is a kind of harm—specifically, a psychological harm. The question then becomes whether or not the harm is worth it. The argument proposes that depending on the results or the nature of the change, a particular act of persuasion is either ethical or unethical. Religious persuasion is seen as “not worth it” because the purported harm outweighs any benefits. This is especially true if the objector is a Pluralist who thinks there is no exclusive truth in regard to religious belief.

A second assumption is that to introduce someone to an alternate way of believing is to assume a position of superiority. Exclusive truth is seen as arrogant and egotistical especially if there is no objective truth to be believed. Rajiv Malhotra, apologist of multiculturalism and ardent opponent of proselytizing, in an address to Cornell University, said:

**... The language of proselytizing is explicitly one of hatred and implicitly one of racism, with the tone of the superior talking down to the inferior people.**<sup>21</sup>

Malhotra quotes Episcopal Bishop Shelby Spong:

**All evangelical and missionary activities designed to convert the heathen are base born. They are expressions of our sense of superiority and our hostility toward those who are different.**<sup>22</sup>

I want to take exception to the assumption that persuasion is psychologically harmful and that religious persuasion—in the form of proselytizing—fosters arrogance and indignity. To the contrary, it is in the capacity to accept or reject persuasion that human autonomy sees one of its greatest expressions. If I am correct, then the right to listen to and reject religious persuasion is an important part of individual freedom. Contrary to the objector's claim of protecting individual identity, to outlaw proselytizing—on the grounds that people who are weak, sick, etc., are made too vulnerable to mental manipulation by proselytizing—is to actually disparage human autonomy and strip persons of a vital part of human identity: the right to choose or refuse persuasion. The Psychological Objection, which seeks to preserve human dignity, actually ends up *weakening* the concept of human dignity!

From what I can gather from Malhotra and Spong's statements, it is the charge of *exclusivity* that makes Christian evangelism guilty. But as we saw earlier, *any* claim about facts is *necessarily* exclusive. Malhotra's own claim is exclusive. Those

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### ***“Proselytizing” Continued from page 9***

who disagree with his beliefs are deemed wrong—not only wrong, but employing “**hatred.**” Does this mean that Malhotra is claiming that same arrogant and egotistical status of being superior? Could the evangelical charge him with “hatred” since he at various times accuses Christianity of being “**imperialistic, violent, opportunistic, and deceitful?**”<sup>23</sup> Why are these Pluralist sentiments not hate speech, while the Christian statements that those who disagree with Christianity are “wrong,” “in darkness,” or “in bondage to false gods” are?<sup>24</sup> The only difference that I can find is that Malhotra believes the exclusive claims of Christian theism are false. I can only assume that is the case when he engages in his own proselytizing by attempting to convince us of the superiority of the Hindu doctrines of Pantheism and Pluralism as a remedy to Christian exclusivism.<sup>25</sup> He tries to proselytize us to adopt his exclusive Pluralist beliefs as opposed to the exclusive beliefs of Christian evangelicalism. So according to Malhotra, evangelicals are in the position of “darkness” (a metaphor for not seeing the truth) with regard to the way things really are. Does this mean that Malhotra is unethical for trying to persuade evangelicals? Of course not. He is just as entitled to persuade as are the Christians to whom he’s objecting.

Malhotra and Spong object to superiority. Is superiority something that can be avoided? What is going on here is that *because* there is no truth of the matter, any disagreement or dissent is seen as taking a position of superiority. Subsequently, if there is no fact of the matter, then *any* arbitrary elevation of one proposition over another would be an unfair superiority. However, if Pluralism isn’t true, then *there is* a fact of the matter (universally); and if one party is correct, then the other isn’t. Being correct logically means that the party asserting the opposite is incorrect; and in a sense, that is a kind of superiority, albeit not a moral one. Christianity is no guiltier of a superior attitude than its objectors.


Second, is protecting the poor and the vulnerable in foreign countries by outlawing proselytizing, as Gandhi wanted to do, really saving them from indignity?<sup>26</sup> Within the debate about free will and determinism is an effort to preserve the element of human choice. Both libertarians and soft-determinists want to preserve the individual’s sense of free choice. (Only the hard determinist wants to dismiss individual choice as an illusion.) At the heart of this is the intuition that when a human being faces a choice and chooses what is in one’s own best interests and helps pursue one’s own goals, that person is exhibiting a quality that makes one expressly human. Human dignity implies that a person has the capacity to decide in accord with his own life plan. A strong tradition in philosophy has argued that any definition of *person* includes *the ability to form plans and accept or reject offers to adjust that plan*. Political philosopher Robert Nozick says it is the quality of being able to form life pursuits and make decisions for those pursuits that makes one human and not animal.<sup>27</sup> Philosopher and ardent defender of free speech John Stuart Mill argued that it is the act of listening to arguments and mustering the mental wherewithal to reject social persuasion that are crucial to a conception of individual liberty.<sup>28</sup>

I am asserting that a person is never more fully human than when confronted with a persuasive offer: They weigh the arguments and decide to accept or reject based on their individual liberty to do so. This is especially the case with religious persuasion. Lamin Sanneh says:

**Belief premised on persuasion fosters the spirit of freedom and tolerance, while suppression or imposition of belief suffocates the spirit. That’s why the church teaches conversion on the grounds that no one can be saved against his or her will. Conversion makes the means of personal persuasion consonant with the end of personal integrity.**<sup>29</sup>

The implications of Sanneh’s statements are startling. Allowing evangelists to persuade foreign natives and giving these natives a chance to accept or respectfully reject such persuasion is a celebration of liberty. Conversely, to engage in global paternalism by calling for the suppression of evangelism is really to relegate the poor and so-called vulnerable to the status of ignorant, weak-willed fools who don’t know any better. It implies their savage minds cannot defend against the persuasive abilities of the slick evangelists. Indeed, the *Indians Against Christian Aggression* compares the natives—who convert to Christianity while being given mixed offers of humanitarian aid and evangelism—to prostitutes.<sup>30</sup> This seems to reveal that the opponents of proselytizing surreptitiously have a dim view of their native population as weak persons who do not have the fortitude to deny persuasive arguments, while the persuasive evangelists are the ones who have a strong respect for people’s autonomy.

What I am advocating here is a very robust view of human autonomy. I am arguing that inherent in all rational beings is a measure of strength to weigh the arguments and evidences of a persuasive offer and to exhibit the autonomy to reject the offer or accept it. It is, in fact, impossible to force belief at all. It is a fact of human psychology that some persons will exhibit more or less of this inner strength, but a part of being human—of having a life plan—is forming and rejecting beliefs related to that plan. There is a uniquely human capacity to weigh persuasive offers and decide whether to adjust one’s life to commit to a belief system.

I have argued in this paper that religious persuasion in general, and Christian evangelism in particular, is not coercive or exploitive in itself. Such actions are not unethical. This is not to say that proselytizing, as I have described it, cannot *become* exploitive, coercive, or that there have not been attitudes and procedures that have made some specific proselytizing efforts unethical. Once again, I have no doubt that some of the horrible stories told by opponents to proselytizing are true: That certain missionaries have bribed or deceived people in order to get their conversion on record. But this is cause to condemn particular *acts* of proselytizing, not to prohibit all proselytizing as India and Sri Lanka intend. Prohibition of this sort not only disrespects the rights of others to accept or reject persuasive offers, but it robs individuals of the important element of *choice* in the framing of their own life plan within their autonomy as persons. 



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\*a fortiori=in a stronger sense

\*\*prima facie=on the face of it

\*\*\*This is the Law of Non-Contradiction, see July/Aug. 1996



MCOI Journal article "Do All Paths Lead to God" by Chad Meister.

†putative=supposed, alleged

††tar baby=a situation or problem from which it is virtually impossible to disentangle oneself.

#### ENDNOTES:

1. Manpreet Singh, "Cracking Down on Conversions," *Christianity Today* (September, 2004), [www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/009/2.23.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/009/2.23.html) [available October 25, 2004].
2. If we set up a consequentialist principle that since the consequences of proselytizing are more often bad than good, we should refrain from proselytizing, we fall pray to all the problems with consequentialism including how do you calculate the good and bad consequences of proselytizing (notoriously difficult), and weighing the lack of dissent against the oppression of free speech and will. Further such a consequentialist principle would seem to entail too much. With such a principle you could justify silencing all religious speech (or conceivably worship) on the grounds that it has a history of producing consequences that are more dire than helpful. I don't think many of the opponents to proselytizing would accept an argument that would have the consequence of that kind of coercive limit on liberal virtues.
3. Cf. F.A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 133-4, and Thomas A. Mappes and Jane S. Zembaty, *Social Ethics: Morality and Social Policy*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982).
4. Consider the recent objections to evangelical efforts in Iraq where missionaries and aid workers are charged with exploiting Iraq's violent upheaval for evangelical gain, Mark O'Keefe, "Mixing Iraq Aid and The Gospel Stirs Debate," *Christianity Today*.com (March 31, 2003) [www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/113/52.0.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/113/52.0.html) [available October 25, 2004].
5. It would also require that in order to decide if an offer of food mixed with an evangelistic effort we would be required to know the intent of the offer and knowing psychological states is problematic at best and very time consuming.
6. It might be objected that the alternative for the national is damnation if they don't accept the offer. However, the threat of damnation only carries weight if and only if they buy into the Christian belief that there is such a state of damnation. It is significant that nowhere in the book of Acts do we find threat of eternal judgment in any argument for accepting the truth of Christianity. It may be that Hell is a theological concept that requires much background doctrine to really be understood in context of a Christian idea of divine justice.
7. "God, Commitment, and Other Faiths: Pluralism vs. Relativism," *Faith and Philosophy* 5, no. 4 (October 1988): 343.
8. "Religious Pluralism and Absolute Claims," *Religious Pluralism*, ed. Leroy Rouser (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 197.
9. John 14:6, NIV.
10. *An Interpretation of Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 239.
11. *Ibid.*, 355.
12. Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 52.
13. *Ibid.*, 57.
14. "A Defense of Religious Exclusivism," *The Analytic Theist: An Alvin Plantinga Reader*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 193.
15. This is at least the case in Christianity where the belief set includes the injunction to persuade others. This does bring up the relation between belief and persuasion. Is there an obligation inherent in strong belief? One could believe something without persuading. While this case can be made; it can't be made consistently by the Pluralist who aggressively argues we should be Pluralists.
16. "The Church as a Tool of Imperialism," quoted in "Indians Against Christian Aggression" website: [www.kentaxrecords.com/iaca/php/item\\_display.php?id=1097763923&type=articles](http://www.kentaxrecords.com/iaca/php/item_display.php?id=1097763923&type=articles), [available October 16, 2004]
17. Cf. George Seaver, *David Livingstone: His Life and Letters*, (New York: Harper Brothers, 1957), 240-5.
18. See especially Sanneh's description of the Masai development of their own Christian Creed. *Whose Religion is Christianity?* (Grand

Rapids: The William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), 58-9.

19. *Ibid.*, 38.

20. I realize there are those that argue that the teachings of Jesus bear no resemblance to what we call "Christianity" and that Paul is chiefly responsible for altering Christian teaching beyond that of its founder. See Ronald Nash's *Gospel and the Greeks: Did The New Testament Borrow from Pagan Thought?* (P&R Publishing, 2003), for a refutation of this oversimplification.

21. "The Ethics of Proselytizing" address to the Cornell University Conference on "Human Rights and Religion" November 8, 2000, [www.infinityfoundation.com/ECITproselytizing.htm](http://www.infinityfoundation.com/ECITproselytizing.htm). [available 10/16/04]

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*

26. According to Indians Against Christian Aggression, "During his meetings with Christian missionaries, Mahatma Gandhi had said that they were doing social service with the ulterior motive of conversions. He asked them to give up this offensive program. He also said to them that if this situation continued in a free India he would ask the foreign missionaries to leave the country." "Conversion Tactics: Charity," [www.kentaxrecords.com/iaca/tactics\\_charity.htm](http://www.kentaxrecords.com/iaca/tactics_charity.htm).

27. "Moral Constraints and the State," *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, (Basic Books, 1974), 30-3.

28. "On the Liberty of Thought and Discussion," *On Liberty* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1978), 35-8.

29. *Whose Religion Is Christianity?*, 46.

30. [www.kentaxrecords.com/iaca/tactics\\_charity.htm](http://www.kentaxrecords.com/iaca/tactics_charity.htm)

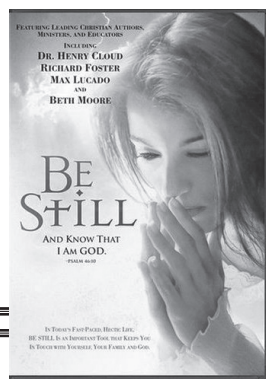
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# An Ode to Silence

## An Evaluation of the *Be Still* DVD

By Marcia Montenegro

DEVOTE YOURSELVES TO PRAYER, KEEPING ALERT IN IT WITH AN ATTITUDE OF THANKSGIVING. . .  
(Col. 4:2 NASB).

Many thanks and credit go to Kim Treweek for the painstaking work of transcribing the entire *Be Still* DVD and providing the transcript. I also am indebted to her for some vital pieces of related research that she passed on to me.

NOTE: This article is an evaluation of the *Be Still* DVD, and not an attack on the participants who appear to be genuinely sincere in their assertions. However, as instructed throughout God's Word, we are told to test all teachings carefully (1 Thes. 5:21). This DVD presents ideas and practices that seem to be rooted, at least in part, from the Contemplative Prayer movement started by three Trappist\* monks: Thomas Keating, Basil Pennington, and William Meninger.<sup>1</sup> This is no surprise since the main person on the DVD, Richard Foster, endorses methods taught by Keating and others involved in Contemplative Prayer. Other than Foster, DVD participants include Dallas Willard, Max Lucado, Beth Moore, \*\* Henry Cloud, Peter Kreeft, and others.<sup>2</sup>

### Raising Questions

On the one hand, *Be Still* tells us that biblical meditation is “reflective thinking on a biblical truth, so God is able to speak to us through Scripture.” But later the narrator states, “Christian meditation is the practice of being in the presence of God. Its ultimate goal is to seek holy God, and receive His guidance and grace.” One wonders why we are not receiving “guidance and grace” through conventional prayer, Bible reading, worship, and contemplation done in the usual fashion—that is, thinking about and pondering on God's Word using our mind as the Holy Spirit leads through standard Bible study. Have Christians been missing something all along?

### Silence Is Better

A more apt title for this DVD might be *An Ode to Silence*, because silence and being physically still are put on a higher plane than just plain talking to God. Seeking “being in the presence of God” by being still and silent is given as advice throughout the DVD and is presented as absolutely essential to being a “spiritually healthy” Christian. However, Christians are already in God's presence through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and through our relationship with Christ. We have access to God's throne in Christ. Using words in prayers is not going to damage or undermine this relationship. During prayer, a Christian can be convicted by the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit often speaks to us through God's Word, so we can also “hear” God without hav-

ing to be still and silent.

*Be Still*, full of music and scenes that will stir those watching, sets up a false dichotomy from the very beginning. Just because we are a busy society and can get too caught up in activities, does not mean that sitting in complete silence in order to hear God is the answer. It may be true that we need to carve out time for devotions and prayer, but it does not follow that busy lives demand the form of “prayer” the DVD is advocating. However, the DVD repeatedly emphasizes this with scenes of people rushing here and there contrasted with a still lake or other peaceful scenes. Hopefully, Christians watching this will be able to set aside the visual manipulation and compare what is being taught with God's Word. Nowhere in the Bible are we taught that to hear God we must be physically still and silent. The verses used for this in the video are taken out of context and do not support this credo.

The title and theme of the DVD are based on Ps. 46:10 (“*Be still and know that I am God*”). Beth Moore even says that: “God's Word is so clear that if we are not still before Him, we will never truly know to the depths of the marrow in our bones that He is God.” In reality, Psalm 46 is God rebuking men for not recognizing His power and might. He is telling the nations and Israel to hush up, cease striving, and recognize the power and sovereignty of God.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the words *be still* are rendered “*cease striving*” in the NASB, “*calm down*” in the CEV, “*Stop [your fighting]*” in the HCSB, and “*desist*” in Young's Literal.

The DVD also draws on Psalm 62 where David says that his soul waits “... *in silence for God only* ... .” Is David waiting in Contemplative Prayer mode to hear God's voice? Not at all. David is talking about recognizing that only God can save. The focus is on fully trusting in the Lord—not on the silence; nor does the passage indicate that David is praying.<sup>4</sup>

### From New Concepts of God ... To Progressing In Sleep

Many dubious claims are made as though they are established truths. These declarations should be vigorously scrutinized. For example:

***New Concept of God.*** Calvin Miller, author of *Into the Depths of God: Where Eyes See the Invisible, Ears Hear the Inaudible and Minds Conceive the Inconceivable*, tells us that silence “gives us a new concept of God.” What does he mean by this? Our concept of God is based on knowing Christ and on

the Bible, and the idea of a “new” concept of God is rather disturbing. We should immediately want to know why *silence* gives us a new revelation about God, and wonder why we need “a new concept of God” in the first place!

**Lectio Divina**, described by Foster as “spiritual reading” of the Bible, has its own section on *Be Still*.<sup>5</sup> The method taught here appears to use God’s Word as a mystical and subjective tool rather than reading the Bible as the objective Word of God, letting the text speak for itself, and then allowing the personal application to flow from that. The Holy Spirit aids Christians as we read and study the Bible in the normal fashion; in other words, we can derive both comprehension of the words and at the same time experience God’s presence without practicing a technique. We should not be looking for personal *messages* in the Bible, but rather personal *applications* of the message. In teaching that one must read the Bible in a distinctive way in order to get a personal message from the text, *Be Still* makes a false dichotomy between head and heart, a mistake common on this DVD.

**Being healed?** Katherine A. Brown-Saltzman, a nurse and Executive Director at the UCLA Healthcare Ethics Center, states that as we slow down, “**physiologically everything begins to shift, ...[....]...breathing changes, our mind quiets, and we can actually get to this state of, where our body can heal in a much better way, because it's not fighting all of this, right?**” Will we be healed employing this type of prayer over other prayers? The audience is left to wonder. It also begs the question of whether our goal in prayer should be its physiological effects. Visiting web sites where Brown-Saltzman is listed, I came away disturbed finding that one of her focuses in healing is guided imagery.<sup>6</sup>

**“Silence is one of the great spiritual disciplines”** (Dallas Willard). We need to ask, “According to whom?” To find *any* support for this teaching, one must go to the Mystics and assume that they have the authority to dictate what the disciplines are. Mystic Jacob Boehme’s advice on silence is described as an “**effort to bring the mind to a complete state of stillness” so that one’s consciousness could reach “an almost complete suspension of the reflective powers and the surface-consciousness, and a strange and indescribable silence.**”<sup>7</sup> Meister Eckhart (1260-1328), a German Dominican friar and Mystic much quoted by Contemplative Prayer proponents, wrote of having a “**Divine Birth**” through remaining still and silent so that God could speak.<sup>8</sup> While it is true that being silent allows the mind to focus during prayer and Bible study, it is not the silence that brings on God’s “voice,” but rather, it is in God’s Word that we find God’s “voice.” Communication with the Lord is *not* composed of silence, though it may be done silently. Communication is composed of our thoughts and words, whether done silently or aloud. The Bible is in words; Jesus prayed in words, Jesus taught us to pray using words. If God had remained silent, we would have no Bible!

**Breathing technique**. One of the more disturbing things is said by an unidentified woman who states that you should sit still, breathe slowly, and then, “**As you inhale, thinking of the Holy Spirit breathing life and peace into your body. And as you exhale, remember the verse to cast all your cares upon him.**” This is reminiscent of many Hindu meditation practices based on the belief that inhalation causes the person to breathe in a cleansing spiritual energy or “divine breath” (*prana*),<sup>9</sup> while exhaling is to get rid of negativity. This implies a person can

receive some kind of peace from the Holy Spirit by breathing a certain way. God’s Word teaches that the Holy Spirit indwells believers at the point of salvation; we have access at every moment to the peace given by Christ.<sup>10</sup> Inhaling cannot cause the Holy Spirit to do anything! The Holy Spirit is not composed of physical particles we can breathe and is not at our command. Additionally, breathing in such a way over a period of time can induce self-hypnosis.

**Thin places**. Another disquieting comment comes via a story told by Dr. Jerry Root, professor at Wheaton College. He relates an account from Mystic Evelyn Underhill about a friend of hers who heard that the Scottish town of Iona is a “**thin place**” because the roots of Scottish Christianity are there. Iona “**is a thin place because there is not much between God and Iona.**” However, according to the Bible, no physical space is closer to God than any other. After man’s sin in the Garden, the *whole earth*, created good by God, became corrupted by sin resulting in death and decay.<sup>11</sup> A “**thin place**” cannot exist in the biblical view. Dr. Root follows this account by stating: “**And all of life, properly looked at in some senses, is a thin place,**” and he quotes C. S. Lewis about awakening to the presence of God in the world He created. This comment, however, doesn’t really correct the error of the first one. Why even bring up this unbiblical concept of a “**thin place**” to make a point about God’s omnipresence that can be made directly from the Bible itself? Relaying the tale and referencing Underhill give this mystical concept an undeserved credibility.

**Advancing spiritually in sleep**. Not since I was a New Ager have I thought I could “advance spiritually” in my sleep! But Richard Foster states on this DVD that you can: “**Brother Lawrence, in his wonderful book, ‘The Practice of the Presence of God,’ said those who have the gale, he means the wind of the Holy Spirit, go forward, even in sleep. Isn’t that wonderful, that we can move forward in our spiritual life in our sleep? I often try, as I am entering sleep, to just give myself to God: My heart, my mind, my thinking, my dreams, whatever they might be. And then you wake up in the morning and you have advanced in the Spirit. You see? That is part of Contemplative Prayer.**” It is not clear what Foster means by being “**advanced in the Spirit.**” Secondly, how would this occur during sleep? After salvation, we are gradually being conformed to the image of Christ;<sup>12</sup> this is part of the sanctification process and, perhaps, this is “*advancement*.” However, the Scriptures reveal this is a *conscious* process, done through cooperation with the Holy Spirit and obedience to Christ.<sup>13</sup>

**“Dedicated to our beloved buddy ... who showed us how to be still.”** This mysterious statement appears at the end of the first section. Who is the “**beloved buddy?**” Is it Thomas Keating—one of the founders of the Contemplative Prayer movement?

## Are Christians Missing Something?

**Missing Out?** There is a wistful note to the DVD—a yearning—as though people are not satisfied with knowing Christ and need something more. The quotes and comments on the DVD emphasize a mystical longing for God, but in a way that implies we can’t know Him satisfactorily through His Word or through Christ. While it is true that we cannot know God *completely*, and that we should long to be closer to Him, we are *not*

—Continued on page 14

### ***"Be Still" Continued from page 13***

hampered from knowing God or being close to Him by not being silent and still as the DVD suggests. Rather than focusing on how we can know God through Christ and the Bible, there is an assumption that we are missing out on something, and that customary and consistent prayer and Bible study are insufficient. This undermines the standard prayer life and Bible reading of most Christians.

***Subjective reading of the Bible.*** Foster advises viewers to read over a Bible passage once and then in a second reading highlight whatever seems to jump out at you. In the third reading, read only the highlighted passage and remind yourself of this portion during the day. He called this "**Contemplative Prayer.**" Biblical applications can be personal, but *the original meaning is the same for everybody!* The Bible should be read for original meaning first with application flowing from that; otherwise, a personal application is worthless.

Max Lucado says that we can read the Bible with two approaches, "**One for inspiration, one for information**" and that for inspiration, "**We find the passage the Holy Spirit has targeted for us.**" While it is certainly true that Christians can find a specific passage that guides them, shouldn't this happen through conventional Bible reading and study? This method of looking for the magical phrase of the day causes one to miss out on the riches and depths of God's Word. Why give viewers a false choice between information and inspiration? They can—and do—happen simultaneously! Why would God give us His Word but fail to tell us that reading it in the normal manner is insufficient?

***Introduction to more troublesome aspects of the Contemplative Prayer Movement.*** Although the DVD does not go into the depths of Contemplative Prayer as do its main proponents, introducing this term and concept could easily lead people to search out the writings of Keating, Pennington, and others who advocate even more troublesome practices such as specific breathing techniques, repetition of a word or phrase (which is rooted in Eastern practice), and teachings such as Pennington's New Ageism that "**God is known in pure consciousness rather than by some subject-object knowledge.**"<sup>14</sup> Be aware that Contemplative Prayer *is* a movement; it is not just a few people here and there giving private views on prayer. There has been a concerted effort by the leaders of this movement to spread these ideas to Christians *and* non-Christians;<sup>15</sup> but until now, these teachings were a mere trickle into the evangelical church via Richard Foster and a few others. This DVD makes it more likely that these beliefs will now flow more freely into the evangelical church.

***Sense of urgency.*** The DVD repeats how important it is not to *pray*, but rather to practice *Contemplative Prayer*, thus making a distinction between the two. At one point, the narrator says, "**The practice of contemplative prayer can be a vital part of our everyday lives, but we must make time for it.**" Foster tells us that Contemplative Prayer "**ushers**" us into the more abundant life that Jesus talked about. Dallas Willard says that Contemplative Prayer is "**interactive relationship with God.**" Beth Moore\*\* exclaims, "**I want to be in the Tent of Meeting, I want to be in that place where the cloudy pillar of God's glory falls, I want to sit back and listen long enough that perhaps the God of all creation might just speak to me.**"

A sense of *urgency* is given (ironically enough for this DVD!) that Christians *must* practice Contemplative Prayer in order to really, truly be close to God and in order to "hear" Him.

Well, hasn't God spoken already? We have His priceless words in the Bible. And as believers, we can go before the throne of God through our faith in Christ.<sup>16</sup>

***The mistake of Mystics.*** Several references are made to Madame Jeanne Marie Guyon (1648-1717). Mme. Guyon was part of the Quietist movement in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This movement was partially related to Miguel de Molinos, a Spanish priest who lived in Italy, and had roots in the Mysticism of Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross. "**According to Molinos, the goal of Christian experience is the perfect rest of the soul in God. Such a condition is possible when a person abandons himself completely to God and the will is totally passive. Mental prayer rather than any external activity is the means to the state of absolute rest with God.**" Mme Guyon, after her husband's death, "**came under the influence of Molinos' thought and by 1680 felt herself so close to God that she received visions and revelations.**"<sup>17</sup>

Quietism was a reaction against the hard line doctrines of counter-Reformation Catholicism, and the Roman Catholic Church did not support this movement. Like most Mystics of the time, they attempted to cultivate a spiritual state believed to bring them closer to God. However, the Bible informs us that God is not a distant Presence Who requires manmade techniques to bring us close to Him, but rather it is Christ Who brings us near to God.<sup>18</sup> The Quietists and Mystics made the mistake of thinking that an experience must occur in order to be close to God.

Many of the Quietist Mystics, such as Guyon and Frances de Sales, are discussed in an online Quaker article, "Friends' Theological Heritage: From Seventeenth-Century Quietists to ***A Guide to True Peace.***"<sup>19</sup> The article's goal is to "**to re-establish an historical link between Friends theology and practice of silent worship and the Quietist movement of seventeenth-century Europe.**" The article continues, "**The most evident connection between Quakers and seventeenth-century Quietists is the nineteenth century text *A Guide to True Peace or the Excellency of Inward and Spiritual Prayer Compiled Chiefly from the Writings of Fénelon, Guyon, and Molinos*, compiled anonymously by two Quakers. In this study, we will examine the contributions of the three authors Fénelon, Guyon, and Molinos ... [...] in order to rediscover the distinct connection between Friends theology and this particular mystical tradition within Christianity.**"<sup>20</sup> Because Foster is Quaker and a leading influence on evangelicals in the area of Contemplative Prayer, an observation of this link to Quietism is reasonable.<sup>21</sup>

***Dr. Bill Schneidewind.*** Dr. Schneidewind is listed for credit under "Biblical Support" on the *Be Still* DVD.<sup>22</sup> He is currently Professor of Biblical Studies at UCLA and Chair of the Dept. of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures. An Amazon Publishers Weekly review of his book, *How the Bible Became a Book: The Textualization of Ancient Israel* (May 10, 2004), states: "**Thus, Schniedewind contends that the historical narratives of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings, in addition to the Pentateuch and some of the prophetic writings, can be dated to Hezekiah's reign rather than to an earlier Solomonic period or to a post-exilic Persian period. Schniedewind's provocative thesis will likely generate some controversy, but**



it will be well received among those who accept the historical revisionism of Israel Finkelstein and others.”

Who is Finkelstein? In a *Christian Research Journal* article, distinguished historian Paul Maier discusses Finkelstein’s theories and others like it.<sup>23</sup> Maier writes that Finkelstein is part of a group of scholars that “**sees little or no correlation between archaeological and biblical evidence and thus no reliable history in the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament).**” Maier goes on to call Finkelstein “**a revisionist archaeologist**” who wrote a book that “**controverted traditional Jewish and Christian views of both the historical reliability of the Hebrew Bible and how it came to be.**”

In other words, Finkelstein writes against the historical evidence for the Bible, and Schniedewind is apparently in this camp. Because of Schneidewind’s role on the DVD, and because of his extremely unorthodox views on the Old Testament, the need for discernment of the *Be Still* teachings is even stronger.

## The Veil Has Been Torn


Are the methods taught on this DVD intended to invoke a certain spiritual experience and feeling? The danger is that when one seeks an experience or a feeling, especially if one employs certain techniques, the person will almost certainly get results.<sup>24</sup> This will be interpreted as God, but *there is no guarantee that it will be God*. Foster, himself, warns in one of his books that Contemplative Prayer is for more mature believers, and 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 oneself with “**the light of Christ,**” and to say “**all dark and evil spirits must now leave,**” and other words to keep evil ones at bay.<sup>25</sup> Naturally, the Bible *does not* teach us that we must pray for protection before praying!

At the moment of Christ’s death, the veil of the temple was torn in two—from top to bottom. This was a supernatural act recorded in three of the Gospels.<sup>26</sup> This marvelous act is referred to in Hebrews, which tells us that the torn veil is really the torn flesh of Christ—the true High Priest—broken for us so that access is open to all who have been made righteous through faith in Christ.<sup>27</sup> There is no curtain between God and us that requires a stillness or silence so that God can “break through” to us. This curtain has been torn once and for all time through the atonement. Communion with God springs naturally from our reading and study of His Word and from prayer as it is patterned in the Bible.

## Our Blueprint for Prayer

Since Christians have access to God through Christ, why is it necessary to cultivate a deep silence in order to be close to God? Since we as believers “hear” God through His Word, why do we need techniques to hear God’s “voice?” God provided the Canon of Scripture, which is “*inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work*” (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

The Biblical model of prayer should be our guide. Colossians 4:2 instructs: “*Never give up praying. And when you pray, keep alert and be thankful*” (CEV). The NASB tells us: “*Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of*

*thanksgiving*” (emphasis added). Christians are to be alert and watchful in prayer, not shrouded in a mystical veil of silence fabricated by man. 

\*Founded in 1664 at La Trappe Monastery in France, Trappist monks are typically austere and take a vow of silence.

**\*\*Editor’s note:** Ingrid Schlueter of VCY America contacted Beth Moore and, upon review of the concerns and information, Beth Moore issued a public retraction which we applaud. [www.sliceoffla-odicea.com/archives/2006/04/official\\_statem\\_1.php](http://www.sliceoffla-odicea.com/archives/2006/04/official_statem_1.php)

### ENDNOTES:

1. See “Contemplating Contemplative Prayer: Is It Really Prayer” at [http://cana.userworld.com/cana\\_ContemplativePrayer1.html](http://cana.userworld.com/cana_ContemplativePrayer1.html).
2. Before faith in Christ, over a period of many years, the author attended silent Quaker meetings and practiced Eastern meditation—Hindu, Tibetan,



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Zen, as well as New Age hybrids—the methods and concepts of which are incorporated in some aspects of Contemplative Prayer.

3. See article, “Meditation and Psalm 46:10” at [http://cana.userworld.com/cana\\_Meditation\\_Psalm.html](http://cana.userworld.com/cana_Meditation_Psalm.html).

4. See this article for a further brief evaluation of Ps. 62: <http://www.frbaptist.org/bin/view/Ptp/PtpTopic20060414133853>

5. *Lectio Divina* (meaning a *sacred reading* and sometimes called “praying the Scriptures”) is defined and practiced differently by various Christian groups. Although one source claims its origins are unknown ([http://www.firstplymouth.org/spiritual/prayers/lectio\\_prayer.html](http://www.firstplymouth.org/spiritual/prayers/lectio_prayer.html)), it allegedly was practiced by the “Desert Fathers” and in monasteries. One definition describes it as “**a slow, contemplative praying of the Scriptures which enables the Bible, the Word of God, to become a means of union with God**” (<http://www.thecentering.org/archive.html>). A Roman Catholic site states “*Lectio divina is a reading, on an individual or communal level, of a more or less lengthy passage of Scripture, received as the word of God and leading, at the prompting of the Spirit, to meditation, prayer and contemplation*” ([http://catholic-resources.org/ChurchDocs/PBC\\_Interp4.htm](http://catholic-resources.org/ChurchDocs/PBC_Interp4.htm)). The majority of teachings that I’ve run across usually involve choosing a Bible passage and reading it silently and very slowly several times, noticing a portion that speaks to you, repeating that portion aloud over and over (but without thinking about it), and then “listening” for what God is saying through the text to you, and then often ending with a prayer. This can be done alone or with a group. It differs from conventional Bible reading and study since *Lectio Divina* is not based on *thinking* about or *analyzing* Scripture, but rather it uses Scripture to lead one into an eastern-style meditation (i.e., a state achieved by bypassing or turning off the mind). In recent years, forms of *Lectio Divina* have become increasingly linked with Contemplative Prayer. This footnote is not meant to be an exhaustive description, but merely a brief overview.

6. See <http://tinyurl.com/pq393> and <http://www.healthcare.ucla.edu/ethics/circle-of-caring>

7. F. C. Happold, *Mysticism, A Study and an Anthology* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1964), 75.

8. *Ibid.*, 76-77, 246. Like many mystics, Eckhart had some dubious theology such as the belief that God is remote and unknowable: “**God is not light nor life nor love nor nature nor spirit nor semblance nor anything we can put into words,**” 244; and he expresses an identification of man’s soul with God: The soul “**becomes so one with God that she herself would say she is God,**” 244.

9. Hence the term *pranayama* for breathing techniques done in yoga.

10. Jn. 14:27; Rom. 5:1, 8:6; Eph. 2:14; Phil. 4:7.

11. Gen. 3:17,18; Rom. 8:19-22.

12. Rom. 8:29; Col. 3:10.

13. Phil. 2:12; 1 Pet. 1:2; Jn. 14:21, 23, 15:10; 1 Tim. 6:14; 1 Jn. 2:3, 3:24, 5:3.

—Continued on page 19



*Scripture quotes from (JW's) New World Translation*

### **Jehovah is the ONLY Savior:**

Isaiah 43:11

I am Jehovah, and besides me there is no Savior.

Isaiah 45:21

Make your report and your presentation. Yes, let them consult together in unity. Who has caused this to be heard from long time ago? [Who] has reported it from that very time? Is it not I, Jehovah, besides whom there is no other God; a righteous God and a Savior, there being none excepting me?

Hosea 13:4

But I am Jehovah your God from the land of Egypt, and there was no God except me that you used to know and there was no savior but I.

### **Jesus is the ONLY Savior:**

Acts 4:10-12

let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you impaled but whom God raised up from the dead, by this one does this man stand here sound in front of you. This is 'the stone that was treated by you builders as of no account that has become the head of the corner.' **Furthermore, there is no salvation in anyone else, for there is not another name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must get saved.**

### **Jehovah is our Savior:**

Psalms 38:22

Do make haste to my assistance, O Jehovah my salvation.

Isaiah 43:3

For I am Jehovah your God, the Holy One of Israel your Savior.

Isaiah 49:26

I, Jehovah, am your Savior

Isaiah 60:16

you will be certain to know that I, Jehovah, am your Savior.

### **God is our Savior:**

Jude 24-25

to [the] only God our Savior

Titus 2:10

not committing theft, but exhibiting good fidelity to the full, so that they may adorn the teaching of our Savior, God, in all things.

Titus 3:4

However, when the kindness and the love for man on the part of our Savior, God, was manifested,

1 Timothy 4:10

because we have rested our hope on a living God, who is a Savior of all sorts of men,

Luke 1:47

and my spirit cannot keep from being overjoyed at God my Savior:

### **Jesus Christ is our Savior:**

Titus 1:4

May there be undeserved kindness and peace from God [the] Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

Titus 3:6

This [spirit] he poured out richly upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior.

2 Timothy 1:10

but now it has been made clearly evident through the manifestation of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has abolished death but has shed light upon life and incorruption through the good news,

Titus 2:13

While we wait for the happy hope and glorious manifestation of the great God and of [the] Savior of us, Christ Jesus,

2 Peter 1:11

In fact, thus there will be richly supplied to YOU the entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

2 Peter 3:18

No, but go on growing in the undeserved kindness and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him [be] the glory both now and to the day of eternity.

## THERE IS ONLY ONE SAVIOR!!!

**Since Jehovah is called the Savior,  
since God is called the Savior,  
since Jesus is called the Savior,**

**THEY ALL MUST BE THE ONE AND ONLY SAVIOR!!!  
or there would be three different Saviors!**

**NOWHERE IS THE FATHER CALLED "SAVIOR"!!!**

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## So ... Who is the One and ONLY Savior?

Acts 16:30-34

*(The Philippian jailer questions Paul and Silas)* And he brought them outside and said: "Sirs, what must I do to get saved?" They said: "Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will get saved, you and your household." And they spoke the word of Jehovah to him together with all those in his house. And he took them along in that hour of the night and bathed their stripes; and, one and all, he and his were baptized without delay. And he brought them into his house and set a table before them, and he rejoiced greatly with all his household now that he had believed God.

*The Apostles told him to believe on the Lord Jesus and they would be saved. He and his household were saved because they believed God.*

John 6:37

*(Jesus is speaking)* "Everything the Father gives me will come to me, and the one that comes to me I will by no means drive away:"

*Jesus, Himself, says very plainly, that the one that comes to Him, He will never drive away. He wants us to come to Him.*

Matthew 11:28-30

*(Jesus is speaking)* "Come to me, all you who are toiling and loaded down, and I will refresh you. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am mild tempered and lowly in heart, and you will find refreshment for your souls. For my yoke is kindly and my load is light."

John 6:45

*(Jesus is speaking)* "Everyone that has heard from the Father and has learned comes to me."

*Jesus doesn't say go to the Father; or Jehovah, or God, He says "come to me."*

2 Timothy 3:15-17

*(Paul is speaking)* and that from infancy you have known the holy writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through the faith in connection with Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired of God and beneficial for teaching, for reproving, for setting things straight, for disciplining in righteousness, that the man of God may be fully competent, completely equipped for every good work.

*Paul is telling Timothy that the holy writings (at that time this was the Old Testament) makes one wise for salvation (because the Law and Prophets all point to Jesus, see Romans 3:21-22). Also, the Scriptures alone are all that is needed to make the man of God fully competent and completely equipped.*

**There is no religion or organization that  
saves us from the consequence of our sin.  
Only Jesus Saves!**



# "EASY BELIEVISM"

## A Misnomer Concerning the True Gospel

By Pastor Barry Black

*Misnomer: 1. Unsuitable name – a wrong or unsuitable name or term for something or somebody. 2. Calling something by a wrong name – a use of a wrong or unsuitable name or term to describe something or somebody. (Webster's Dict. of Eng. Lang.)*

Generally when the suffix “-ism” is placed behind a word, it is used to describe a movement, doctrine, or system of belief. Many times, it is used to imply an attitude of adverse judgment against a group (i.e. *Mormonism*, etc.). Is the reason for calling the pure Gospel of Grace (faith alone in Christ alone for eternal life) *easy believism* to insinuate that those who adhere to it are “sectarian” or “cult like?”

So is what some consider “easy believism” a new view of the Gospel? Is it a deviation from the true Gospel? Or is it, indeed, the good news that sinners may have—and thus, be guaranteed of—eternal life by simple (*simple*—not *easy*) faith in Jesus Christ? Let's look and see what Jesus said concerning eternal life. We will primarily focus on the Gospel of John.

The Gospel of John is the only Gospel of the four accounts written with the sole purpose of assuring us that we can know we have eternal life (see John 20:31). Strangely enough, the only condition for receiving the gift of eternal life (which includes being with God in Heaven when we die) is to believe in Jesus Christ as the only begotten Son of God ... period. (See Nicene Creed at the end of this article.) In fact, the Apostle John uses the word *believe* or *faith* (same word) 98 times in the Gospel of John. He never says to “believe and be baptized,” “believe and join a denomination or church,” “believe and repent,” “believe and be sorry for your sins,” “believe and turn from your sins,” or even “believe and pray to be saved.” Only one simple condition and one condition only: *Believe*. Why do people (even well-meaning people) add something else to believe? “It seems too easy just to believe,” is the usual argument. Well, *believe* is the only condition given! Look at John 3:15-18, 36. In John 3:18, it is clear that he who does NOT believe *is* (present tense) condemned already; and in John 3:36, it is clear that the wrath of God (anger against sin resulting in eternal separation from God in Hell) abides upon the one who does NOT believe.

Over and over, the Gospel of John records that the one and only condition for eternal life is *faith in Jesus Christ*. The words *faith* and *believe* are English words for the Greek word *pistis*. *Faith* is the noun form, *believe* is the verb form. After the death of His friend Lazarus, Jesus came to the home of Mary and


Martha. Before Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, He talked to Martha about resurrection and eternal life. John 11:25-26 records: ***“Jesus said unto her (Martha), I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.”*** After telling her that, Jesus asked a simple question of Martha. It had nothing to do with Martha joining a church, or turning from or quitting her sins, or professing Christ publicly, or promising to do better, or walking an aisle, or filling out a card. She didn't even pray! Jesus simply asked her, ***“Do you believe this?”*** She answered in verse 27, ***“Yea, Lord, I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.”*** (Martha was sure of what she hoped for and certain of what she did not yet see. See Heb. 11:1) Simple? Yes.

But, let's look at the “easy” part. Would you be willing to say that to believe/place your faith in a man who claimed to be both God AND man, died for your sins on a cruel cross, rose again the third day so that YOU can have eternal life *by believing in Him alone*, is easy? Then why do so many people depend on something or someone else to obtain eternal life? Why do so many depend on believing on Jesus *and* being baptized, or believing on Jesus *and* joining a particular church or denomination, or believing on Jesus *and* turning from ALL their sins? You know it's strange, but on that last one—“believing on Jesus *and* turning from ALL your sins”—when someone presents the Gospel with those two conditions, they never mention to turn from the sins that *you have not yet committed!*

Man by nature is very religious. That is, man by nature wants to DO something in order to have peace with God or maintain peace with God. The initial biblical example is Cain. Remember in Genesis 4 when Able brought a blood offering as instituted by God (see Gen. 3:21) Cain brought of the fruit of the ground—what he had grown as a result of his own efforts. The idea here is that he brought something good, something that God had given him the ability to do, but Cain's error was that *it was not what God required*. Salvation/eternal life is NOT gained or maintained through human ability. Ephesians 2:8-9 makes that very clear: ***“For by grace are ye saved through faith: and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”*** What God has required is faith in Christ and Christ alone for salvation (i.e. eternal life, see Rom. 3:29-30). He requires simple faith. However, just because it is *simple*, does NOT mean it is *easy*. It is contrary to human nature and thinking

to believe that there is NO human effort in obtaining and maintaining salvation. In other words, we cannot do *anything* to get saved or to *stay* saved (saved from the consequence of our sin which is separation from God forever in Hell). If we are counting on anything *other than* faith or in *addition to* faith, it is NOT what God requires.

Romans 5:1 *"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."* When one places his or her faith in Jesus Christ alone for salvation (eternal life), the result is we are "justified." The word *justify* means that God declares the believing sinner righteous (free of guilt and penalty of sin), *even while we are still in a sinning state* (see Rom. 5:8).

So basically, we could summarize this by realizing that it is a misnomer to call the issue "easy believism." The truth of the matter is that the word *easy* is a relative term. *Simple*—now that is a definite term. The issue is actually to believe the *simple* Gospel—which for some is not easy. 



Barry Black serves as Senior Pastor at Joy Baptist Church in Hull, GA. He graduated from Liberty University in 1990 with a Bachelor's Degree in Church Ministries and a concentration in counseling. Barry is single and lives in Colbert, GA.

## The Nicene Creed

**We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.**

**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father.**

**Through him all things were made.**

**For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man.**

**For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried.**

**On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.**

**He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son.**

**With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.**

**He has spoken through the Prophets.**

**We believe in one holy catholic [universal] and apostolic Church.**

**We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.**

**We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.**

**Amen.**

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### "Be Still" Endnotes Continued from page 15

14. M. Basil Pennington, *Centered Living: The Way of Centering Prayer* (NY: Image, Doubleday, 1988), 95.
15. Ibid., 191-2. Pennington writes of teaching Contemplative Prayer to Hindus in a Jain temple. Referring to this and other times of meditating with those of "many different traditions," he states that he experienced a "deep unity" with them and adds: "When we go beyond the portals of the rational mind into the experience, there is only God to be experienced" (192).
16. Heb. 10:19-22.
17. "Quietism, General Information," R G Clouse, *Elwell Evangelical Dictionary*, <http://mb-soft.com/believe/txn/quietism.htm>
18. Eph. 2:13; Heb. 4:16.
19. Dianne Guenin-Lelle, *Quaker Theology* #6, Spring 2002, <http://www.quaker.org/quest/issue6-3-Lelle02.htm>
20. Ibid.
21. Having myself attended Quaker meetings off and on over a 23-year period before becoming a Christian, I see the similarity of the mystical aspects of Contemplative Prayer and the practices of silent meetings amongst Quakers, as well as a parallel between Contemplative Prayer ideology about hearing God and Quaker historical teachings. Not all Quakers have silent meetings, however.
22. Dr. Schneidewind has a Bachelor's from George Fox University (a Quaker school), an MA from Jerusalem University College, and his Ph.D. is from Brandeis University.
23. "Archeology: Biblical Ally or Adversary?" Vol. 27, no. 2, 2004; article online at <http://www.equip.org/free/DA111.htm>
24. In my 15 plus years of experience doing Eastern and New Age meditation before trusting in Christ, I can vouch for these experiences seeming very spiritual and peaceful.
25. Richard Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (NY: HarperCollins, 1992), 156-57.
26. Matt. 27:51; Mk. 15:38; Lk. 23:45.
27. Heb. 10:12-22.

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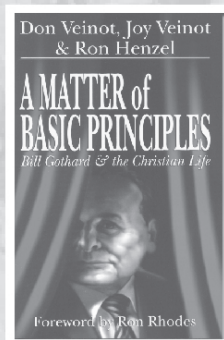
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