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A Mormon Temple representing the challenge of New Religious Movements around the world. Used with permission from Greg Schneider of Redlands, CA.

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## Editorial

# Missions and New Religious Movements

“*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives, and freedom to prisoners.*” (Isaiah 61:1, NASB)

In 1993 I was privileged to be able to assist Jim Stephens as he served to prepare a special IJFM edition dealing with mission to Buddhists (IJFM, Vol. 10:3, July 1993). As a former member of a pseudo-Christian sect, and given my work as a Christian researcher and missionary to new religious movements (NRMs) after becoming a Christian, I was eager to someday explore the possibility of approaching a mission periodical about discussing the challenge of new religious movements to Christian missionary efforts. Thankfully, Dr. Hans Weerstra, the editor of IJFM, has provided us with just such an opportunity.

Our exploration of this topic requires definition a few terms. Some of the contributors to this issue use the word “cult” to refer to a number of religious groups. While there are a variety of meanings for this word depending upon the perspective one brings to the subject, typically “cult” is defined by evangelicals in a theological sense as “(1) A religious group originating as a heretical sect and maintaining fervent commitment to heresy.” “Heresy” is defined as a “doctrine which is erroneous in such a way that Christians must divide themselves as a church from all who teach or accept it.” The practices of various groups are important as well, especially since they often flow from heretical teachings. In terms of behavior or practice “cult” is defined as “(2) A religious or semi-religious group which exhibits extreme antisocial behavior.”

(Robert M. Bowman, Jr., *Orthodoxy and Heresy* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992], 115-116). While the term “cult” is familiar to evangelicals, many members of groups to which the term is applied consider the term offensive and pejorative. In an effort to remove unnecessary stumbling blocks to the gospel message, terms such as “new religious movement” (NRM), “alternative or fringe religious movement” are sometimes used.

As the contributors will make clear, the rapid growth and expansion of these groups around the world presents one of the greatest evangelistic and missionary challenges facing the Christian Church as we enter the 21st century. In the pages that follow, Dr. Gordon Lewis reminds us that NRMs are an important part of the Church’s missionary and evangelistic responsibility. Dr. Bryce Pettit provides an important historical overview of NRMs and their impact on frontier missions. As a needed corrective to the tendency of many ministries to NRMs to emphasize theological analysis at the expense of evangelism, Dr. Vishal Mangalwadi provides us with an introduction to the New Age movement, an informal network of individuals and organizations espousing an “all is one, all is god” worldview (monism and pantheism).

Everett Shropshire, my co-guest editor, and I, provide an overview of the challenge before us followed by recommendations for broader church evangelism. Readers will also benefit from the challenges presented by Paul Carden on the grave threat NRMs pose on the mission fields of the world. Veteran missionary Bill Honsberger presents helpful evangelistic considerations for reaching a pagan (non-Christian) world in our time by looking

back at the strategies of the early church. Finally, Keith Seabourn provides a discussion of the practical uses and applications of computer technology to both the proclamation and defense of the faith.

I would like to offer a special thanks to several individuals who helped make this special edition of the IJFM possible. First, thanks to Dr. Weerstra for providing this forum for addressing this challenge within the context of world missions, and for his patience as we collected and edited the articles from contributors throughout the United States and abroad. I also thank my wife, Wendy, for her patience and support regarding the many hours of editing and writing. She also provided emotional encouragement as well as my often-unseen ministry partner. Finally, thanks to Paul Carden, who provided many helpful editorial recommendations and insights as this project progressed.

It is our hope and prayer that this special edition of the IJFM will stimulate discussion coupled with action among the Lord’s people, among churches, denominations and mission agencies. May this project make significant contribution as a stimulus toward the evangelization of zealous, sincere (yet deceived) people clinging to false christs and false gospels. May the Church around the world be challenged to respond with prayer and action to this less reached portion of the Lord’s harvest field in the world.

*John W. Morehead  
with Everett Shropshire  
Guest Editors  
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USA*

# Our Mission Responsibility to New Religious Movements

*Changes are needed in churches, schools, missions agencies as well as ministries to New Religious Movements (NRMs) in order to reach the lost within these movements.*

by Gordon R. Lewis

A strange thing happened to America on its way through the twentieth century. In the 1960s and 70s effective missionaries representing Eastern pantheistic religious and occult spiritualities reached anti-establishment multitudes. Having rejected whatever Christianity they encountered in their youth, they were attracted by promises of a new way to personal relaxation and world peace. The New Age Movement led by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's Transcendental Meditation craze went far beyond anti-establishment groups attracting activists in every level of society who sought something more than secular humanism offered. Many religious people believed the publicity that TM was compatible with Christianity. To find inner serenity they were initiated and began doing TM in the AM and the PM. The technique may have helped some to identify with the impersonal cosmos, but it was not transcendent enough to make them acceptable to the living, holy Lord of all. They needed not TM but CM, distinctively Christian meditation.

## **A New Global Frontier**

An eclectic New Age Movement rose like a mushroom cloud over Western civilization and its fall-out has made household words of formerly unfamiliar concepts: panthe-

ism, karma, reincarnation, spiritual evolution, and channeling (formerly, witchcraft). Many who may not regard themselves members of the New Age Movement, now live under the influence of pantheistic and occult assumptions in telecasts, movies, business seminars, horoscopes, health food stores, metaphysical and other book stores, psychic fairs, psychic hot lines, and alternative health procedures.

In 1993 at Chicago's Parliament of World Religions Robert Muller said "we are entering an age of universalism. Wherever you turn, one speaks about global education, global information, global communications—every profession on earth is now acquiring a global dimension. The whole humanity is becoming interdependent, is becoming one."<sup>1</sup> It considered a "Proposal to Evolve the Parliament of the World's Religions towards a United Nations of Religions." Others promoted "World Citizenship" and an "Inter-religious Federation for World Peace." An "Invitation to a Global Liturgy" sought to awaken, reconcile and unite the hearts and minds of the human family.

University religion departments and religious publications seem to feature more the far eastern religions than the Christian faith from the near east. Hence, in spite of the resurgence

of evangelical churches, schools and missions in the last half of the twentieth century, NRMs have exploded into a major people group unreached by the gospel of grace. The global computerized information age presents pioneer missions with a global frontier.

Why then are NRMs not more often in the news? The ideas of NRMs are in the fine print in many articles, but appear in the headlines only occasionally for several reasons: (1) Their challenges to the classical Christian worldview and way of life have become increasingly deceptive and effective. (2) Anti-theistic/christological/biblical teachings and occult practices have become commonplace in everyday western culture. So they are no longer news. (3) Evangelical church members want to hear little negative about others' religions, but only something positive and self-affirming. (4) Groups denying Christianity's core doctrines claim to be Christian and seek acceptance as Christian. If not, they claim at least to be compatible with or an enhancement of Christianity.

## **The Challenge**

So the need for Christians to defend and proclaim a theistic world view, universal moral principles and the gospel of grace could not be more urgent. We repeatedly hear that "all religions teach the same thing." They

may have some of the moral law as yet unsurpassed, but the differences are greater than the Grand Canyon. Most NRMs do not distinguish God from the cosmos, non-negotiable moral principles from relative noses of wax, the gracious imputation of Christ's righteousness from justification by works, morality motivated by love from that motivated by fear and necessity or magic from relational spirituality. Evangelicals have one of the outstanding opportunities in history for helping people distinguish authentic Christianity from its misconceptions in alternative religions.

We praise God for the independent agencies that have arisen to meet the challenge of NRMs that churches and missions agencies have been so slow to meet. Much more needs urgently to be done. Tragically, the non-Christian impact of NRMs remain untargeted in many theology textbooks, mission boards and churches. Until formal study of NRMs is brought into focus, the followers of these futile ways will remain lost and the causes of evangelical Christianity will suffer. Although increasing numbers of independent, parachurch apologists are able to unmask the NRM's erroneous worldviews and ways of life, few seem to give priority to evangelizing their devotees. Those who do may have little educational background for evaluating philosophical world views, doctrinal systems, ethical issues and alternative spiritualities. Hence it is crucial that leaders of outreach in every evangelical church and home mission board consider the thesis of this article:

The thesis of this article is three-fold. The challenge of the new global frontier to a Christian theistic world view and way of life in Western countries like America is so great that we cannot leave outreach to their adherents to amateurs and part timers. (1) Individuals who are gifted, well-

educated, accredited, full time, professional missionaries must be sent by their churches and mission boards to reach the lost in NRMs. (2) Church missions committees and mission agencies need to pray, give and send missionaries to reach the unreached under the influence of NRMs. (3) Existing independent countercult ministries need to become more closely related to a church and a home mission board. As difficult as that may seem, there would be mutual benefit. In the present age the pre-eminent institution through which God is working with His people to edify them and make them a blessing to the whole world is the church Christ founded and sustains.<sup>2</sup> Becoming more closely related to the churches has been beneficial to other parachurch organizations. Campus outreach ministries, for example, which have found the relationship of mutual benefit.

### **A New Designation**

A minister or missionary holds fast to the faithful Word in order by sound doctrine to achieve two primary ends: (1) to encourage the saints, and (2) to refute opponents of the faith (Titus 1:9). Many ministries feature one or the other to the detriment. Those who think it unpopular to refute error contribute to the rise of naiveté concerning NRMs. Those who are exclusively focused on refutation of falsehood may contribute to negativism and despair.

The connotation of "countercult" is too negative to represent missionary's loving outreach to unreached people in need of the good news of God's grace. It is not enough for evangelical leaders primarily to react against non-Christian religious worldviews, epistemologies and ethics. We need to present a better way. Missions to Muslims would not call themselves CounterMuslims. This plays into the

hands of those who dismiss any, even well-reasoned refutation of their views, as anti-Mormon, anti-Muslim, etc. This article proposes that the half truth of the "countercult" ministry be deleted from the headlines and that evangelicals in ministry to NRMs think of themselves primarily as "missionaries" and their organization as missions. Missionaries must research and answer the truth claims of unrealistic world views, their illegitimate sources of knowledge and the faulty designs of their lifestyles. Missionaries need also to remove unnecessary roadblocks to faith. Their primary and ultimate *raison d'être* is to lead people influenced by NRMs to belief of the gospel, exclusive reliance on the one Mediator, Jesus Christ, and to a new orientation of life related to a sound and vital evangelical church.

In this day of unparalleled evangelical opportunity among those deceived by spiritual counterfeits, missionaries accountable to their boards and churches will demonstrate a more wholesome spiritual experience and way of life than lone ranger Christians with negative priorities. Above all, missionaries lead zealously religious sinners to bury their old way of life at the Messiah's cross and leave its tomb empty in the vitality of a new Spirit-given life from above.

### **Problem Areas**

Although the need for evangelical missions to NRMs is enormous and growing, it is easy to be skeptical about their future for several reasons. (1) The priority of many countercult ministries is almost exclusively on the bad news rather than the good news. (2) Countercult ministries continue generally to be in financial jeopardy, often existing without church and mission board support. (3) The leaders, though wonderfully dedicated people, may be insufficiently trained biblically, logically, morally and spiri-

tually in Christian colleges and seminaries. (4) Church members seem more motivated to pray and give for missionaries on other continents than for those in their homeland. (5) Leaders of independent ministries often have strong personalities with years of experience and deep convictions that make it hard to work together with others with different convictions even on secondary matters of strategy and methods. It is understandable, but unfortunate that people with few highly prized loyalties can work together easier than those with many deeply valued loyalties, even on secondary matters of strategy and methods.

Have you heard the story of the six shipwrecked sailors? They were on an island for a long time and decided they should worship. Two were Southern Baptists who built a lean-to and worshipped together there. Two were New Agers who built a shed and channeled messages together there. Two were evangelical cult researchers who could not cooperate. They built two different huts and worshipped separately. From their distant locations they continued to publish articles against each other's approach!

Will internal strife destroy cooperative evangelical missions to the cults? While the house is being burglarized, will the watch dogs become attack dogs at each other's throats? To change the analogy, will their "friendly fire" shoot each other down? Deeply disturbing was the news during the Gulf War that a United States plane was shot down. By "friendly fire" several trained, skilled, healthy defenders of our country were needlessly killed and millions of dollars were destroyed. Even more distressing, however, would be news that evangelical cult ministries had been shot down by "friendly fire!" What a

tragedy if members mistakenly destroyed the worthy ministries of other well-trained, skilled defenders of the faith!

Nevertheless, I believe there are good reasons for anticipating a bright future for Christian missions to the NRMs—the John the Baptists of the new global frontier.

### ***Evangelistic Priority***

*Those missions to NRMs will flourish in the future whose leaders focus, not on the penultimate goal of refutation, but on the ultimate priority of presenting the Good News.*

The apostle Paul was commis-

**Missionaries must research and answer the truth claims of unrealistic worldviews, their illegitimate sources of knowledge and the faulty designs of their lifestyles.**

sioned by Christ to do the work of an evangelist among the religious Jews and Gentiles. An excellent, well-educated researcher and great defender of the faith, Paul was the paradigm missionary-evangelist to zealous Jews and religious Gentiles. But Paul was not a Lone Ranger. He was sent out by a local church at Antioch and responsibly returned to it to report on his ministry (Acts 14:26-28). The church that checked and confirmed his character and gifts stood behind him in need. He was accountable primarily as a missionary evangelist who also did pre-evangelism (apologetics), and rehabilitation of people from their prior religious commitments to the Christian churches he planted. He fed young Christians, taught sound doctrine and defended the faith against its influential opponents. Leaders of ministries

to NRMs today may have many subspecialties, but above all, must see themselves as sent by the Lord, like Paul, to evangelize the lost.

The late Francis Schaeffer, an exceptionally effective communicator and defender of the faith, did not want to be called an "apologist." An interviewer asked, "You have been described in many ways. How do you view yourself, as a theologian, a philosopher, or a cultural historian?" Schaeffer replied,

My interest is evangelism. To evangelize in the twentieth century, one has to operate across the whole spectrum of disciplines and have answers for the questions. I think we often sell Christianity short, not putting forth the richness we have in Christ for the total culture and the total intellectual life. Evangelism, then, is two things: first of all, giving honest answers to honest questions to get the blocks out of the way so that people will listen to the Gospel as a viable alternative and then secondly, showing them what Christianity means across the whole spectrum of life.<sup>3</sup>

Schaeffer fully recognized the penultimate need in many cases for pre-evangelism (or apologetics). But he held that the ultimate *telos* or goal of defending the objective validity of the faith was to persuade sinners of their need personally to accept its subjective validity for them. He preferred to be called an evangelist. Missionaries to NRMs could well identify themselves as evangelists, defined as broadly as Schaeffer defined it.

Our Lord himself commissioned us to make disciples of all people groups in all nations. If we eliminated those committed to NRMs in the West, the mission field would be small indeed. In the process of reaching those in NRMs, evangelists often need to do apologetics, or as Schaeffer aptly

called it, pre-evangelism. But our primary identity ought not to be mere apologists, theologians, philosophers, psychologists, sociologists, cult watchers, heresy hunters, or watchmen. Our primary designation should be that of evangelists whose primary goal is going out on a mission from a church Christ came to build to make disciples to grow that kind of church to become a blessing to the world.

How does the Lausanne Covenant define evangelism?

To evangelize is to spread the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as the reigning Lord he now offers forgiveness of sins, and the liberating gift of the Spirit to all who repent. Our Christian presence in the world is indispensable to evangelism, and so is that kind of dialogue whose purpose is to listen sensitively in order to understand. But evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Savior and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God. In issuing the gospel invitation we have no liberty to conceal the cost of discipleship. Jesus still calls all who would follow him to deny themselves, take up their cross, and identify themselves with his new community. The results of evangelism include obedience to Christ, incorporation into his Church and responsible service in the world.

Yes, by all worthy means we must summons people to repent and transfer their allegiance from counterfeit spiritual masters. But our distinctive message is that of a theistic world and life view (Heb. 11:6), morally principled living (Rom. 2:14-15) and the good news of the Gospel for the unjust (all). The primary reason for the existence of an evangelical approach to NRMs rests in our belief in the dynamite of the gospel. Power encounters occur as the Holy Spirit uses missionaries who, motivated by love for God and the lost, present Spirit-endued gospel truth with understanding to the spe-

cific interest and need of a devout sinner. The future will be bright for ministries that not only teach the gospel but exhibit the joy of fellowship with Christ and his people in the multifaceted ministries of a Christian church.

### **Missionary Identity**

*Evangelical ministers to NRMs will remain alive and well insofar as they change their primary identity from mere counter cult agents to missionaries—frontier type missionaries to unreached people in alternative religions and cults.*

Missionary and church leaders defend the truth in order to evangelize and edify those who seek salvation in the wrong places. Missionaries stand up for truth, not as an end in itself, but as an instrument of the Spirit who brings sinners to the Savior and builds them up in the church. The goal of missionaries to NRMs is not just to educate Christians, to expose error, or to pronounce groups heretical in doctrine and/or aberrant in practice. Missionaries have a higher calling. They lovingly refute error and defend the objective validity of the gospel for the primary end of leading people to Christ and his new community which is to bless the whole world.

As long ago as 1980 the Lausanne Committee on World Evangelization recognized outreach to people in the cults as missions. At that Consultation on World Evangelization in Pattaya, Thailand, leaders divided the mission field, not geographically, but targeted unreached people groups. I was invited to participate in the working group on "Mystics and Cultists."

The missionaries and national leaders in that small group were concerned about very different cults and some wanted to take approaches that were primarily sociological, anthropological, theological, biblical or philosophical. Eventually we came to value

each other's strengths and a pamphlet was produced representative of majority views. Not all were happy with the entire document, but the faltering attempts at reconciliation rather than confrontation were worthwhile.

At the closing plenary session, participants were movingly challenged to continue interacting with other missionaries in our respective continents. In response to that challenge, the idea of Evangelical Ministries to New Religions (EMNR) was conceived. I presented the possibility of a more continuous cooperation among ministries to the cults in North America at a cults conference to advance Christian missions by strategic planning, mutual encouragement, and shared experiences. After a year or two of consideration, several signed up as charter members, affirming their agreement with the Lausanne Covenant. About half of the doctrinal and missionary platform in the Lausanne Covenant is explicitly devoted to evangelism. Statement headings include the Uniqueness and Universality of Christ, the Nature of Evangelism, the Church and Evangelism, Cooperation in Evangelism, the Urgency of the Evangelistic Task, etc.

Thus EMNR was conceived in the context of a missions Consultation explicitly devoted to evangelizing unreached people. EMNR members, who concur with the Lausanne Covenant, do not do so sincerely if they are mere cult watchers, debaters, bad news gatherers or investigative reporters. Let each associated individual and organization feature their positive identity as missionaries open to dialogue as well as proclamation. Let their name and the headlines of their promotional materials communicate that their ultimate objective is missions to convey the good news to religious groups unreached by the gospel of grace and ministries of the church.

In the context of the Lausanne Committee on World Evangelism, full-orbed missions is the evangelical cult minister's major *raison d'être*.

It is great to see that the Southern Baptist Home Missions Society has its Interfaith Witness. Reaching people with non-theistic and non-Christian religious beliefs is there headlined, as it ought to be everywhere, as the task of a home missions agency.

In 1989, at my recommendation, the Conservative Baptist Home Mission Society, now Mission to the Americas, began sending qualified missionaries to reach New Agers. The first, Bill Honsberger, now serves in the Boulder-Denver area.

The present article constitutes a similar proposal to other denominational and non-denominational mission boards officially to send forth laborers into this whitened harvest field. How foolish it would be to wait until 51% of our country holds many of same non-Christian convictions as Hindus and Buddhists! Perceptive leaders of home mission boards will discern the need before them.

With all the avenues of outreach available to evangelicals in this day of exceptional opportunity, we neglect this unreached field to our own loss. Annually we lose gifted young people, church members, potential missionaries and many resources to NRMs. To preserve the present base of support for mission agencies, it would be in the self-interest of mission boards to send missionaries to the NRMs. Mission boards need not start from point zero. They can seek out independent ministries to NRMs and propose cooperative relationships. They can approach the colleges and seminaries to train people for this work.

How can an independent NRM ministry implement its identity as a

mission? (1) It could seek out a home mission society with which to cooperate. (2) It could become an accredited agency of it as a special task force. (3) It could become an evangelical home mission society with a specific target--NRMs--and include "mission" in its name. The context in which God has promised to give lasting fruit to full-orbed missionaries calls for their major goal as that of doing pre-evangelism, evangelism and rehabilitation to the church.

**An evangelical missionary to NRMs should display proven ability to understand and communicate a coherent account of the relevant lines of biblical teaching on a given subject.**

How will missions to NRMs survive financially? When independent or parachurch cult ministries place themselves in the context of the mission of the church to the world and their services to others merit it, the needed support comes in. As we serve others in the name and spirit of our Lord, they in turn minister gratefully to us. The potential for support in the church mission budgets is greater than that of individuals. Mission committee members in local churches can respond to the challenge of this article by teaching the members that missions to NRMs are biblical and urgent.

As home mission agencies, those researching, speaking and witnessing would need to meet and maintain standard educational requirements and would benefit by regular accountability to their mission agency's board. As missionaries doing evangelism, pre-evangelism and rehabilitation to the churches, we have distinct and varied gifts, specializations and

strategies. With all our variables, we are sent by the Lord through a church to cooperate as a team along with many other missionaries.

### **Biblical Qualifications**

*Ministries to NRMs will not be in jeopardy if their leaders possess the integrity required of church leaders and missionaries in general.*

To help trustees of mission boards and churches, a check list of qualities was given by inspiration in 1 Tim. 3 and Titus 1. Ordination councils and mission boards need to apply these biblical requirements today to those who would evangelize in a pluralistic culture of NRMs.

In moral character a pastor/evangelist/missionary is to be husband of one wife, that is to keep his vow of faithfulness to his wife. He is faithful also to teach his children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. If he cannot extend his faith in his family, how shall he do so as an ambassador of his church?

What other traits of character predominate? I quote, "Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless--not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to much wine, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain." An agent of the Holy Spirit himself exhibits self-control, uprightness, holiness and self-discipline" (Titus 1:7-8). The fruit of the Holy Spirit's presence are to be in evidence.

In personality, a missionary is hospitable and loves all that is good (Titus 1:8). His interests should be much broader than the NRMs as he loves all the good gifts God gives. For all good things are ours to dedicate to Christ and God (1 Cor. 3:22-23).

In experience, a leader of evangelical ministries to alternative religions ought to be a mature member of his

church. He "must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil" (1 Tim.3:6). Also the missionary has earned "a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap" (v. 7).

An evangelical missionary to NRMs should display proven ability to understand and communicate a coherent account of the relevant lines of biblical teaching on a subject, holds firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it" (Titus 1:9). It is not enough to proclaim merely a positive or merely a negative message. An evangelical missionary is able both to encourage the saints and to refute the teachings of unbelievers. It is well for doctrinal statements to affirm what is believed and to deny what is therefore regarded as untrue to reality and normative morality.

If the qualifications of an elder-bishop-pastor seem too much to expect of missionaries to cultists, consider those of a deacon.

Deacons, likewise, are to be men worth respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. In the same way their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything (1 Tim. 3:8-10).

The antecedents for deacons are hardly less demanding. The apostles chose Stephen as a servant or deacon because he was "a man full of faith, and of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 6:5) "full of grace and power" (v. 8). Opponents "could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by which he spoke" (v. 10). No missionary attains perfection, but it seems reasonable that

substantial indications of the qualifications for office in the church ought to be maintained for any Christian leader in outreach from Christian churches.

Insofar as NRM researchers expect these qualifications in their pastors and international missionaries, they must require them of their own selves. We may have the glowing recommendations of others, but we will receive a sincere letter of recommendation from the Lord only if we display the qualities of character, personality, experience, giftedness and spirituality required in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

One's defense of the faith is to honor Jesus Christ, one's King, Head and Lord. Various pamphlets from cult ministries quote a sound bite from 1 Peter 3:15 "Be ready always to give an answer, a reason for the hope that is in you." It is always encouraging to find people obedient to that exhortation. But in the context, our reasoned defense is fruitful when yielded to the Lordship of Christ. Before defending the faith Peter says, "In your hearts set apart Jesus as Lord." If we ourselves are not to become cultic, our ultimate concern ought not be for our kingdom, but Christ's kingdom. We all must bow to the Lordship of Christ. The head of our missionary agency, as well as any other branch of the church, is the risen Lord Jesus Christ in all his exalted power and glory.

How, Peter, should we relate to those we would reach with the truth? Relationally, "do this with gentleness and respect" (v. 16). However damaged by sin, every devotee of a cult remains an image-bearer of God. So each has inherent worth and inalienable human rights. Each is to be respected and deserves to be treated as justly and caringly as we would be treated. Each cultist needs to be loved as potentially a child of God, as broth-

ers and sisters in our churches.

We are to be more concerned with winning people than arguments. "Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will" (2 Tim. 2:23-26).

If when reaching out to the lost we display the spirit of Christ, how much more should we display Christ's spirit in relating to believers with the same mission. The future of missions to NRMs will be bright if our identity, our mission and God's requirements are in sharp focus. Churches, mission boards and committees need seriously to implement such qualifications.

### ***Self-giving Love***

Paraphrasing and applying 1 Cor. 13, we may have the largest, most productive outreach to cultists in the world, but if we have not love for God and our brothers and sisters who minister by a different strategy, our voices are like clanging cymbals (v. 1). We may have the most extensive knowledge of true and false doctrine ever, but if we have not love, we are nothing (v. 2). If we give everything we own to ministries to NRMs, but have not love, we gain nothing (v. 3).

Please apply this passage to your relationship to colleagues in similar ministries as well as unreached people groups.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does

not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails... And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love (vv. 4-13). May the Lord forgive us who repent for being impatient, unkind, envious, boastful, angry or rude to each other and those we would reach!

What does God want from us most of all? Above all, God wants our love! That is the great commandment of the whole Old Testament. Love the God who transcends all the griefs of time with all your heart, soul, strength and mind. And what secondly does God desire of missionaries? By God's grace, love your relatives, friends and neighbors. Love those who need Christ in world religions and cults.

What do you say to a Hare Krishna at the airport? Walter Martin facetiously suggested one time, that we grab them by the lapels, shake them and say, "Why don't you go get a job? You are parasites on this society." In cases needing an existential shock treatment, that may be the loving thing to do. Others may need a less confrontive approach.

When I taught in India I learned that the beggars think they are doing you a service. They give you a chance to earn good karma by contributing to them. So why not say to the Hare Krishna, "I appreciate the fact that you want to help me earn good karma by buying your magazine. Do you realize that I have perfect karma? I have the perfectly righteous status of the Lord Jesus Christ. And you can have Christ's perfect karma put to your account. Renounce trust in your good karma and by faith receive the gift of Christ's perfect righteousness. Then you will have the righteousness that comes from God as a free gift.

We are to love our brothers and

sisters in the churches, even those who don't know and don't care about the world religions and cults! Do we love our colleagues in their varied ministries to NRMs? Would that observers of our lives and teams of missionaries might be able to say, "How the Christian missionaries to NRMs loved each other!"

How can we say that we love God if we cannot love our neighbors— even those believers in the Lausanne Covenant who are also on a mission to reach cultists? If we can mature in love for the team of missionaries with a similar calling, we will grow in effectiveness. And if we love the redemptive kingdom now manifest most prominently in the church, including the one we joined, our witness to outsiders will be enhanced.

### **Mission Cooperation**

With a little imagination one could predict the collapse of the young, first century church at Corinth. Once a vibrant fellowship of repentant sinners, they were being torn apart with "quarreling" (1 Cor. 3:3). One said, "I follow Paul." Another, "I follow Apollos," but these were not the head of the church, they were "mere men" (v. 4).

Whatever organization we serve, and whatever our high regard for its gifted leader, we have a higher loyalty. "What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow" (vv. 5-6).

Are we followers of Walter Martin? Hank Hanegraaff, Paul Martin, the Passantinos, Robert Morey, James Spencer, Norman Geisler, the Jesus People, Ronald Enroth?

Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a "fool" so that he may become wise. For the wisdom of

this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written, 'He catches the wise in their craftiness'... So then, no more boasting about men! All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos, or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are of Christ and Christ is of God (1 Cor. 3:18-21).

We can profit from the writings of people as different as Walter Martin, Anthony Hoekema, Ruth Tucker, Gordon Lewis and Craig Blomberg. We need not reject the contributions of one to profit from the values of the other except where they contradict the teaching of Christ and Scripture. For all are Christ's and all are ours insofar as they teach and exemplify truth. But all are finite and fallible and so we must not make them our rule of faith or fellowship.

An occupational hazard of apologists is to use gifts God gave us for defending the faith to defend ourselves. Fallaciously we may imagine that since the Bible is inerrant we are. A converted Catholic priest in my classes admitted that as a priest he said, "The pope is infallible on a few matters on which popes have spoken *ex cathedra*, but in my town I was infallible on everything else!" Since the Bible alone is without error, defenders of biblical inerrancy should be the first to acknowledge their own fallibility.

The future of missions to NRMs will be bright, if having unity in the essentials (such as those in the Lausanne Covenant), we allow liberty on non-essential methods and exude charity toward all our colleagues. With confidence in the integrity of each other's mature allegiance to Christ as Savior and Lord, we should be able to abide our distinctive differences of personality, gifts, strategies and methods.

An integration of the elements of truth in the work of our colleagues is more appropriate than blanket

endorsement of one against all others. For example, in my book *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims*, I found value in the data of the inductive method of reasoning of a Norman Geisler or a John Warwick Montgomery. I integrated the logical elements of a rational empiricist like Stuart Hackett, or of a rationalist like Gordon Clark. I appreciated and used the content of Cornelius Van Til's presuppositions. I incorporated the personal witness of Christian mystics. All were integrated in the valid elements of each in a verificational approach.<sup>4</sup>

In spite of real strategic differences, all who can affirm the Lausanne Covenant can respect, love and cooperate with each other. Although we have our different mentors, we must remember that they are all mere men and we can learn from all insofar as all are of Christ. As Paul said, "all are yours"!

### **Self-Government**

Paul's swan song to the elders from the cult center of Ephesus, started out with "Guard yourselves" (Acts 20:28). If we govern ourselves we will not need so much to be governed by others. Paul warned that ravaging wolves were coming and would deceive many. But in such a time, he said, first, stand guard over your own self.

In addition to guarding the gospel message, we need to guard our own doctrinal and moral integrity. We must keep ourselves in the love of God, maintaining moral and spiritual health by daily dedication to the cause of Christ. Let us not become so busy cataloging the errors of others that we fail to heed admonitions to examine and control ourselves. As good as we may be doing at self-governing, none of us sees ourselves as others see us. So we need accountability to others and particularly to our own boards.

A *Christianity Today* article was headed, "Who is watching the cult watchers?" If we were more open to responsible self-criticism and that of one another by the mission boards of our churches, we might not need to be watched by others. Missionaries to the NRMs deplore the damage to the cause done by leaders of the cults and of failed television ministries who have been unaccountable to their boards. If we have called for greater accountability on their part, should we not acknowledge our need for greater accountability to our churches and our mission boards? Regularly, we must examine whether in our ministries we have yielded to fleshly efforts or whether they are a fruit of the Spirit's work in the body of Christ and our board of trustees.

In the moral and spiritual battle for truth we need to choose our battles and our weapons carefully.

"Though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Cor. 10:3-5).

Dysfunctional families often use the wrong weapons to resolve their differences. How great must be God's concern with his dysfunctional church family when we also choose the world's weapons to settle our disagreements.

According to a very apocryphal story, a person who recently went to heaven saw a cloud floating by with people excitedly praising God, shouting Hallelujah, raising both hands and exclaiming, Praise the Lord! Peter explained, "There go the charismatics."

Another cloud sailed by with dig-

nified people who sang old hymns, but did not raise hands in worship. Peter explained, that they were the Presbyterians.

A third cloud went by with a group of battle weary cult watchers. Peter said "Sh! Don't say anything. The others didn't think any counter-cult people would get here."

But I believe that evangelical missionaries to the cults and the churches supporting them will be there. I recall what the glorified Lord said to the church in Ephesus through John,

I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. But you have this in your favor, You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches (Rev. 2:2-7)

### **In Conclusion**

Let us remember our first love and our first spiritual weapons when we were so dependent on the Holy Spirit. As Martin Luther King memorably said, "I have a dream." so too I have a dream that in this day of unparalleled global opportunity, evangelicals will be known primarily as missionary evangelists, gifted and qualified, supported by schools and mission boards to lovingly and cooperatively minister faithfully to those living under the influence of NRMs.<sup>5</sup>

I have a dream that together missionaries to NRMs will make a significant contribution to the cause of Christ that cannot be made by any of our agencies separately.

I have a dream that evangelical churches will regularly support these qualified missionary evangelists.

I have a dream that severe personal differences among missionaries will be transcended by the holy love of God's Spirit faithfully shed abroad in our hearts, convicting of sin, urging people to confess and to embrace each other in forgiveness.

### Endnotes

1. Cited by Elliot Miller, "The 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions: Part One: Interreligious Dialogue or New Age Rally?" *Christian Research Journal* 16,2 (Fall 1993), 1
2. See the role of the Church in God's program, Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, vol. 3, chapter 5, and especially chapter 6 on the Church and Israel in God's Kingdom.
3. *Christianity Today* (8 October, 1976): 20 [18]. Cited in my "Schaeffer's Apologetic Method" ed. Ronald W. Ruessegger, *Reflections on Francis Schaeffer*. Academie, 1986, pp. 75.76.
4. Gordon R. Lewis, *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America), 1990.
5. Also see my "The Church and the New Spirituality" in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 19, 2 Fall 1996

Photo here  
of  
Lewis

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*Ministries to New Religions and his written several books in the field of apologetics and NRM such as Testing Christianity's Truth Claims, What Everyone Should Know about Transcendental Meditation, and Confronting the Cults. Dr Lewis has also authored two books on theology. One is his monumental work entitled Integrative Theology and the other is Decide for Yourself: A Theological Workbook.*

# New Religious Movements and Missions: An Historical Overview

*The relationship between frontier missions and New Religious Movements is neither new nor transitory. NRMs will target the people most vulnerable to a spiritual counterfeit operating as wolves in sheep's clothing (Matthew 7:15). NRMs routinely deny the basic teachings of historic Christianity. What are the lessons from history and how should we reach them?*

by Bryce A. Pettit

**M**issionaries in a mountainous region of Colombia had worked for years preparing a people group to receive the gospel. God blessed their work and a majority of the people accepted Christ. When news of this mission success spread through other parts of Colombia, caravans of another type of missionary began to arrive in the same villages. They were Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons (the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, or LDS), and they arrived in force with dozens of missionaries and thousands of pieces of literature. They saturated the area with their message and over forty percent of the new converts were lost.

Is this an isolated incident? Is it a new phenomenon? Dwayne Black of the World Prayer Center in Colorado Springs, Colorado, thinks it is neither. He is a returned missionary from western Africa, and in a conversation with him I spoke to him of the strategic prayer need related to the growing threat of cults to frontier missions around the world. He had struggled with these groups himself for over forty years while in Africa and he assured me that he understood this growing danger.

The relationship between missions, including frontier missions,

and New Religious Movements (NRMs, the correct term today for the older term cults) is neither new nor transitory. In a recent article on the LDS church, sociologist of religion Rodney Stark has projected that at its present growth rate, by the year 2080, the LDS church will reach a total membership of 260 million members, making it an emerging world religion.<sup>1</sup> Two points make Stark's observations even more relevant to the issue of NRMs and missions. First, the current growth rate of the LDS is higher than Stark's original projection, and secondly, almost all of their "converts" will be new to Christianity, nominal believers, or people with only a brief exposure to the Christian message, not people who have never heard of Christ. In other words, they will target the people most vulnerable to a spiritual counterfeit operating as wolves in sheep's clothing (Matthew 7:15).

## **Reason for Concern**

I bring up this point because NRMs are not simply alternative Christian denominations. They routinely deny the basic teachings of the Bible and historic Christianity, and are often not part of Christianity at all but originate from other world religions and the occult, etc. The NRMs,

for all their fervent efforts, rarely do pioneering missionary work to unreached people groups. In fact, many groups like the LDS church boast of taking advantage of the expense and sacrifice of Christian missionaries to prepare the way for their own proselytizing efforts. Past Christian writers have warned of the threat such groups pose for the world Christian movement, but the threat they outlined was largely ignored.

Marley Cole, for example, in his book *Jehovah's Witnesses: The New World Society*<sup>2</sup> gave a detailed account of the growth of the Witnesses around the world from 1942 to 1953. During this single decade they expanded their activities in Africa from eleven countries to thirty-four. The number of total ministers (i.e., active membership) grew from 10,070 to 81,793, with the total number of hours spent doing their kingdom preaching (i.e., proselytizing) rising from 2,200,163 to an incredible 16,979,027.

We need to remember that much of this was accomplished during the crisis of World War II. In Europe, during the Nazi conquest of most of the continent, their growth went from 13 countries to 24, and 22,796 total ministers to a sobering 179,374.<sup>3</sup> Statis-

tics such as these, however, are now hopelessly out of date. Stark estimates that by 2090 the Witnesses may well reach 195 million in total active membership.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, he writes that in 1992 the total efforts of the U.S. and Canadian churches sustained a task force of 41,142 overseas missionaries at a yearly cost of over \$2 billion. The Witnesses, by contrast, maintained a force of 3,279,270 “publishers” (the current term for those active in the Watchtower “preaching work”) with only a budget of \$45 million. Paul Carden<sup>5</sup> notes that this number is eighty times the number of North American missionaries operating at a fraction of the cost.<sup>6</sup>

In 1996 they spent a staggering 1,140,621,714 preaching hours promoting the message of the Watchtower Society. The total number of magazines, books, Bibles, etc., placed in homes or with individuals was recorded as 334,279,595. They had 366,579 baptisms and the total attendance at their annual communion observation, called the Memorial (a good indicator of the total number of people in Watchtower book studies, family members of JW's or others being affected by their teachings), was 12,921,933.<sup>7</sup>

The LDS church and the Witnesses are the two largest groups among the numerous NRMs afflicting frontier missionary efforts today, but they represent a small part of a much larger story. They are part of the category known to cult researchers as “Bible cults,” which does not take into account the many New Age cults which have emerged since the 1960s—indigenous religious cults that have emerged once Christianity has taken root in a frontier area, various magic groups, middle eastern religions or the human potential movement.<sup>8</sup> The growth of these groups at the expense of Christian missionary efforts, as the LDS and

JWs attest, is a cause for serious concern.

### ***The American Context***

Although the church has wrestled with challenges from heresies and alternative religions throughout her history, the threat to frontier missions from cults and new religions is a recent phenomenon that deserves special attention. Our orientation to this subject involves understanding the religious history of the United States of America, called by many the Pandora's Box of cults and new religions. From its earliest days the US has been a haven for alternative spiritualities.

The preeminence of established Protestant denominations, particularly Anglicanism, Congregationalism and Presbyterianism were challenged in their domination by Roman Catholicism, Judaism, the Mennonites, Moravians, Methodists, Deism, Unitarianism, Transcendentalism, Masonry and Native American shamanism. The close proximity of so many divergent religious and philosophical systems combined with the political revolution of the eighteenth century created a political acceptance of religious pluralism. The atmosphere of religious freedom and tolerance that emerged from the American Revolution changed not only the religious history of the world, but it effected the Christian missionary movement as well.

When the American revolution began, the harsh persecution of smaller religious groups that had characterized much of the early history of the English colonies had practically ended. The state churches of these colonies would eventually go through a process of disestablishment that began in 1776 in Virginia and ended in 1833 in Massachusetts. As the Great Awakening (1726-56) swept the colonies, the established religious

bodies found themselves competing against the newer denominations who became more prominent largely because of their proselytizing zeal and the fact that they took advantage of the western flow of the population away from the eastern seaboard. The Baptists and others favored a system of separation of church and state which eventually led to a broader acceptance of freedom of worship without governmental regulation or interference.<sup>9</sup>

Smaller and less socially acceptable Christian denominations such as Baptists, Methodists, Dunkards, Quakers and Roman Catholics initially wished to be allowed to exist without government interruption of their activities, but eventually it meant that the United States would become a vast spiritual supermarket of ideas and religious bodies from old and new religions alike. Granting civil liberties to minority religious groups identified America as an experiment in religious pluralism and tolerance. For example, the first Lutheran synod was organized in 1748, the first Negro Baptist church was formed in Georgia in 1773, the American Universalist Church was founded in 1780 (only four years after the disestablishment process began). Deism became immensely popular after Thomas Paine published his *Age of Reason*, the Russian Orthodox Church began missionary activities to Alaska in 1792 and William Ellery Channing founded the Unitarian Church in 1819, which was closely followed by Joseph Smith founding the LDS church in 1830.<sup>10</sup>

### ***The 19th Century Caldron***

The struggling efforts of early nineteenth century new religious groups such as the LDS church, various utopian communities and the Spiritualist congregations exploded

into a kaleidoscope of new religious fervor after the American Civil War. Many factors contributed to the tapestry of religions that found a home in the United States. The increasing concentration of the population in cities due to industrialization, along with improved education, communication, as well as transportation and the influx of new immigrants, brought people with new ideas and new religious beliefs into close physical proximity, allowing people to sample new ideas and beliefs.

Although new religious groups were often met with social ostracism and even violence, they would eventually be protected under the U.S. Constitution and were able to survive, and later thrive as part of the American religious experiment. This protection was also extended to marginalized groups such as the Mormons, and as the nineteenth century progressed this became an umbrella for the most diverse religious climate any nation had yet tolerated.

To many scholars the U.S. religious scene is still perceived as having been dominated by traditional religious institutions from Protestant, Catholic and Jewish backgrounds, but this is a mistake.<sup>11</sup> The nineteenth century witnessed the formation of several alternative faith systems to rival the Christian majority. They included occultic groups such as the Theosophical Society and the Golden Dawn, the emergence of New Thought groups such as Christian Science, Religious Science and Unity, apocalyptic millerite churches, humanistic beliefs inspired by Darwin, Marx and Freud, the continuing presence of Masonry, along with the entrance of older world religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. The established world religions also had their own variations such as the

Bahá'í faith and the Ramakrishna Mission.

Until this uniquely American religious renaissance began to emerge after the Civil War, Christian missions had little to fear from new religious movements. In fact, one historian of Mormonism documents that from the first missionary efforts of the LDS

**Theosophy's search was for a treasury that transcended religion and was founded on what they called the Ancient Wisdom that lies behind every true religious tradition.**

church in 1849 until the end of the century in 1899, the LDS church experienced a declining membership outside the United States.<sup>12</sup> However, the post-Civil War era witnessed an overall change in this situation. A foundation was laid for aggressive proselytizing activities by NRMs that has continued unabated. Focusing solely on early membership numbers has blinded many researchers to the greater civil and ideological impact of the NRMs and their affect on Christian churches and missionary efforts. A foundation was laid that allowed these groups, through persistence and patience, to establish springboards for larger and more complex proselytizing efforts in later years.

### ***Theosophy in India***

The context for this change and the impact of NRMs on frontier mission fields did not take place within the United States itself, but rather in India. A Russian mystic named Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and a Union Civil War colonel and newspaper editor named Henry Steele Olcott formed a metaphysical organization in New

York in 1875 called the Theosophical Society. Dedicating itself to belief in a universal brotherhood of all races, to exploring comparative religion and science, and seeking genuine occult phenomena, Theosophy tapped into the circles that had been stimulated by Spiritualism after the Civil War.

The massive loss of human life during the Civil War (600,000 deaths) inspired a search for information about dead brothers, husbands and fathers within the Spiritualist churches and organizations. Blavatsky and Olcott decried the fakery within Spiritualism and founded their own society to distance themselves from the chicanery of the parlor tricks and hoaxes foisted upon desperate people by the Spiritualists. Their search was for a religious treasury that transcended religion and was founded on what they called the Ancient Wisdom that lies behind every true religious tradition.

A scandal broke out over Blavatsky's occult phenomena that made her and Olcott look suspiciously like the Spiritualists they denounced. This helped them to decide to sail for India in 1878, and in 1879 they arrived at the spiritual home of the Ancient Wisdom. When they arrived in India they were appalled at the treatment of the Indian peoples by the British *raj* and by the Christian missionaries, both Protestant and Roman Catholic.

Traditional Indian religions were mocked, technological achievements by the West were used to intimidate the Indian peoples and belittle the accomplishments of their own civilization. The people were denied many civil liberties<sup>13</sup> and they suffered under many cruel policies.<sup>14</sup> Blavatsky and Olcott determined to undermine the work of the apathetic missionaries as much as possible. Judging by the criticism they received in various missionary magazines, they

were quite successful.<sup>15</sup>

Whereas the Theosophical Society had been founded on a belief in the value of all religions, this quickly gave way to openly antagonistic attitudes toward Christianity and a vigorous promotion by Blavatsky and Olcott of Hinduism and Buddhism.<sup>16</sup> Brahmanic Hindus in particular welcomed Theosophy as an answer to white missionary attacks on India as a backward and unscientific civilization.<sup>17</sup> This did not escape the notice of Christian missionaries, and what ensued for several decades was an escalating atmosphere of distrust and hostility.<sup>18</sup>

Blavatsky and Olcott took up the banner of these ancient religions using the founding of several colleges, an extensive use of the printing press and fervent proselytizing to communicate to all the peoples of India their own religious and cultural heritage. They even began a youth movement modeled after the Young Men's Christian Association.<sup>19</sup> John N. Farquhar notes that by the year 1884 the Theosophical Society had grown in both numbers and influence with over one hundred branches spread throughout India with many allies among Hindu upper castes.<sup>20</sup>

Theosophists promoted Hinduism and Buddhism partly to thumb their noses at the missionaries, but mostly to instill pride in the Indian peoples in their own civilization.<sup>21</sup> The missionaries were in turn livid with the obstruction of their evangelistic efforts by the Theosophists. They saw their activities being weakened by the influence of the Theosophists and looked for every opportunity to denounce them.<sup>22</sup>

Yet another scandal over allegedly fraudulent occult phenomena drove Blavatsky, the more charismatic member of the "Theosophic Twins," to leave India. Whether or not Blavatsky was guilty of fraud is irrelevant to the

fact that Theosophy lost much of its momentum for many years because of the scandal. The missionaries were only too happy to aid in publicizing the scandal in their own magazines and newspapers.<sup>23</sup>

Theosophy might have faded from the religious horizon of India altogether except that Blavatsky's successor as president of the society, Annie Besant, who turned the efforts of the society away from a search for occult phenomena to championing Indian home rule and social reform. She even participated in the first India National Congress and her numerous writings influenced many leaders in this movement. This provided Theosophy with a platform from which to continue assaulting Christian missionary efforts. Theosophists were instrumental in uncovering many unjust conditions directed against the people of India, winning folk-hero status for some.<sup>24</sup>

The callousness of Christian missionaries to the plight of the Indian peoples, their religious arrogance and their disdain for anything within Indian culture or religion made the success of a group like the Theosophists a certainty. Theosophy fired major broadsides at the missionaries with observations such as, "What Christianity really is is shown by Krupp cannons,<sup>25</sup> by whiskey distilleries, (and) by opium ships."<sup>26</sup> These stinging rebukes of Christian hypocrisy inoculated many in India from the message of Christ. Missionary magazines were constantly complaining of the hindrance that Theosophy made to their work. However, Theosophy became a kind of prophetic voice judging the sins of the churches who presented themselves to the Indian people in a confusing array of splintered denominations who identified with the colonial regime of the British.<sup>27</sup>

Theosophy's lasting impact on

frontier missionary activity can be seen in its participation in the 1893 World Parliament of Religions during the Chicago World's Fair. Many of the speakers from India and other eastern nations were either Theosophists, or had at one time been associated in some way with Theosophy. The popular western belief that Christianity was the final step in the world's spiritual evolution was successfully challenged by these speakers. No one had expected these representatives to argue articulately and persuasively about their own belief systems, much less indict mainline Christianity for its religious arrogance and intolerance.<sup>28</sup>

Scholars have noted that this religious congress provided the platform that Eastern religions needed to expand their influence into the Western nations. It marked the beginning of the popularity of belief in reincarnation and other Eastern ideas in the mostly Christian countries of Europe and North America. The greatest evidence of the impact of this congress can be seen in the influence of the New Age Movement. The prominence of New Age spirituality in the 1960s, 70s, 80s and 90s was precursored by the presence of Theosophy, occultism, New Thought and Spiritualism in the 1860s, 70s, 80s and 90s. Also, the current challenge of NRMs to missionary efforts was pioneered by Blavatsky, Olcott and Besant, by LDS missionaries in Europe and Latin America and by Christian apathy towards both.<sup>29</sup>

### ***The Lull Before the Storm***

The nineteenth century had been a time of clash of ideas as Darwin, Freud, Marx, higher biblical criticism, etc., stormed the citadels of traditional, Western Christendom. NRMs had a role to play in this assault, but the Church's attention to that assault was blunted in the next century. Two

world wars, the Great Depression, the end of colonial rule, the appearance of nuclear weapons of mass destruction, the rise of global Communism, all worked to preoccupy the Church's energies. Counter-cult activities were limited largely to theological critiques and by ridicule in the form of tracts and small booklets.<sup>30</sup> Some, who were more in the mainline Christian churches or who were outside observers of the American religious scene, worked to legitimize NRMs as part of the broader American religious smorgasbord.<sup>31</sup>

An expanding library of books by and about NRMs had little impact on how Christian missions were dealing with their presence outside of North America and the generally christianized Western culture. More attention was being paid to the growing trend away from evangelism to dialogue as a method of encountering the world's religions championed by the World Council of Churches. The great missionary conferences at Edinburgh (1910), Jerusalem (1928) and Tambaram (1938) had maintained the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and his claims to deity and as Savior of the world. This would soon change.

This unique understanding of the Christian message was challenged as being dogmatic, inflexible and insensitive toward the religious heritage of other peoples. Studies in comparative religions strongly challenged the accepted idea of the exclusiveness of Jesus Christ. In 1966, when W. A. Visser't Hooft ended his term as General Secretary of the WCC, the dialogue model would become the accepted method for Christians to encounter the world's religions, but the pressure to change the WCC's position had been going on for many years. The Central Committee of the

WCC met in 1971 and adopted an interim policy on dialogue that profoundly affected the WCC's approach to non-Christian religions, including NRMs.<sup>32</sup>

### ***The Post-War Period***

The current interest in the effect NRMs have on missionary activities

**The New Age Movement is no longer a marginalized movement birthed in the counter-culture of the 60s, but is a global phenomenon affecting business, education, medicine, government, science, media, established religion and entertainment.**

began in 1958 when Walter Martin, an evangelical critic of the "cults," was asked to be part of the Pastor's Conference Team of World Vision Incorporated. He traveled over 25,000 miles throughout Africa and Asia speaking to thousands of Christian workers and gathering information on the impact NRMs were having on their missionary efforts. Over the next few years he visited other countries and continued to gather information relevant to the threat these groups posed to world missions.<sup>33</sup> His Christian Research Institute became the model for dozens, and eventually hundreds, of other counter-cult organizations worldwide over the next four decades.

Parallel to this development were several reinvigorating movements among the NRMs in the 1960's. In the LDS church a program known as "Every Member a Missionary" inspired their current rapid expansion and missionary activity. Among some NRMs the year 1975 took on an apoc-

alyptic importance as these groups began to prepare for this date by stepping up their proselytizing efforts.<sup>34</sup> Also, the explosion of New Age mysticism received a boost in the 1960s when President Lyndon B. Johnson repealed the Oriental Exclusion Act which had restricted the number of Asian immigrants to the United States. J. Gordon Melton, of the Institute for the Study of American Religions, lists eleven major Eastern teachers, or gurus, who moved to the United States within seven years of the repeal of this legislation.<sup>35</sup>

The New Age Movement is no longer a marginalized movement birthed in California's 60s counter-culture, but is a global phenomenon affecting business, education, medicine, government, science, media, established religion and entertainment.<sup>36</sup> The sophistication of this social and spiritual movement has made it one of the leading alternatives to the Christian gospel around the world. Older, more established groups, both the biblically oriented ones such as the JWs and Mormons, and the metaphysical groups, are copying this savvy approach to marketing and public relations and they are benefiting from it with increased social influence and expanding memberships. After reviewing articles in several magazines and newsletters from a wide variety of NRMs, it has become obvious to me that Christians have now become the target of the largest proselytizing backlash in the history of the world Christian movement.<sup>37</sup>

Walter Martin outlined several observations that he had discerned from his travels to missionary territories in the 1950s and 60s that bear repeating and updating here.<sup>38</sup> His observations are more relevant to groups that claim to be in some sense

Christian, but are helpful for other groups as well. First, in the mission contexts particularly, NRMs are often hesitant to reveal their affiliation with cultic groups. They do not wish to be identified with an organization that has received negative press, or whose teachings have been critiqued and denounced by Christian scholars. NRMs reveal their ties to these groups only after an individual has been immersed in the group and indoctrination has been successful.

This attempt to obfuscate their identity extends to other aspects of their work as well. They usually do not wish to identify their literature as originating with a "cult," and therefore package their message without reference to their true origins. They operate under the rubric of Christian symbols and terminology while consciously denying their historic meanings, and they will rarely identify their public meetings with a sectarian organization. They have become adept at denying the central teachings of historic Christianity while brandishing a Bible to support their own beliefs.

One of the more egregious practices of NRMs is the way they infiltrate large evangelistic rallies. Members of NRMs deceptively pass themselves off as Christian volunteers at spiritual rallies and public evangelistic efforts by noted speakers who attract large audiences. They will steer spiritual seekers away from Christ to their own groups. The parallel to this among other groups that are not oriented toward Christianity is their infiltration of cultural institutions. They use this acceptance as a way to propagandize for their group using the media and celebrity endorsements.

In recent years the situation with NRMs and missions has changed dramatically from the situation that Walter Martin encountered. Most NRMs now perceive little in historic Chris-

tianity that threatens them. Uninformed and ill-equipped to deal with the challenge of NRMs to their evangelistic efforts, Evangelicals in particular have been labeled as intolerant bigots, anti-intellectuals and dangerous to a world movement toward democratic ideals. Rather than presenting themselves as being in harmony with Christianity, many NRMs are now content to be thought of as progressive and forward thinking champions of religious tolerance and political harmony.

### ***The Current Crisis***

Christian responses to the burgeoning growth of NRMs has been weak and ineffective. Most counter-cult ministries are absorbed with fund raising simply to remain active. Except for a few older and more visible organizations such as CRI International (Walter Martin's Christian Research Institute), the Spiritual Counterfeits Project, Watchman Fellowship and a few others, counter-cult groups have remained small and concentrated within the United States. Resources in languages other than English have been scarce, and are usually translations of older English works. In some areas this is beginning to change, but the need to go beyond the more highly visible groups such as the LDS church to indigenous groups who have never been analyzed is growing rapidly.

Denominational responses to NRMs have generally been apathetic. The two responses that have been substantially funded and staffed are the Commission on Organizations for the Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod) and the Interfaith Witness Department of the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. Only the IWD ministers outside its denominational boundaries, and it has grown to be a powerful force for answering cultic threats to

its congregations. There are a few other examples, but denominational support for counter-cult ministries has been mostly nonexistent.

Sociologists of religion believe that the Church's apathy toward this threat has historically been due to the assumption that NRMs are a passing cultural fad that will exhaust itself in time.<sup>39</sup> This incorrect assumption has been answered by Harold Turner, an authority on the growth of NRMs, who concludes that "the world has never seen more religious innovation and creativity than in the second half of the twentieth century."<sup>40</sup> He also notes how curious this is in light of the fact that we now live in a world that is becoming monochrome and standardized in so many other directions, e.g., airports, fast-food restaurants, etc.

Churches have certainly had more responses to the growth of NRMs over the last fifty years than these two examples, but they have been through intellectual responses such as publications and conferences, not missionary strategies to reach them, or protective strategies to inform believers of their dangers.<sup>41</sup> One of the most encouraging developments by way of response has been that many Evangelical counter-cult ministries have established branches outside of North America and Europe to counter the presence of NRMs. However, they still generally maintain the precedent set earlier in this century of devoting their time to doctrinal critiques and attacks on the founders and current leaders of these groups.<sup>42</sup>

A notable exception to the rule is the ministry of the Utah Gospel Mission. At the end of the nineteenth century, pastors from Utah commissioned the Rev. John Nutting to travel throughout the U.S. to recruit missionaries to evangelize the Mormons in Utah. After his death the mission lost most of its momentum until it was revived in 1979 by the Rev. Kurt

Van Gorden. Van Gorden had worked for a number of years with Walter Martin at the Christian Research Institute and left to form a new ministry that would focus on evangelism and recovery from cultic abuse. I was privileged to travel with Van Gorden to Ohio in 1979 to meet with some of Nutting's descendants to obtain much of Nutting's personal research into Mormonism. The family granted Van Gorden's request to revive the Utah Gospel Mission, which still recruits evangelists to minister to the LDS people.<sup>43</sup>

Another current breakthrough in this area has been the recognition by George Otis, Jr., founder and President of The Sentinel Group, that NRMs should be included in any spiritual mapping exercise undertaken for missionary research. The methods relying on theological critique of the NRMs have done little to impede their growth. Spiritual warfare was a topic that was not discussed in most publications and conferences on NRMs unless it related directly to demonic activity in the occult.

There were a few exceptions to this, of course, but until Otis began to identify and quantify the growing presence of NRMs in world mission contexts, directed concerts of prayer have never been focused on the spiritual strongholds of spiritual darkness related to these groups. Established world religions and recognized animistic religions have been identified as fortresses of spiritual opposition to the gospel, but NRMs have not been perceived to pose the same dangers. I myself have been to many counter-cult conferences, and I have never heard a call for concentrated efforts of spiritual warfare intended to break up the spiritual deception of an NRM group or organization. There has been

a recognition that individuals need prayer for the opening of spiritual blinded eyes, but nothing on the scale that Otis is striving to bring about.<sup>44</sup>

The most important aspects of Otis's work revolve around two missing elements of research into most efforts to evaluate and counteract NRMs. First, Otis recognizes that the

**Established world religions and recognized animistic religions have been identified as fortresses of spiritual opposition to the gospel, but NRMs have not been perceived to pose the same dangers.**

counter-cult work of the past has culminated in the objectification of the people lost in the spiritual darkness of the cultic systems. Otis is asking that we see members of NRMs not as rabid minions of Satan, but as lost sheep wandering in a spiritual wasteland in need of a redeeming Shepherd.<sup>45</sup>

Walter Martin attempted to make this point in his ministry and writings, but his naturally confrontational style blunted this insight for many Christians. The adversarial stand so often taken by those interested in reaching the NRMs has only worked to validate the NRM's xenophobic fear of persecution and their stereotype of Christians as bigoted and uncaring oppressors of the type that Blavatsky and Olcott encountered in India.

The second needed insight that spiritual mapping brings to this issue is the need to identify and quantify the spiritual strongholds of deception for the various NRMs. Calls for prayer in most counter-cult ministry newsletters revolve around the needs of the staff of the ministry and individuals

who are receiving ministry from the organization. There have been a few prayer initiatives along this line, such as declaring 1997 as the International Year of Prayer for Jehovah's Witnesses, but this effort by many Evangelical counter-cult groups still suffered from the same deficiencies as missionary strategies have in the past. It was vague and had not been researched and promoted with quantified evidence, etc.

When the WorldWide Church of God transformed into an evangelical denomination within the last few years the event was reported with great fanfare. Never before had such a large cultic group departed from its origins to become orthodox. But why should this be such a novel occurrence? Placing the NRMs into the matrix of spiritual mapping has already born much fruit in this area. In their 1997 International Consultation on Spiritual Mapping, The Sentinel Group reported a number of communities around the world that were being transformed because they had employed this form of spiritual warfare to address the needs of their community that included attention to NRMs.

In Kiambu, Kenya (a suburb of Nairobi highly resistant to missionary efforts), a handful of intercessors believed that witchcraft had an important role to play in their town's slavery to violence, the occult and crushing poverty. Spiritual warfare led to the conversion of dozens of bars into churches, a dramatic drop in the crime rate, the removal of a powerful witch from a position of influence with government officials and economic revitalization for the community.<sup>46</sup>

A similar breakthrough was reported from Hemet, California—a sleepy little retirement community. This was a place where Christians were divided along denominational

lines and their churches could only be described as apathetic. The community was plagued with prostitution, drugs and gang violence. Both Transcendental Meditation and the Church of Scientology were moving into the area with plans to build major facilities. It was discovered that the area had been a focus of Native American animism for centuries.

Several prayer initiatives were put into motion by a concerned local pastor and spiritual breakthroughs were soon reported by the churches. Unity and love replaced animosity and division among believers and pastors alike. Their churches began to grow because of renewed evangelistic efforts, especially among gang members. A reconciliation service was organized for various Native American groups which resulted in many dramatic conversions.<sup>47</sup>

Reports such as these illustrate that NRMs are entering a phase of vulnerability to Christian evangelism that is unprecedented in the history of frontier missions. Never before have our evangelistic efforts been this well organized around prayer and spiritual warfare, or so specifically targeted to demonic strongholds, and never have our motives been so clearly identified with the loving heart of God for all peoples regardless of their social, ethnic or religious backgrounds.

### **In Conclusion**

The purpose for doing this article is to inform those in frontier missions of the origins and background of the cultic systems that challenge our evangelistic efforts for the hearts and lives of men and women around the world. The mistakes of the past were discussed only to provide the context and illustrate how spiritual battles fought in the strength of human energies alone only exacerbate the condition of spiritual deception that holds the peoples of the world in bondage

and error.

As the chronological dawn of a new millennium looms on our collective human horizon, are we also on a spiritual threshold of Christian unity and evangelism that will catapult the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ into a new era of spiritual victory over the Satanic domination of much of the world? The evidence that is already pouring in concerning the spiritual advances of the Church's missionary efforts are astounding. Why should we not expect the same for the thousands of new religions around the world? Are Rodney Stark's sociological estimates for the growth of NRMs such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons fatalistically accurate? If God can sovereignly bring an end to Soviet Communism, how much longer can Salt Lake City resist His will?

### **Endnotes**

- 1 Rodney Stark, "So Far, So Good: A Brief Assessment of Mormon Membership Projections," *Review of Religious Research* 38 (Dec. 1996): 175-78.
2. Marley Cole, *Jehovah's Witnesses: The New World Society* (New York: Vantage Press, 1955), 24.
- 3 Ibid. Also, Cole reports that in 1952 alone they distributed a staggering 211,888,382 books, tracts, magazines and other written propaganda pieces.
4. Rodney Stark and Laurence Iannaccone, "Why the Jehovah's Witnesses Grow So Rapidly: A Theoretical Application," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 12 (May 1997): 133-57, cited by Paul Carden, "The Centers for Apologetics Research October 1997 Prayer Update," (San Juan Capistrano, CA: The Centers for Apologetics Research), 2.
5. See his article in this issue for further use of these statistics.
6. October, 1997 Prayer Update, p. 2. In a sobering observation, David Bryant cited a study by World Vision International that concluded that if Evangelicals were as zealous as the LDS movement in promoting missions among its young people, some one million short term missionaries could have already been recruited by the year 1980 alone. Regrettably, this citation was left out of the next edition. David Bryant, *In the Gap: What It Means to Be a World Christian*, with a Foreword by Leighton

Ford (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1984), 46.

7. Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, rev. ed., gen. ed. Hank Hanegraaff (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1997), 426.
8. The vast number of American religions requires three encyclopedic volumes to record them. See J. Gordon Melton, ed., *The Encyclopedia of American Religions: A Comprehensive Study of the Major Religious Groups in the United States and Canada*, 3 vols. (Tarrytown, NY: Triumph Books, 1991). Notice that Melton calls his work a study of only the major religious bodies. The proliferation of cults and NRMs makes an exhaustive and up to date reference tool both impractical and impossible.
9. See Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 54-60.
10. Leo Rosten, ed., *Religions of America: Ferment and Faith in an Age of Crisis, A New Guide and Almanac* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975). 615-24.
11. John A. Saliba, *Understanding New Religious Movements* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1995), 37-64.
12. William Alexander Linn, *The Story of the Mormons: From the Date of their Origin to the Year 1901* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1902), 612-13.
13. Raj Bahadur Sharma writes that the House of Commons in England feared that missionary activity in India might pose a threat to the empire. They had to be assured "that the measures aimed at converting and educating the heathens of India" would not result in "giving them any political rights." The missionaries were therefore not sympathetic with any ideas of Indian nationalism. See his *Christian Missions in North India 1813-1913* (Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1988), 207.
14. Gordon Johnson, gen. ed., *The New Cambridge History of India*, vol. 3.1, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India*, by Kenneth W. Jones (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 167-79.
- 15 See "The Theosophists," *The Missionary Herald* 81 (August 1885): 320.
16. James M. Thoburn, *The Christian Conquest of India* (New York: Young People's Missionary Movement, 1906), 214-15. He complained, "The deplorable efforts of individuals from the West, like Mrs. Besant (and) Madame Blavatsky are having an unwholesome influence on the minds of the people."
17. This is in direct contradiction to Kenneth Scott Latourette's belief that The-

- osophy was merely a Hindu mission to Occidentals. See his *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, vol. 6, *The Great Century in Northern Africa and Asia: A.D. 1600-1914* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1944), 204. The appeal of Theosophy to a broad spectrum of intellectuals in India is outlined by Bruce F. Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived: A History of the Theosophical Movement* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), 79-81.
18. W.J. Lhamon, "Recent Theosophy in Its Antagonism to Christianity," *The Andover Review* Vol. 19 (September 1893): 570-81.
  19. James M. Thoburn, *The Christian Conquest of India*, 215.
  20. John N. Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India* (Nai Sarak, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1967), 233.
  21. Robert E. Speer, then Secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, quotes a Hindu contemporary of Blavatsky and Olcott as saying that "to preach Christianity to the Hindu, who had a religion and was civilized before the dawn of history, seems to him, therefore, the most ridiculous thing on earth—indeed audacious." See his *Christianity and the Nations* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1910), 246.
  22. See Harlan P. Beach, *India and Christian Opportunity* (New York: Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1908), 140-42. He complained that because of Blavatsky and Olcott, "every variety of alloy of Hinduism and Christianity has been thrust upon the Indian public."
  23. Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India*, 233-67 contains a detailed account of the scandal and the drama that was played out between the Theosophists and the missionaries.
  24. Probably the most notable was Olcott, whose work in Ceylon to bring political reform to the oppressed Ceylonese earned him the title of "The White Buddhist." He wrote a *Buddhist Catechism* modeled after the Christian catechism that went through forty editions in his lifetime alone. See Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revised*, 84.
  25. The Krupp family provided munitions for several of Germany's wars.
  26. Julius Richter, *A History of Missions in India*, translated by Sydney H. Moore (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1908), 380. Richter also noted that Theosophists called the missionaries "thick-skulled, bigoted blood-hounds," and missionary teachings as "the purest idiotic trash." *Ibid.*, 390.
  27. See J.T. Sunderland, "Christian Missions in India: Will India Become Christian?," *The New World: A Quarterly Review of Religion, Ethics and Theology* 7 (March 1898): 35-53.
  28. Carl T. Jackson, *The Oriental Religions and American Thought: Nineteenth Century Explorations, Contributions in American Studies*, Number 55 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 243-61.
  29. See Latourette, *The Great Century*, p. 245.
  30. See William C. Irvine, *Heresies Exposed*, with an Introduction by Louis T. Talbot (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1921); Walter Martin, *The Christian and the Cults: Answering the Cultist from the Bible, The Modern Cult Library Series* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1956) and Jan Karl Van Baalen, *The Chaos of Cults: A Study in Present-Day Isms* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1938) as examples of theological critique. I have collected many tracts and booklets from denominational publishers from the early twentieth century on NRMs, and almost unfailingly they objectify and vilify other groups with the same kind of vitriol that Blavatsky and Olcott encountered in India.
  31. Marcus Bach became the theologically liberal mirror image of writers such as Walter Martin and worked to bring "sectarian" groups and their ideas into public acceptance. See his *They Have Found a Faith* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1946). A similar, but more scholarly analysis was provided by Charles S. Braden. See his, *These Also Believe: A Study of Modern American Cults and Minority Religious Movements* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1949).
  32. Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1982), 11.
  33. Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, pp. 423-24.
  34. The JWs and the Worldwide Church of God, founded by Herbert W. Armstrong, are the two more well known organizations that used 1975 in this way, but many occultic groups had also fixed on this date as being monumental in the world's "spiritual evolution."
  35. J. Gordon Melton, "The Flowering of the 'New Religious Consciousness: Factors in Its Sudden Growth," in Ronald M. Enroth and J. Gordon Melton, *Why Cults Succeed Where the Church Fails*, (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 1985), 124.
  36. Russell Chandler, *Understanding the New Age*, (Dallas: Word publishing, 1988) gives a general introduction to this broad cultural intrusion of the New Age Movement.
  37. For example, see J. Isamu Yamamoto, "Sects Target New Areas, Make Subtle Changes," *Christianity Today* 34 (Oct. 22, 1990): 52. Several magazines and journals have been reporting on the phenomenon of NRMs in recent years, especially *Christianity Today*, *The Christian Research Journal*, *SCP Journal* (published by the Spiritual Counterfeits Project in Berkeley, California) and the secular journal, *The Cult Observer*.
  38. Martin, *Kingdom of the Cults*, p. 432.
  39. Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, with Lori Kent, "Cult Membership in the Roaring Twenties," in Starke and Bainbridge, eds., *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival and Cult Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 234-62.
  40. Harold Turner, "A Global Phenomenon," in Alan R. Brockway and J. Paul Rajashekar, eds., *New Religious Movements and the Churches* (Geneva, Switzerland: WCC Publications, 1987), 8.
  41. See Diana L. Eck, "Responses of the Churches to New Religious Movements: A Report from North America," in Brockway and Rajashekar, *New Religious Movements*, 138-56.
  42. This is John A. Saliba's lament in his recent overview of the situation. See his *Understanding New Religious Movements*, VII-X.
  43. For two years my wife and I directed a parallel outreach to Jehovah's Witnesses at their annual convention at Yankee Stadium in New York City called the Brooklyn Gospel Mission.
  44. The product of Otis's many years of research into this area is contained in his book, *The Twilight Labyrinth* (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 1997).
  45. I endeavored to make this point in the context of NRMs and evangelism in my doctoral dissertation for Fuller Theological Seminary. See my "Evangelizing Cults and New Religions: Issues and Strategies in Global Context" (D. Min. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1993), 97-115.
  46. "ICSM '97 Special Report" (Colorado Springs, CO: The Sentinel Group, 1997), 3.
  47. *Ibid.*, 4.

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# From Enlightenment to Endarkenment

*The New Age Movement represents a widespread and influential worldview and spirituality in the West as well as beyond. May we be challenged to reach the numerous men and women who embrace this "endarkenment." May we reach them with the glorious light of the Good News of Jesus Christ and usher them into true spirituality.*

by Vishal Mangalwadi

A section of Western society has taken a quantum leap from Darwin's enlightenment that "Man is only a beast," to Shirley MacLaine's, "I am God." But how did that happen?

Why did the Hindu guru, Swami Vivekananda, become an instant hit in the Parliament of World Religions in 1993? The founder of the Ramakrishna Mission heralded in Chicago a gospel that man was God, not a sinner. Understanding this immediate acceptance of his message will throw light on the first question.

## **The Dilemma of Secular Humanism**

Vivekananda's gospel seemed to resolve one of the central dilemmas of secular humanism. By the last quarter of the 19th century, the European Enlightenment's inherent problem had become painful for the intellectual elite: if human beings were only another animal species, a part of nature, how could they possibly transcend nature—understand it, rule over it and shape their destiny within it? Humanism was an established fact before the Enlightenment. Centuries earlier Renaissance thinkers had asserted that man was unique. His greatness was qualitatively different. No other animal was culturally creative. No other species had history, let alone the ability to shape history.

Man was like God. The Reformation both balanced and reinforced the legacy of Renaissance humanism by asserting that man was simultaneously both great and depraved. This moralized and liberated Europe from the corruption and fatalism that ruled other cultures. Even after the Enlightenment, the revival of Christianity under John Wesley and others made it very difficult for the European mind to accept the dehumanizing logic of a godless humanism, that man was only an animal without any intrinsic dignity or freedom. Yet, the implication of godlessness was also inescapable. In the absence of God, man could be nothing other than a part of nature, regulated or determined by the forces that govern nature.

The paradox became painful because of two other consequences that flowed from the rejection of a biblical view of God. First, if there is no God, or if he does not give revelation and does not hold man accountable, then man could not be a "sinner." Also, if God does not do anything to save man, then man has no option than to be his own savior. If man is not a sinner, utopia should be possible. It would be immoral to accept anything less than perfection. Man must play the Messiah-God by becoming a social engineer. Thus, the

Enlightenment became trapped in a tension of its own making. For man was a beast who had to "play God"—first to define himself, his morals and his destiny and then to save himself.

## **The Renaissance View of Man**

During most of the twentieth century, the universities around the world have propagated the idea that Christendom was introduced to the high view of man during the Renaissance through the rediscovery of Greek literature. This view had been questioned as early as 1885 by Henry Thode who pointed out that the naturalism of Renaissance art had been derived from Franciscan sources. Since then a century of scholarship has completely demolished the idea that the Renaissance's humanism came from Greek thought. Charles Trinkaus summed up the results of this scholarship in his two-volume work, *In Our Image and Likeness* (1970). He pointed out that far from developing a high view of man, the Greeks developed the doctrine of hubris. Man was great, but gods and the supreme god were greater. Above them all was the cosmos. Even the supreme god could not change the flow of history from the Golden Age down to the Iron Age. If man tried to

rise above his fixed place in the scheme of things, he committed hubris—overweening pride towards gods—which invite their vengeance.

The Hebrews alone of all the ancient peoples experienced a different reality. Their God demonstrated to them that he was not bound by the cosmos: nor by history, its politics, or by nature. Even if the cycle of history was running downwards for all people, he was taking *them* from the Iron Age to a Golden Age, from slavery into a land flowing with milk and honey. Neither Pharaoh's army, the Red Sea nor the desert could stop Him from doing what He had purposed. He was free, not bound. Far from desiring to keep men at a humiliating distance, He wanted them to be like Him—free, in His image and in His likeness.

Specifically, the Renaissance view of man developed out of an intense theological debate at the end of the Middle Ages. The issue was—who is greater, man or angels? The Greek and Roman influence on Christendom had ensured that the worship of gods and goddesses continued in the form of angelology. After fierce debate some theologians decided that the angels should not be worshipped because man was greater than the angels. Man was greater because God had become man. God could become man, because man was made in God's image. In his creativity and dominion over nature, man was to mirror God. Political orders had to acknowledge, respect and protect man's evident and God-given dignity. The logic of Darwinism would have destroyed the foundations of Western humanism, as it did under Nazism and Marxism, but thanks to various revivals, the high view of man birthed by the Bible has by and large so far withstood the onslaught of reductionism.

### **Secularization of**

### **Humanism**

Secularism did make a massive attempt to hijack Christian humanism. Shelley's poem "Prometheus Unbound" is a brilliant example. Scholars continue to debate who, in Shelley's mind, was Prometheus. Mary Shelley says, he was "the emblem of the human race". In his study *Biblical Origins of Modern Secular Culture* (1984), Prof. Willis B. Glover outlines for us differences between Shelley's and the Aeschylus' version of the poem. In the original legend Prometheus steals fire from the temple of Zeus and gives it to mankind. Zeus punishes him by binding him for a long time. Prometheus is unbound after he makes his peace with the great god. Shelley gives the legend an Enlightenment twist. Jupiter (or Zeus) is a phantom god created by Prometheus' imagination. This phantom god becomes a tyrant and begins to oppress His creator—mankind! God (religion) becomes the source of all evils. Man (Prometheus) is released, not by appeasing god, but by taking the perfections back from the phantom god to whom he (man) had ascribed them in the first place.

The idea Shelley expressed in poem found its practical expression in the Age of Ideologies. From Feuerbach's thesis that God was only human attributes writ large (man created God in his own image), to the psychoanalysis and therapy begun by Sigmund Freud and messianic movements, such as Fascism and Nazism, ideologies sought to make man his own savior. Some of them retained the high view of man, but instead of deriving it from God, they grounded it in opposition to God. The ultimate outcome of their attempt was not to become visible until after the Second World War and subsequently in the collapse of the Berlin Wall. Yet, the logical problem was evident to Vivekananda's audience in Chicago: How

could a beast play God?

Vivekananda had appeal because he taught that man did not need to play God. He was in reality God and could know his divinity through the route of the mystical. What is more, this affirmation of man's divinity did not require one to discard Darwinism, because even the beasts (like human beings) were God, awaiting the full expansion of their divine consciousness. Hindu philosophy, it seemed, was capable of resolving the paradox of whether man was God or beast. Man could be both an animal as well as God. After Vivekananda inseminated the West with the idea of man's divinity, it took sixty-years' gestation period before reappearing as a full-blown worldview.

### **Towards Man's Divinization**

Two scientists became midwives, clearing the intellectual roadblocks on the way toward a wide acceptance of the idea of man's divinity.

First, was Albert Einstein: when Einstein propounded the equation  $E=MC^2$  he did more than provide the theoretical basis for splitting the atom. He demolished the dichotomy between physics and chemistry. Earlier physics studied energy while chemistry studied matter. Matter in the 19th century was comprised of approximately 100 elements, which in turn were composed of atoms that were indestructible and therefore eternal. Einstein's equation, that  $\text{Energy} = \text{Mass} \times \text{Speed of light squared}$ , seemed to suggest that all matter was, in fact, energy. Energy did exist in various forms: electricity, heat, light, sound, etc., but these forms were inter-convertible, suggesting the possibility that diverse elements could actually be mutations of one energy. The Cartesian dichotomy of body and soul, energy and con-

sciousness, however, continued as another hindrance for a wide acceptance of the divinity of man.

The Jesuit Paleontologist Teilhard de Chardin cleared this second roadblock. His book, *The Phenomenon of Man* (1959), was described by many New Agers as the most decisive factor in the spread of the New Age worldview. De Chardin's book is tedious, but the argument is simple. If carbon (C) and oxygen (O) react in an equation, you could get Carbon Monoxide (CO), or Carbon Di Oxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), or even Carbon Tri Oxide (CO<sub>3</sub>). But you cannot get water (H<sub>2</sub>O). Why? Because the equation lacks hydrogen (H) in the beginning. What is not there in the beginning, argued de Chardin, cannot appear later. The presence of consciousness is a fact in insects, animals, mammals, and in human beings. Since it does appear in the process of evolution, it must have been there from the beginning. If the consciousness is present from the beginning, it is reasonable to assume that it has, in fact, been guiding the whole process of evolution from the start. What exactly is evolving, anyway? De Chardin observes that evolution is that of consciousness itself. Insects have less consciousness, animals have more, mammals have a lot more and human beings are self-conscious. Is there any reason to suppose that evolution has stopped? If not, what would be the next stage in evolution? It would have to be the evolution of self-consciousness into superconsciousness. Earlier evolution may have been guided by chance, but now that consciousness has become self-consciousness in man, we need to assume the responsibility for evolving ourselves consciously.

Fuse the idea that all matter is energy with the idea that the ultimate

form of energy is consciousness and you have replaced the old age worldview with the New Age paradigm. Now there is no distinction between man, monkey and matter; they are but mutations of consciousness. Your salvation lies in manipulating your mind to perceive your oneness with everything—the Ultimate Reality is consciousness and it is already within you. You are God, or at least the

**Modern man was able to trust his reason because he assumed that his creative mind resembled the Creator's mind. This assumption gave birth to modern science and the success of science began to reinforce the assumption that our minds could know the truth.**

cocooned caterpillar that is waiting to fly as a butterfly.

We need not, at this stage, go into a discussion of the logical implications of New Age Monism. How then, for example, are we to understand our uniqueness as individuals? If my experience of myself as a separate individual is somehow a mistake, then should I be accorded any "Fundamental Rights" as an individual? Also, if all is one, what is one to do with the duality of good and evil and right and wrong? Discard them as superstition? We do, however, need to be reminded of the pseudo-scientific assumptions of the New Age worldview.

Einstein himself did not think that matter equals energy. He explicitly rejected mysticism as nonsense. Had he seen the above interpretation of his equation he would have insisted that science was possible only because, at the very least, matter was energy plus laws, laws that are

rational. He definitely kept the possibility open that nature had laws because it had a Lawgiver. De Chardin's logic likewise presumed that consciousness was the ultimate form of physical energy and that evolution was a *priori* fact—which in reality is an increasingly debatable dogma. What if consciousness is something that the Creator injects into His creation? What if He assigns different degrees of consciousness to different species and makes man in His image?

Thoughtful New Agers are well aware of the flimsy "scientific" basis of their belief. Their advantage is that pseudoscience is not the only way to get lost. There is no dearth of ways of getting lost. In their system any claim to "One Way Only" is bigotry. In that light, a brief review of the history of the New Age needs to cover at least two additional ways that

lead them into lostness.

### ***The Way of Knowledge***

"How do we know?" is one of the fundamental problems of philosophy known as epistemology. The Pre-modern Age said that we know through the established system of authority. For example, what are you going to do if a black cat crosses your path? You must stop, let someone else go ahead of you. Why? Because, a black cat is a bad omen. How do you know? Well, my grandmother told me so. Again, your grandmother is suffering in purgatory; if you buy the indulgence being sold by the church, her soul will be delivered from purgatory and will go to heaven. How do you know? The Pope says so; you must believe what the socially accepted authority says.

The Modern Age began (as a mass movement) when Martin Luther said,

"No, thank you!" The spirit of the modern age was that I am going to believe only that which is true. But, can you know the truth? Yes, said the early modern age. We can know truth because our Creator is able to speak to us. The possibility did not occur to them that it could be that while they were able to speak, perhaps their Creator was incapable of speaking. Or, while they were able to write books, their Creator couldn't possibly do so. The Modern man was able to trust his reason because he assumed that his creative mind resembled the Creator's mind. This assumption gave birth to modern science and the success of science began to reinforce the assumption that our minds could know the truth. Once the assumption became a conviction it created a new problem.

If the human mind was capable of knowing truth, why do we need revelation? Could it be that human reason is itself sufficient? Rationalism replaced revelation as Descartes began to suggest that reason is sufficient. The Modern Age gradually turned into Modernism. It retained the earlier commitment to truth alone, but insisted that man's reason and empirical experience, not God's revelation, was the means of knowledge. Man was capable of knowing everything, including God.

The Age of Reason should have repented of its hubris when David Hume demonstrated that our reason was not capable of proving God. Human reason may be incapable of proving God, but can it prove that God does not exist? If reason cannot prove God, does it necessarily follow that God does not exist? Could it be that reason is a limited faculty and needs some *a priori* assumptions to work with? The Enlightenment refused to see the limits of reason and stepped toward a conclusion: if reason could not prove God we must stop believing in Him.

Other consequences followed quickly. Philosophers soon discovered that without pre-supposing God, reason could not prove that a real moral law existed either. Should faith in morality then be discarded? Intellectual integrity demanded an abandonment of moral absolutes, however difficult that may be socially.

Okay, so we cannot know God and we cannot know morality, but can we know ourselves? Freud indicated that our conscious, rational mind was only the tip of the iceberg. A much larger part of our mind was the subconscious mind and it was anything but rational. Rationality, Freud suggested, was often only rationalization of our instincts, lusts and fears. None of us really knows himself. Should we adhere to Rationalism as a source of knowledge when it cannot enable us to know even ourselves? People persisted nonetheless in their faith in reason because it seemed to be a fit tool for unraveling the mysteries of the physical universe. Then came Heisenberg. He demonstrated that when you enter the subatomic world of quantum mechanics, rationality hits a dead end at some points. His Uncertainty Principle implied that either the fundamental nature of reality is non-determinate, or its rationality differs from the structure accessible to human rationality. Modernism's faith in reason died when it became clear that human reason, by itself, is not sufficient to lead us to a knowledge of God, morals, ourselves, or even of the external world. Modernism gave way to post-modernism.

Mainstream post-modernism in the academic world has, after a fashion, remained loyally wedded to rationalism. The main difference between the modernists and the post-modernists is that the latter species knows that her husband is impotent. Post-modernist professors are proud that they know that they do not know and that they cannot know truth. They are comforted by their knowl-

edge that every one of them is blind, leading equally blind students throughout the abyss of darkness. The only fact they are sure of is that anyone who claims that he knows is not one of them, is epistemologically incorrect and suspicious beyond toleration. Rationality's sole privileged use is to destroy all truth claims. Many, however, have found the impotent rationalism of post-modernism utterly dissatisfying. They, therefore, began flirting with mysticism. If you know that you are never going to know via Rationalism, why not try killing your mind through drugs, sex, yoga, or other psycho-technologies? Perhaps your mind is your problem, "the chief villain" (Osho Rajneesh). Who knows if the enlightenment would not dawn upon you if you got rid of your rational consciousness?

However, after discarding rationality, how could it be known whether one is experiencing enlightenment or endarkenment?

### **Stars, Spirits, Saucers and Sex**

Tom is eating a mango. What is a mango? We know the mango because we can relate it to a class of objects called "fruit". What is Tom? Tom is a boy. What is a boy? A boy is a young male human being. In philosophy, Tom and the mango are "Particulars", 'boy' and 'fruit' are "Universals". We know particulars only if we can relate them to universals. If a universal is finite, it, in turn, becomes a particular and needs a universal to be understood. So, 'boy' is a universal in relation to Tom, but it is a universal only relatively. To be understood, it itself needs a universal, 'human being'. But a human being is also finite, therefore, only relatively a universal. What is a human being?

The Renaissance and the Reformation said that the human being is the image of God—the ultimate, infinite universal. John Calvin wrote that it is certain that man cannot know himself

unless he has first looked upon the face of God. The Enlightenment accepted Hume's argument that on the basis of our reason we cannot know God and had no option but to revolt against the Reformation's ultimate universal. Alexander Pope, the great humanist poet, summed up their creed in his famous couplet:

Know then thyself,  
Presume not God to scan.  
The proper study of mankind is man.

A practical consequence of this creed was that Humanities replaced Theology as the central department of European universities. Theology, which had been the queen of all sciences, became, at first, a marginal department. Gradually, as theologians admitted that they did not know God, they changed their divinity schools into departments of study of religions.

Pope was a great poet but a poor

philosopher. Had he listened to his Greek predecessors, they would have told him that his attempt to know a particular (mankind) with reference to itself (man), without a universal (God) was plain futility. The question 'what is man?' simply cannot be answered without supplying or accepting a universal. It was not a "scientific" necessity," but a simple philosophic compulsion that drove the secular humanists to substitute "animal" in place of "Image of God" to explain themselves. "We are animals" they proclaimed.

What is an animal? An animal then had to be explained as a biological machine. A machine? Everything from an atom, to a solar system, to the universe is a machine—an organized system. Machine is the ultimate universal. Thus was born the mechanistic worldview of modernism. The simple problem with this world-

view was that we knew ourselves better than its reductionistic explanation of who we were. If a person seriously believed himself to be a machine we would send him to a psychiatric asylum. If he treated us as machines he would be sent to jail.

It was natural that those who did not want to be treated as cogs in the machine would revolt against this dehumanizing worldview of an old age. A new age was inevitable. It was humiliating enough to see ourselves as monkeys (a human being is an animal) but at least we were defining ourselves. If we went back to the idea that we were God's image it will require a greater humility, because then we would have to surrender to Him the right to define us. It was not possible for the humanistic pride to tolerate this. So, the New Age began to invent new universals to explain the human being.

You are made, the New Age said, in the image, not of monkeys, but of your stars. Your horoscope tells you who you are. When you are angry, it is because of your Mars, and when you are frustrated, it is because of your Saturn.

Unfortunately, the astrologers err far too often when they become as specific as we want them to be. So, many in the New Age began to look beyond the stars to flying saucers to help supply the needed universal. You are made not in the image of your stars, they said, but in the image and likeness of the ETs (Extra-Terrestrials). Your ancestors came here ages ago, in a UFO (Unidentified Flying Object). We will find them, if we seek them with all our heart and purse. So SETI (Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence) became a religious experience for the serious and resourceful, while others had to be content with being abducted and raped by the ETs in the UFOs. The study of Humanities was rapidly replaced by UFOlogy as the central pre-occupation of those who wanted to know what man really was.

Many sincere New Agers were unwilling to keep waiting indefinitely for the ETs to appear and define who we are. How do we really know that they are going to come in our lifetime, if ever? These found an easier solution to the problem of the missing universal via spirit channelers. They said, you are not a monkey, but a spirit. You can know what a spirit is by talking with them through a channeler, or by being possessed by them yourself. The spirit entities dwell in a superior multi-dimensional realm, where they can see our past, present and future and answer our deepest questions. It is also cheaper to connect with the spirits than with saucers. The New Age spirits have indeed been generous in the abundance of revelation they have given. Whether these revelations have made our generation any wiser is an altogether dif-

ferent question. No channeler has yet been awarded a Nobel Prize for adding anything significant to our knowledge concerning the mysteries of reality.

Those who think that all reality is basically one naturally find sexual dualism of male and female embarrassing. Many of them, therefore, seek to transcend this dualism by becoming one with the opposite sex. Others, who take seriously the view that both maleness-femaleness is already within each of us, prefer to have homosexual encounters. These encounters are better suited for bringing out the male in women and female in men. Those who pursue this variation of the sexual path to salvation seriously tend to reject marriage, as it necessarily reinforces dualism: the wife, as marriage assumes, is a woman while the husband is a male.

None of the above options solve the problem of finding the ultimate universal. Stars, saucers, spirits, and sex remain finite. A person lost in the maze of the New Age, therefore, keeps going back to the assertion, "I am God"—even if I have demonstrably made a mess of my life. The New Age movement represents a widespread and influential worldview and spirituality in the West and beyond. May we be challenged to reach the numerous men and women who embrace this "endarkenment" with the true enlightenment of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

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# Hidden in Plain Sight: The Mission Challenge of New Religious Movements

*New religious movement (NRMs) represent a neglected mission challenge. The authors discuss the challenge before us, and make strategic recommendations for evangelizing these "less reached" people.*

by Everett Shrophire and John Morehead

On March 26, 1997 the attention of the world was focused on a grisly discovery in a mansion in upscale Rancho Santa Fe, California. There, authorities found the decaying bodies of 39 members of Heaven's Gate, a New Religious Movement (NRM) which combined elements of neo-Gnosticism, science fiction, pseudo-Christian teachings and apocalypticism revolving around UFOs. Each of the victims of this mass suicide was dressed in black, their upper torsos ceremonially covered with triangular purple shrouds. Following the teachings of Marshall Applewhite, the group's members did not believe they were committing suicide. Rather, they had merely left their "containers" (bodies) for new, genderless forms resembling popular Hollywood depictions of extraterrestrials residing in a cosmic "Level Above Human."

Unfortunately, as bizarre and tragic as the Heaven's Gate suicides were, they were not the only NRM (popularly called cults) to receive media attention in the last few decades. Just a week prior to the discovery of Heaven's Gate, the latest victims of the Order of the Solar Temple were discovered. Between 1994 and 1997, 74 men, women and children perished in a series of fiery murder-suicides in France, Switzerland and Canada.

In March 1995, followers of Aum Shinrikyo ("Supreme Truth") released sarin nerve gas in Tokyo's subways, killing 12 people and injuring over 5,500 others. Japanese authorities would later discover that Aum's membership and influence was international with over 40,000 followers in at least six countries. It was also well financed with assets of over \$1 billion.<sup>1</sup>

In May 1993, David Koresh and the Branch Davidians ended a fifty-one day standoff with federal authorities when the Davidian's compound near Waco, Texas burst into flames. Eighty-four people died in the conflict. In perhaps the best known mass murder-suicide by a NRM, in November, 1978, over 900 people perished in the sweltering jungle of Jonestown, Guyana, under the leadership of Jim Jones.

Yet these are only the most "newsworthy" of the NRMs. Secular psychologist Margaret Thaler Singer notes, when it comes to such groups, there is "a big splash in the news, then people back off from noticing the cults and the exploitative persuasion that surrounds us all."<sup>2</sup> There are many other NRMs, including the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) which has over 10 million members, the Watchtower

Bible and Tract Society (Jehovah's Witnesses) with over 5 million members, and the New Age movement which may have over 12 million active participants. While it is difficult to obtain exact statistics, conservatively estimated the number of people involved in NRMs is at least 16 million, perhaps as high as 30 million or more in the U.S. and around the world.<sup>3</sup>

## **A Neglected Challenge**

But the seriousness of the above mentioned events, and the significance of the groups behind them, are quickly forgotten. They intrude on our consciousness only as fleeting images in our busy lives, quickly retreating to the periphery. Unfortunately, American culture still lacks an awareness and comprehension of NRMs as something other than a problem restricted to the religious fringe.

What has been the response of the church? Given evangelicalism's emphasis on sound doctrine, something frequently twisted by NRMs, one might think they would be given a high priority. But the church's attitude has largely consisted of apathy and ignorance. *Christianity Today* writer Tim Stafford keenly noted that:

Our situation is more like the early church's than, perhaps, it has been at

any time since Constantine. Now, as then, Christianity competes with a hundred religions on a spectrum from Krishna to Christ. It is clearly not enough to believe in the supernatural or to feel born again. Precision in belief is essential.<sup>4</sup>

With this pressing need for Christian pastors, missionaries and lay people to understand biblical teaching in contrast with deviations from the Christian faith, one would think that our seminaries would be among the first to show an interest in contemporary groups promoting false teaching under the guise of Christian terminology. Yet only a handful of Protestant denominations have major programs dealing with NRMs. Beyond this, most other seminaries offer nothing more than electives on NRMs, leaving our pastors, missionaries and lay people ill prepared for the aggressive proselytizing that will surely come their way from these groups.

Christian apathy toward NRMs is illustrated by the fact that Aum's terrorist attack mentioned above failed to make the top ten list of newsworthy religious events for 1995 in the January 6, 1996 issue of *Christianity Today*, the "flagship periodical" of evangelicalism.<sup>5</sup>

The situation at the local church level also gives cause for concern. Pastors are overworked and simply do not have the time or training to address the challenges posed by a host of NRMs. Likewise, the average Christian is often unconcerned or confused by this problem. In reflecting on the Christian's response to the proliferation of NRMs and world religions in America, Terry Muck lamented:

An already bewildering variety of religions, cults and world views is sure to grow even more confusing...Yet here is a strange reality: for most American Christians this just does not create an impression. Scholars and demographers talk about it incessantly. But for the average man on the street, it is at most a curious fact. In a recent

survey, *Christianity Today* magazine asked a cross section of its readership to name the ten toughest questions facing American Christianity. The challenge of the world religions did not even register. Similarly, a recent Gallup poll asked American citizens to name their areas of greatest concern for the coming years. Few mentioned the growing religious diversity in our country.<sup>6</sup>

One of the authors will never forget several summers ago working part-time at the U.S. Center for World Mission (USCWM) during the Branch Davidian standoff with federal authorities. Shortly after the media televised the Branch Davidian compound going up in flames, a student on the USCWM campus came skipping into the office exhilarated that the bizarre "cultists" had gotten what was coming to them! One would hope that such attitudes are held by few in America and the church at large, but they may indeed be widespread.

In March of 1987 George Gallup found that the groups that Americans least desired as neighbors were those of strange religious sects and cults. Forty-four percent of the people said they would not want to live next to someone who belonged to a cult... When it comes to prejudice, religion seems to lead the race.<sup>7</sup>

How tragic. This situation cuts us to the heart as we recognize our own failure to take to heart the Lord's teachings to love the alien and the stranger (Deut. 10:19).

### ***Contending for the Faith***

In addition to the Bible's ethical teachings about loving our neighbors, the Scriptures give us additional reasons for dealing with NRMs. In a sampling of passages, Jude exhorts the church to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who

were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ" (Jude 3-4, *New American Standard*). Two items are especially worthy of note in this brief passage. First, we are to "contend earnestly," or put up a good fight for the Christian faith, because the faith has enemies who have crept into the church itself. The problem of false teaching is not always external to the church. Sadly it is frequently internal. Second, the faith was "once for all delivered" to the church. We must be wary of pseudo-gospels given to supplement God's revelation in Jesus Christ.

In Acts, the Apostle Paul warned the elders of Ephesus to "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock... I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:28-30). Peter echoed similar words when he said, "False prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves" (2 Pet. 2:1).

In another important passage, Paul warned the Corinthians, "I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully." Here Paul reminds us that false teachers and groups are not a 20th century

phenomenon. He then continues reminding us that not everything that looks and sounds Christian really represents the genuine: "For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore, it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their deeds" (2 Cor. 11:3-4,13-15).

In a classic passage dealing with apologetics, or the defense of the gospel message, Peter says we should "Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence" (1 Pet. 3:15).

### ***Challenge of the Next Century***

If NRMs represent a neglected mission field, we neglect it to the detriment of our evangelistic mandate to "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you" (Matt. 28:18-19). Not only are we being unfaithful in reaching a significant group of people with the gospel, the NRMs also pose a serious challenge to the church's other mission fields.

NRMs, as pseudo Christian groups, are frequently parasitic, feeding on the successes of Christian evangelism and preying on new converts. The mission periodical of the Evangelical Missions Information Service (EMIS) noted this threat in Zaire. Even as the pool of Unreached Peoples continued to shrink, NRMs and

Eastern religions continued to multiply "often at the expense of the Christian churches." EMIS recognized that the presence of such groups demanded new defensive and evangelistic tactics, and that "the adherents of these various systems represent the 'unreached people' of tomorrow's strategies." <sup>8</sup>

**It is our prayer that Christian leaders will analyze this present time in missions, and seeing the challenge of NRMs, will be motivated to respond with discernment and grace.**

Further, every year, the Mormons field over 55,000 full-time missionaries who actively recruit members of Christian churches. Last year alone, they were successful over 300,000 times! Also, most Jehovah's Witnesses are former members of Christian churches. In fact, nearly all NRMs find great success among new Christian converts.

This challenge has not been missed by great missionary thinkers. In "Recovering the Primacy of Evangelism," premiere evangelist Billy Graham listed four trends that "pose a special challenge to Christian evangelism." He insightfully noted that the twenty-first century "may be a time when nations that have historically been Christian not only abandon their Christian roots completely... but increasingly become the targets of aggressive proselytizing by non-Christian cults and religions." <sup>9</sup>

We should also note that while the missionary enterprise of North America is still strong, if the present trend of the growth of NRMs continues (usually at the expense of Christian churches and denominations),

the support base for frontier missions will erode in response. As Dr. Gordon Lewis of Denver Seminary warned in 1988, "If we wait until 51% of our citizens are sold on a [New Age] cosmic humanism, it may be too late... If the cultural shift to Hindu, [New Age and unbiblical groups'] beliefs continues in America at the present rate, in another twenty years we may have lost a major base for missions to other lands. Hence, an ounce of prevention in America now may be worth a ton of cures later." <sup>10</sup>

For instance, we may be winning converts in some places, but we are losing significant ground to NRMs in other places. The Latter-day Saints are waging an extensive public relations campaign in the United States to convince Americans that they are Christian. They give away free Bibles, delivered by bright, energetic Mormon missionaries, who use these contacts as prospects for conversion. Southern Baptist vocational evangelist Danny Daniels said that if the trend is not reversed, the Mormon church may well define Christianity for the media in the coming century.

### ***Marginalization of Ministry***

The presence of NRMs represents a missionary challenge to the Christian church. In response, numerous Christian ministries have risen to meet this challenge. Yet out of more than 500 or more evangelical ministries in the United States, as listed in *Directory of Cult Research Organizations*, only nine are full-time ministries which are fortunate to have paid staff. Related to the lack of recognition within evangelicalism for this ministry, many ministries to NRMs find the financial struggle to be one of the greatest. Ronald Enroth and J. Gordon Melton summarize the situa-

tion:

Unfortunately, the development of ministries to what are perceived as marginal religious groups has tended to marginalize the ministries as well, and has delayed the recognition and acceptance by both mainline and evangelical denominations of the need for mission strategy toward Eastern-metaphysical and occult religion in the West.

Small, poorly-funded, marginalized counter-cult ministries have had and can hope to have but minimal overall impact upon the continued growth and spread of the alternative faiths. . . In the face of this significant cultural phenomena, the small ministries must be content with occasional and individual converts and divert a high percentage of their time away from ministry to fund raising and survival. Churches assign such ministries a low priority when judged by the enormity of other perceived world mission needs.

In the face of this marginalization, leaders of the counter-cult ministries, and sympathetic evangelical and mainline church leaders, must pool their collective resources and develop a new strategy which will engage the whole church in mission and ministry to non-Christian religions in the West.<sup>11</sup>

### **Encouraging Signs**

Yet the situation facing ministry to NRMs has seen some encouraging developments. The focus of an entire issue of *International Journal of Frontier Missions* on this subject must surely be considered an encouraging sign. In addition:

\*Under the leadership of Dr. Gordon Lewis, Evangelical Ministries to New Religions (ENMR) was formed in 1983. EMNR is a promising umbrella organization which provides ethical, doctrinal and research standards for those in ministry to NRMs. It also facilitates cooperative efforts and the sharing of resources and information among members.

\*Paul Carden, former director of international outreach for the Christian Research Institute, has created The Centers for Apologetic Research. Mr. Carden has helped bring a renewed emphasis upon missions and

evangelism to the evangelical treatment of NRMs.

\*In a constantly changing field involving a wealth of information, Apologia has created two excellent on-line resources: *Apologia Report* and *AR-Talk*. *Apologia Report* is an on-line periodical which provides current, reliable information on a number of NRMs and trends, and *AR-Talk* is an on-line forum for the sharing of questions, answers and resources related to this field.<sup>12</sup>

\*The Evangelical Theological Society has formed a group called the Society for the Study of Alternative Religious Movements. Though the group is now small, hopefully other scholars will participate, bringing additional evangelical scholarship to bear on this important topic.

### **Toward a Better Strategy**

Recognizing the challenges faced by ministries to NRMs, we make the following recommendations for consideration by church, denominational and missions leaders:

1. *Concentrated Prayer Focus.* Integral to the work of the defense and proclamation of the faith is the ministry of prayer. To stimulate prayer concentrated on NRMs, prayer resources, such as the *Global Prayer Digest*, might focus specifically on the prayer needs of these groups. The production of prayer resources such as this might bring increased prayer attention for NRMs by international prayer networks such as the AD2000 and Beyond Movement Prayer Track and Concerts of Prayer International, as well as increased awareness and prayer at the local church level.

2. *Broaden the Support Base Through Strategic Relationships.* As previously mentioned, one of the key challenges facing evangelism of NRMs is a shortage of financial

resources, threatening the continued existence of not a few organizations. As Gordon Lewis has argued elsewhere in this journal, independent ministries among NRMs must seek a relationship with home mission boards, perhaps as an accredited agency heading a special task force. Though forming such relationships will be difficult, greater success might be facilitated with the assistance and endorsement of existing mission boards that already recognize the importance and need of evangelism to NRMs. Once secured, such relationships will secure financial stability, and increased awareness and support from churches, denominations and seminaries.

The recent affiliation of The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS), a Latter-day Saint scholarly think tank for Mormon apologetics, with Brigham Young University, demonstrates that one of the largest and fastest growing of the NRMs recognizes the need for a well-financed and orchestrated defense of their pseudo-gospel. Might evangelicals learn something from them and emulate it in the defense and proclamation of the saving gospel?

3. *Specialized Training Through Resource Centers, Seminaries and Bible Colleges.* As the non-Western or Two-Thirds World missionary movement continues to play a greater role in world evangelization, the North American mission community will need to respond by revising its role based upon its strengths. This is especially relevant with regards to the mission field of NRMs. Here, North America has an important contribution to make. A great opportunity exists to provide education and training on NRMs from the wealth of North America's informational resources in this arena. Ministries such as Truth-Quest Institute, Watchman Fellowship, Personal Freedom Outreach,

The Centers for Apologetic Research and others, maintain libraries of books, journals, videotapes, audiotapes and files touching specifically on these groups. In addition, organizations such as these have experienced researchers and teachers whose expertise can prove invaluable in equipping pastors, missionaries and lay people in the U.S. and overseas, in concert with missions and denominational agencies as well as seminaries. This wealth of information in North America can be passed along through traditional "in-house" training, as well as through theological education by extension. A specific goal of such training would be to equip resource persons in each Christian church, and to mentor "apologetic interns" to equip a future generation.

To help promote the creation of such programs of study at an increased number of seminaries and Bible colleges, perhaps a cooperative effort could be launched between the Evangelical Theological Society and evangelical educational institutions such as Denver Seminary, Trinity International University, Biola University and the Veritas Graduate School of Southern Evangelical Seminary, organizations with existing programs dealing with NRMs and apologetics. Simply put, NRMs must become a high priority item on the agenda of evangelical theological education for the next century.

4. *Consultation on Evangelism to New Religious Movements*. Just as consultations on Islam helped bring attention to the need for mission to Muslims, a consultation on evangelism to NRMs would help bring needed attention to this mission field. A consultation could be held in North America sponsored by EMNR, perhaps in conjunction with Urbana, and in partnership with mission boards, as well as leading mission agencies such

as the Association of International Mission Services, Evangelical Fellowship of Mission Agencies, Interdenominational Foreign Mission Association and the International Society of Frontier Missiology. The North American consultation would be followed by an international conference, perhaps in Eastern Europe or the former Soviet Union, where the growth of primarily American made and exported NRMs is especially problematic.

5. *Establishment of Endowed Chairs*. The establishment of an endowed academic chair of studies in new religious movements at an evangelical university such as Trinity International University or Biola University is an idea worthy of exploration. Such a position would serve as a catalyst for the scholarly study of new religious movements from a distinctly evangelical perspective. The results of this academic study would help counter the scholarly apologetics of some NRMs, such as the Latter-day Saints, and would also filter down to benefit evangelicals at the parachurch as well as popular apologetics levels. The chair's endowment would also help bring much-needed financial stability to this area of ministry.

### Conclusion

In the gospel of Luke our Lord offered a rebuke to the scribes and Pharisees: "You know how to analyze the appearance of the earth and the sky, but why do you not analyze this present time?" (Luke 12:56) It is our prayer that Christian leaders will analyze this present time in missions, and seeing the challenge and opportunity presented by NRMs, they will be motivated to respond with discernment and grace. May the Lord continue to build this mission house lest the watchmen continue their vigil for nought. (Ps. 127:1)

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# The Threat of the Cults on the Mission Fields of the World

*The threat is real, the threat is growing, and the threat must be met with a greater awareness and strategic action.*

by Paul Carden

One of the least perceived and most ignored challenges now facing the Church is that of cults on world mission fields. Aggressive, well-funded, and deceptive cults and aberrant sects pose a present or potential danger in virtually every place the gospel is preached—from the industrialized nations of the west to developing societies with emerging languages.

Award-winning historian Ruth Tucker, author of *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya*, writes: "I have come to the conclusion that one of the most serious and least recognized problems we face in overseas missions is that of the proliferation of cults...."<sup>1</sup> Given the scarcity of literature on the problem and the lack of sustained, coordinated action to address it, it is evident that Tucker is right: few Christians in the field of missions seem to recognize the multi-faceted threat of the cults around the globe, consistently underestimating their resources, their determination, and the long-term impact they make on evangelism and church-planting. Based on a review of the available data, I have drawn three unwelcome conclusions:

First, *the threat is real*. Despite the fact that astonishingly little attention is paid to the problem, any serious examination of the most basic facts reveals that the cultic missionary thrust is now a serious force to be reckoned with.

Second, *the threat is growing*—in

both size and complexity. Not only are mega-cults like the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses expanding rapidly worldwide, but a host of smaller sects is multiplying in number and accelerating their translation work, extending their reach into vulnerable countries and cultures as never before.

Third, *the threat must be met*. To the degree that the Church neglects its responsibility to respond strategically to this situation, the threat increases. Of course, we regard such movements as a danger to the life and outreach of the Church because the New Testament says they are. In apostolic times the Body of Christ was faced with cultists and false teachers, and the epistles give repeated warnings about deadly spiritual impostors. In Jude 3-4 we are bluntly exhorted to "contend earnestly" for "the faith once for all delivered to the saints" because that faith has sworn enemies.

In Acts 20:28-31, the apostle Paul warns the elders of Ephesus that such enemies of the gospel appear from both outside the Church ("savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock") and from within ("from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them"). In 2 Corinthians Paul makes it painfully clear how very vulnerable the Church was to error (11:3-4, 13-15), and in his second

epistle Peter spares no words in warning his readers about the threat of false teachers in their midst, calling them to "be on your guard" (2:1-22; 3:15-17).

Today the battleground stretches beyond Judea and Samaria to the uttermost parts of the earth. Thanks to technology and democratization, a dizzying variety of cults can now propagate their distorted gospels across borders and time zones more cheaply and efficiently than ever. Worse, they frequently change identities and tactics as they cross cultures, making them more difficult to detect and identify. With so few barriers remaining, cults on world mission fields are often doing the greatest harm where the Body of Christ is least equipped to respond effectively.

We are not at liberty to ignore such deceivers and their disciples; the stakes are too high. Instead, they must be refuted and resisted, and we must prepare ourselves to reach out with compassion and truth to those who have been taken captive. To do this we must first face the facts.

Although the scope of the problem is far too wide to address adequately here, in the present article I will briefly review some of the most recent research on the worldwide growth of cult movements, assess the short- and long-term implications of this growth, and offer strategies and solutions.

### The Latter-day Saints

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, better known as the Mormon church, was founded with just six members in 1830.<sup>2</sup> It has now passed the 10-million member mark and is active in some 162 nations and territories.<sup>3</sup> To be sure, this makes it larger than most such cults, but is it a cause for serious concern?

In 1984 Rodney Stark, a widely respected sociologist at the University of Washington, analyzed Mormon growth trends and reached the startling conclusion that Mormonism was poised to become a world religion. To the amazement of skeptics, eleven years later Stark's *highest* projections had fallen short by almost a million members! He now calculates that, if these trends continue (and unless something drastic happens), by the year 2080 we will be facing 260 million Mormons worldwide—Mormons who need to be evangelized, which is no easy task.<sup>4</sup>

Though Mormons are famous for their large families, natural reproduction alone cannot account for such an astonishing increase in membership.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, many factors contribute to this alarming trend, but one stands out: the Mormon missionary program. Writing in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, sociologists Gordon and Gary Shepherd conclude that “the overall number of converts to Mormonism appears most importantly to be a function of the sheer *number* of missionaries laboring in the field. The single best predictor of the annual Mormon conversion rate is the size of the LDS missionary force”<sup>6</sup>—which now numbers nearly 57,000<sup>7</sup> laboring in 331 missions worldwide.<sup>8</sup>

Shepherd and Shepherd add: “Today, in fact, there is no other single religious denomination in the world—Catholic, Protestant, or non-Christian—whose full time *proselyting* [i.e., convert-making] force is remotely

close in size to that currently recruited, trained, and supported every year by the LDS church.”<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the *MARC 1998-2000 Mission Handbook* reports that 825 U.S. and Canadian Protestant agencies combined were fielding only about 42,000 career and short-term (1-4 year) missionaries of all kinds.<sup>10</sup> (The largest Mormon splinter group—the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints—had only 123 missionaries as of October 1997.)<sup>11</sup>

How much does the cult invest in this unparalleled missionary effort? In a 1991 interview with the *Arizona Republic*, mission statistician David Barrett estimated the LDS church's *annual* spending on missionary outreach at a whopping \$550 million.<sup>12</sup> and in 1997 raised his estimate by 40% to \$770 million.<sup>13</sup> Given that the church has at least \$30 billion in assets and an estimated annual gross income of \$5.9 billion,<sup>14</sup> it seems well prepared to sustain—and dramatically increase—its missionary presence worldwide for years to come. Indeed, given the correspondence between its missionary force and conversions, what should give Christian missions strategists even greater pause is the future outlook. Shepherd and Shepherd write:

Even if only a third of eligible young men accepts LDS missionary assignments, full-time missionary ranks should continue to expand along with the growing membership base. If...the size of the LDS missionary force were to continue to increase at a rate of 50 percent per decade for twenty more years, there would be 110,000 missionaries laboring in about 700 missions by the year 2015. Within fifty years at this same rate the church would be managing a force of over 370,000 missionaries in approximately 2,300 missions. As fantastic as these figures seem, they represent the current potential of Mormon proselyting efforts in the first half of the twenty-first century.<sup>15</sup>

The Mormons' missionary force does not work alone; the church

makes very effective use of complementary media (e.g., television spots offering free videos) and tourist attractions (e.g., Hawaii's immensely popular Polynesian Cultural Center) as a first means of gaining contacts for energetic young “elders” and “sisters” to follow up.<sup>16</sup>

Whom are the Mormons seeking—and converting? Shepherd and Shepherd observe that “the overwhelming majority of Mormon converts [around the world] are already Christians, who are recruited in [religious] markets already cultivated by other Christian denominations.”<sup>17</sup> Surprisingly, even prominent Mormons have candidly acknowledged their missionary program's parasitic quality and their intention to feed on the labors of missionaries, whether those of generations past or today's Wycliffe translators.

Joe Stringham, an official Mormon church linguist who received training (while an active Mormon) from the Summer Institute of Linguistics, writes in the cult's official monthly magazine that “We Latter-day Saints owe much to Bible translators. Rarely have our missionaries begun proselyting [sic] among a people who did not already have a Bible. Having a Bible is a vital step in preparing people to receive the fulness [sic] of the gospel.”<sup>18</sup> In 1997, Mormon general authority Alexander B. Morrison stated: “We owe a debt of gratitude to other Christians who came to Black Africa before we in [the Mormon church] did so. It is significant that essentially all of our converts in Black Africa are coming to us from other Christian churches.”<sup>19</sup>

Mormonism has been especially successful in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Oceania. Its missionary work in sub-Saharan Africa and the former Soviet Union (and its satellite nations), begun only recently, may yet bear fruit. In Asia the Mormon missionary thrust has yet to make a sig-

nificant impact beyond the Philippines, South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan.<sup>20</sup>

### **Jehovah's Witnesses**

The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society was founded in 1884, and its followers have been known since 1931 as Jehovah's Witnesses.<sup>21</sup> Writing in the May 1997 issue of the *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, scholars Rodney Stark and Laurence Iannaccone describe the Society as "the most rapidly growing religious movement in the western world."<sup>22</sup> It may pose an even greater danger than the Mormon church.

Like Mormonism, the Witnesses are a large and growing movement. In 1945 the Watchtower Society had 156,299 members worldwide;<sup>23</sup> a half century later it reported a "peak" active membership of 5.59 million in 232 "lands" (i.e., nations and territories).<sup>24</sup> But a realistic estimate of those directly engaged with the cult at any given time (e.g., attending meetings, preparing for baptism) raises the figure to 13 million, based on attendance at its annual "Memorial" observance.<sup>25</sup> Whereas the Mormon church includes infant "children of record" and inactive adherents in its membership statistics,<sup>26</sup> the Watchtower only counts "publishers"—i.e., baptized Witnesses who go door-to-door.<sup>27</sup> In reality, then, the Watchtower Society is the larger of the two movements.

The Watchtower may also pose a much more serious threat to the cause of Christ worldwide—both now and in the future. Stark and Iannaccone write "if social scientists back in 1950 had projected Witness growth for the next 40 years at the rate of 6% per year, their membership prediction for 1990 would have been nearly 500,000 too low."<sup>28</sup> The two scholars foresee that, at an annual growth rate

of only 4%, by the year 2090 the Jehovah's Witness movement will reach almost 195 million active members worldwide.<sup>29</sup> (As they note in the same article, "Granted that many things can invalidate projections, when a movement has maintained a substantial rate of growth for a long time, it takes a lot to slow it down.") Again, if we double or triple this figure to reflect the actual number of other children and adults directly involved in the life of the movement, we may

**Prominent Mormons have candidly acknowledged their missionary program's parasitic quality and their intention to feed on the labors of missionaries, whether those of generations past or today's Wycliffe translators.**

find ourselves facing a cult population of half a billion or more. (Stark and Iannaccone note that "except for the years immediately following the prophetic disappointment of 1975, Witnesses' growth has consistently outpaced Mormon growth. In 1954, there were 7.7 Mormons per Witness *publisher*. By 1994, this had been reduced to 1.9. Given that the Mormons are generally viewed as the world's most successful new religion and had about an 80-year start on the Witnesses, this is an astonishing achievement."<sup>30</sup>

Such rapid expansion has brought a shortage of meeting places. For example, the August 1997 issue of the internal Witness newsletter *Our Kingdom Ministry* reports that, due to rapid expansion in the Third World, the Watchtower Society simply can't build meeting places fast enough. "

[O]ne country with 568 congregations has just one Kingdom Hall. Another country has one Kingdom Hall for every 129 congregations....Several other countries, with a total of over 1,000 congregations, have not yet been able to construct even one Kingdom Hall." They add: "Many more Kingdom Halls are needed in Russia. The increase in the number of Witnesses there is very rapid, but about 85 percent of the congregations under the Russia branch do not have permanent meeting places..." (The cult's 1996 *Yearbook* relates that a congregation in Murmansk, Russia, had ballooned to 800 publishers but couldn't yet be divided "because there is only one elder."<sup>31</sup>

Another noteworthy aspect of the Witnesses' worldwide growth is their apparent ability to penetrate cultures which have been comparatively resistant to Mormonism. Stark and Iannaccone write that "...the Witnesses have become far more 'globalised' than the Mormons. While nearly half of all Mormons reside in the United States, only 19% of Jehovah's Witnesses do."<sup>32</sup>

Humanly speaking, the secret to the Witnesses' success seems mainly to lie in two key areas: literature and lay mobilization.

### **Tools of Their Trade**

The Watchtower Society pumps vast amounts of printed materials to its followers and prospective members. As of September 15, 1998, the average printing of its colorful biweekly *Watchtower* magazine was 22.1 million copies in 129 languages—the largest circulation, they claim, of any religious magazine in the world. In 1997 the Witnesses produced over a billion copies of *The Watchtower* and its sister periodical, *Awake!*<sup>33</sup> The cult has printing facili-

ties around the world, and their capacity is astonishing: the Taunus/Selters' branch in Germany can print and bind an amazing 1.6 million magazines and 80,000 books per day in 42 languages.<sup>34</sup>

The Society also gives special emphasis to the translation of its peculiar version of the Bible, the *New World Translation*, which is especially useful in denying such historic Christian doctrines as the Trinity and the bodily resurrection of Christ. From 1950 to 1997, over 91 million copies of the *New World Translation* had been printed in dozens of languages ranging from Portuguese and Norwegian to Sesotho and Xhosa.<sup>35</sup> (By comparison, in 1997 the Mormons boasted of "flooding the earth" with some 83 million copies of the *Book of Mormon* since 1830.<sup>36</sup>

Essential to the effectiveness of the Watchtower's literature distribution is its extensive and sophisticated translation work. The Witnesses, determined to reach the whole world with their books and periodicals, have gone to lengths unmatched by any organization—Christian or secular.

According to the cult's official history, by the late 1970s the Watchtower Society found it necessary to develop its own custom computer programs for typesetting and photocomposition to meet its ambitious proselytizing objectives. "There were no commercial programs available for entering and phototypesetting many of the 167 languages in which the...Society was then printing, so the Witnesses had to develop their own. At that time the commercial world saw no money in languages used by smaller populations or by people with very limited income, but Jehovah's Witnesses are interested in lives."<sup>37</sup>

The cult's leadership "realized that if Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide could study the same material in their meetings week by week and distribute

the same literature in the field ministry, this would have a powerful unifying effect."<sup>38</sup> By 1984 the Witnesses had achieved simultaneous publication of the biweekly *Watchtower* magazine in 20 languages, a figure which grew to 66 by 1992<sup>39</sup> and nearly doubled—to 113—as of 1996.<sup>40</sup>

By 1992 the Witnesses had over 800 translators at work around the world<sup>41</sup>, aided by sophisticated custom computer programs<sup>42</sup>, and "the software was available for processing material in over 200 languages, [while] programs for other languages used by millions of people were still being developed."<sup>43</sup> The Watchtower's translation work is expanding steadily. In 1996, "18 new languages were added to the list of those in which the Society publishes Bible literature,"<sup>44</sup> and in 1997 "the Society approved literature in 25 additional languages..."<sup>45</sup> (By comparison, the Mormon church's translation work is still getting off the ground; as of December 1996 the cult's official magazine was published in only 23 languages.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, the Watchtower Society justifiably boasts:

The amount of Bible literature distributed by the Witnesses to publicize the Kingdom, along with the diversity of languages in which it has been made available, finds no equal in any human field of endeavor. The records are incomplete; but the reports that are still available show that in 294 languages, 10,107,565,269 books, booklets, brochures, and magazines, as well as uncounted billions of tracts, were put into the hands of interested people between the years 1920 and 1992.<sup>47</sup>

(The only comparable effort by evangelicals would seem to be the *JESUS* film, which had been translated into 455 languages and dialects as of July 29, 1998, with another 245 in production.<sup>48</sup> The crucial difference is that, in most cases, the Witnesses' translation work in each language is ongoing [involving monthly or

biweekly periodicals], whereas the *JESUS* Film Project usually dubs or subtitles its principal product into a given language only once.)

What is the result of this ocean of doctrinal poison? Based on my 20 years' experience in this field, I believe that countless numbers of those whom the Witnesses don't convert, they contaminate—convincing them through seemingly scriptural arguments that the Trinity and other core doctrines of the historic Christian faith are pagan lies, and rendering them far more difficult to bring to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Add to these the significant percentage of Witnesses who go inactive<sup>49</sup> (the majority of whom I suspect are "convinced" by the Watchtower's doctrinal system, even though they become disaffected with the organization), and you have millions of people who must be "unWatchtowerized" if they are to be evangelized.

### **Lay Mobilization**

Stark and Iannaccone make the proposition that "Religious movements will grow to the extent that they can generate a highly motivated, volunteer religious labor force, including many willing to proselytize."<sup>50</sup> Indeed, to distribute its vast publishing output, the Watchtower Society mobilizes its entire active membership, virtually all of whom must take part in personal outreach in order to remain in good standing.<sup>51</sup> In 1997 the Witnesses logged almost 1.2 billion hours worldwide standing on street-corners and going door-to-door with the Society's substitute gospel.<sup>52</sup>

To carry out this work, the Witnesses are trained continuously, and their preparation begins early. Stark and Iannaccone write:

It seems instructive that two of the most successful religious movements of modern times—the Mormons and the Witnesses—both achieve very effective socialization by giving

young people important roles to perform. Mormon religious education is predicated on the assumption that it is preparing teenagers to be missionaries, thereby being able to send more than 40,000 young men and women off each year to be full-time missionaries (at their own expense) [sic]. Nothing builds more intense commitment than the act of being a missionary, and for Mormons this experience comes at precisely the age when people are the most susceptible to doubt and defection. The Witnesses do not train their children to spend 2 years as full-time missionaries, but they do train them, from their early teens, to spend a lifetime as a part-time missionary—a publisher. Most Witness children begin to knock on doors by the time they complete high school (and many begin younger). Being thus exposed to rejection, ridicule, and even abuse may cause some young Witnesses to withdraw. However, it appears that rejection binds most of them ever more strongly to the movement...<sup>53</sup>

And the Witnesses offer more than magazine subscriptions: householders who are interested in having an ongoing “Bible study” in their own homes will find the Witnesses eager to arrange one at a time of their convenience. How many Christians are willing to do the same?

Researcher David Barrett estimates the Watchtower’s annual missions budget at \$280 million—barely more than a third of what the Mormon church spends each year.<sup>54</sup> On the economic advantages of the Witnesses’ volunteer labor force, Stark and Iannaccone observe:

In addition to missionising, a large volunteer religious labor force contributes to the strength of religious movements in other important ways... For example, labor can often be substituted for capital. Thus, while the Methodists must not only pay their clergy, but also pay for all their clerical, cleaning and maintenance services, and hire contractors to build new churches, the Witnesses rely on volunteer labor to provide all these

things, including the construction of their meeting halls. Indeed the Witnesses rely on volunteer “rapid-building” crews to construct a new Kingdom Hall from the ground up over a single weekend.<sup>55</sup>

Like the Mormon missionary thrust, the Witness proselytizing program has a parasitic quality. Stark and Iannaccone write that “a Christian sect, such as Jehovah’s Wit-

**The Witnesses offer more than magazine subscriptions: householders who are interested in having an ongoing Bible study in their own homes will find the Witnesses eager to arrange one at a time of their convenience. How many Christians are willing to do the same?**

nesses, will do best where most people are familiar with Christian culture and do least well where most people are familiar with another religious culture.”<sup>56</sup> Correspondingly, the Witnesses have enjoyed great success in Latin America and Africa, and their growth in the nations of the former Soviet Union has been astonishing.<sup>57</sup>

### **Other Movements**

The foregoing barely scratches the surface; a host of other cults and aggressive, theologically aberrant movements now competes with the Body of Christ in the spiritual marketplace and preys on new and nominal believers. The Baha’i faith now claims over 5 million followers in 235 nations and territories and, unlike the Mormons and Witnesses, has provoked very little apologetic or evangelistic response, even in the west. L. Ron

Hubbard’s Church of Scientology—which claims to be compatible with other religious faiths—is now a global phenomenon. Anti-Trinitarian “Oneness Pentecostal” sects have an estimated 17 million followers worldwide.<sup>58</sup> The followers of pseudo-Christian spiritist Alan Kardec in Brazil, the *Iglesia ni Cristo* cult of the Philippines, the *Luz del Mundo* cult of Mexico, and other heretical, missionary-minded movements around the world claim millions of adherents who need specialized evangelistic strategies. At the same time, dozens of smaller, less-notorious cults and sects are multiplying and extending their harm into areas where the church is least able to resist and evangelize them.

Even if the major cults stopped growing today, they constitute a significant mission field in themselves. But the likely reality is that the major cults *won’t* stop growing and given their projected membership they will constitute a formidable evangelistic challenge in the 21st century—all the more so if we do not take preventive action *now*. Contextualized strategies are needed for each group and, in many cases, each distinctive culture in which they operate.

Most of the growth of cults and aberrant movements is taking place in the so-called Third World or developing world, where Christians have the fewest resources to identify and resist such groups. The Jehovah’s Witnesses boast of their progress in the “virgin territory” of such places as rural Moldova<sup>59</sup>, and we receive sobering reports from the Muslim-dominated former Soviet republics of Central Asia where tiny, struggling groups of Christians are under persistent assault by the Witnesses. Believe it or not, as of 1997 the Watchtower’s highest growth rate in Latin America

was in communist Cuba.<sup>60</sup> We must also remember that in some parts of the world, cults are coming close to achieving a sort of dominance. For example, in the island nation of Tonga, one third of the population is Mormon (and a quarter of the population of both American and Western Samoa).<sup>61</sup> In Spain, "There are almost as many active Jehovah's Witnesses as Protestant church members,"<sup>62</sup> and in Poland the Witnesses outnumber evangelicals outright.<sup>63</sup> What of the gradual opening of China to outside religious influences, and the efforts of cults to convert and co-opt the millions of vulnerable Christians there? Such high-risk and newly exposed countries and cultures urgently need special attention.

### **Strategies and Solutions**

Is the situation hopeless? If we ignore the problem, yes; if we act with God's help, no!

Even in the "first world," the average pastor—much less the average Christian layperson—cannot devote himself to monitoring and biblically critiquing the fast-multiplying number of new and heretical religious movements in his own culture. Christian leaders and lay believers in the developing world are especially disadvantaged in this regard. Clearly, the antidote for deception is discernment, but discernment depends on data. To effectively meet this challenge, more apologetically oriented materials (tracts, pamphlets, books, videos, and audiocassettes) are needed in increasing numbers in Third World languages spoken by millions in nations where cults like the Watchtower grow with little or no organized resistance. But as valuable as such materials are, they offer only limited assistance; a five-page chapter on Rev. Moon's Unification Church may not meet a desperate pastor's needs, and a simple

tract on William Branham or the Children of God cult may not suffice in a difficult counseling situation.

Most of the pseudo-Christian cults and aberrant religious movements now spreading internationally are based in the west, and many of these originate in North America, where a handful of specialized evangelical agencies perform valuable ongoing research into their doctrines and tactics, developing biblical critiques and evangelistic strategies.<sup>64</sup> Unfortunately, almost none of these agencies has either the means or the motivation to translate and adapt their resources for cross-cultural use, much less establish an ongoing physical presence outside their borders.<sup>65</sup>

What can be done? Having played an active role in the operation and/or establishment of such outreaches in the United States, Latin America, and the former Soviet Union, I submit that the ideal solution is to establish what may be called Full-Service Cult-Research and Response Agencies (or FSAs, for short) in the developing world. These FSAs should have the following minimal characteristics:

- \* They should be nondenominational/interdenominational Christian in spirit and practice
- \* Where possible, they should be registered as nonprofit educational organizations
- \* They should have at least some full-time staff, including trained researchers
- \* They should have a stable base of financial support
- \* They should have a stable office space which is accessible to the public.

FSAs should engage in the following essential activities on an ongoing basis:

- \* Monitoring/data-gathering on cultic movements in their countries
- \* Monitoring popular (e.g., news-

papers) and scholarly media reports on such movements

- \* Maintaining library and research files (which, if possible, are made accessible to qualified outside researchers)

- \* Publishing a regular research bulletin directed at pastors and ministry workers

- \* Cataloging all existing books and other media on cults and related topics in the local language(s)

- \* Maintaining the highest ethical standards in research, publishing, and any other representation of cults and controversial religious movements (in conformity with the 1997 *Manual of Doctrinal & Ethical Standards* published by Evangelical Ministries to New Religions [EMNR], a North American umbrella group for cult and apologetics-oriented ministries)

FSAs should provide the following resources and services to both the Christian public and to the general public (e.g., media representatives, academics, government):

- \* Objective, accurate information on cults and new/controversial religious movements (e.g., their history, beliefs, practices, membership and other statistics)
- \* Balanced biblical assessments of such movements.

In addition, FSAs should offer:

- \* Specialized training/teaching in evangelism and prevention for pastors, church and parachurch ministry workers, and motivated lay believers
- \* Organized evangelistic outreaches to public cult events (e.g., to Jehovah's Witness conventions; spiritist festivals)
- \* Individual counseling or consultation, whether in person or via telephone or correspondence

Such FSAs can multiply their effectiveness through ongoing or project-based ministry partnerships with

evangelistic agencies like the JESUS Film Project and broadcast outreaches like TransWorld Radio.

Finally, no strategy to resist and evangelize the cults worldwide can prosper apart from a broad-based intercessory campaign. Two North American countercult agencies declared 1997 "the International Year of Prayer for Jehovah's Witnesses," but seemingly few outside their immediate circles of influence ever found out. To succeed, such a campaign requires broad support and a continuing effort to raise Christian awareness through the effective dissemination of strategic research data.

The problem will not go away by itself. Alarmed by the accelerating growth of Jehovah's Witnesses on world mission fields and exasperated by the church's inaction, the late Walter Martin wrote in 1965 that "the gravity of the problem which confronts the Christian Church is apparent to all but the most adamantly obtuse." (66) One generation—and many millions of cultists—later, precious little has been done to address this grave state of affairs.

We cannot wait. As J.K. van Baalen wrote, "The cults are the unpaid bills of the church." If we do not act now to deal with this international explosion of error in the name of Christ, we will needlessly run up debts that will spell untold pain and sorrow for future generations of believers. Will we respond? To paraphrase Edmund Burke's famous dictum, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for God's people to do nothing."

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3. *Church News*, April 18, 1998, p. 11.
4. Rodney Stark, "So Far, So Good: A Brief Assessment of Mormon Membership Projections," *Review of Religious Research*, December 1996, pp. 175-178.
5. Mormon scholars Gordon and Gary Shepherd write that far more important than natural increase (i.e., birth rates exceeding death rates and defections) to "rapid expansion of the modern LDS church in many parts of the world has been a renewed emphasis on international proselytizing since World War II and a willingness to concentrate church resources on the systematic enhancement of missionary programs....By 1960 the proportion of LDS membership growth worldwide due to annual conversions exceeded natural increase for the first time in this century and has continued to do so ever since. Currently, in fact, annual convert baptisms exceed those of Mormon children by approximately four to one." See their "Membership Growth, Church Activity, and Missionary Recruitment" in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Spring 1996, p. 34. (This special theme issue of *Dialogue*, "Mormons and Mormonism in the Twenty-first Century: Prospects and Issues," features a series of articles presenting hard-to-find scholarly data on Mormon growth trends.)
6. Shepherd and Shepherd, p. 38.
7. *Church News*, April 18, 1998, p. 11.
8. *Church News*, March 7, 1998, p. 9.
9. Shepherd and Shepherd, p. 39. The authors draw a harsh contrast with Protestant missionary efforts: "by mainstream Protestant standards, all full-time LDS missionaries, including mission presidents, are short-termers. Compared to Christian career missionaries, the vast majority of Mormonism's youthful missionary corps lack theological knowledge and ecclesiastical experience. Their relative immaturity, however, is balanced by idealistic enthusiasm and by a willingness to live Spartan lives in a regimented proselytizing program under experienced adult supervision. Most importantly, the full-time LDS missionary force continues to grow, with good reason to believe that its growth will extend well into the twenty-first century, while many

Protestant mission agencies will struggle to maintain previous rates of recruitment in their missionary forces. Continued institutional emphasis on the lay missionary obligations of every member, and especially the intensive religious socialization of young males to accept full-time mission calls before assuming other adult responsibilities, gives the LDS church a decisive missionary recruiting advantage over most evangelical competitors (who typically depend on idiosyncratic personal calls to the ministry in order to staff their missionary ranks)."

10. Telephone conversation with John A. Siewert, October 1997, notes on file. (See John A. Siewert and Edna G. Valdez, eds., *Mission Handbook 1998-2000* [Monrovia, CA: MARC Publications, 1997], pp. 74, 84.) By way of contrast, in 1991 the *Arizona Republic* reported David Barrett's assessment that "The Roman Catholic Church's missionary programs are far larger [than those of the Mormon church], involving about 150,000 missionaries, but are not ranked as high because they are divided among a large number of religious orders and are not under central control..." "Church Thrives on Tithes," *Arizona Republic*, July 1, 1991, p. A6.
11. Telephone conversation with human resources staff, RLDS church headquarters, October 1997, notes on file.
12. "Church Thrives on Tithes," *Arizona Republic*, July 1, 1991, p. A6.
13. Telephone conversation with David Barrett, October 8, 1997, notes on file.
14. David van Biema, "Kingdom Come," *Time*, August 4, 1997, p. 54.
15. Shepherd and Shepherd, pp. 43-44. The authors note that such growth will depend on increasing numbers of members who are willing to socialize their youth to accept missionary assignments and contribute financially to their mission field support. Beyond this, they believe that two changes toward young Mormon women could increase North American missionary enlistments "dramatically": (1) lowering the age for single "sister" missionaries (which is now 21), and (2) emphasizing missionary service as strongly among young women as among young men. (As of 1996 about 20% of Mormon missionaries were young women.)
16. Sociologist Anson Shupe describes the successful media strategy

- (emphasizing health and family-oriented public-service announcements on television) used by the cult in many countries to establish a favorable climate prior to beginning legal missionary work; see his book *The Darker Side of Virtue: Corruption, Scandal and the Mormon Empire* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1991), pp. 27-29.
17. Shepherd and Shepherd, p. 35.
  18. Joe Stringham, "The Bible," *The Ensign*, January 1990, p. 18, cited in Ruth A. Tucker, "Mormon Expansion Overseas," in *Christian Institute for Mormon Studies: Proceedings & Papers*, Vol. 1 (Salt Lake City: Utah Institute for Biblical Studies, 1992), pp. 19-20.
  19. *Church News*, Nov., 29, 1997, p. 5
  20. Mormon scholars Lowell C. Bennion and Lawrence A. Young write that Latin America has "roughly one-third of the total and nearly two-thirds of the membership outside North America," noting a Brigham Young University geographer's recent projection that "In the year 2020...Latin Americans would account for about 71 percent of all LDS while North America and Europe combined would account for only 11 percent." Bennion and Young write that "only on the Christianized or Westernized edges of the eastern hemisphere has the church established significant beachheads"—for example, in Oceania, the Philippines, and South Korea. See their "The Uncertain Dynamics of LDS Expansion, 1950-2020," in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Spring 1996, pp. 8-32.
  21. *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993), pp. 718, 720.
  22. Rodney Stark and Laurence R. Iannaccone, "Why the Jehovah's Witnesses Grow so Rapidly: A Theoretical Application," *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, May 1997, p. 133. This article is one of the few such scholarly examinations of the Witnesses in recent decades.
  23. *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993), p. 501.
  24. *The Watchtower*, January 1, 1998, p. 21.
  25. *The Watchtower*, January 1, 1998, p. 21.
  26. Lowell C. "Ben" Bennion and Lawrence A. Young, "The Uncertain Dynamics of LDS Expansion, 1950-2020," in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Spring 1996, p. 9.
  27. Rodney Stark and Laurence R. Iannaccone, "Why the Jehovah's Witnesses Grow so Rapidly: A Theoretical Application," *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, May 1997, p. 139.
  28. Rodney Stark and Laurence R. Iannaccone, "Why the Jehovah's Witnesses Grow so Rapidly: A Theoretical Application," *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, May 1997, p. 154.
  29. Rodney Stark and Laurence R. Iannaccone, "Why the Jehovah's Witnesses Grow so Rapidly: A Theoretical Application," *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, May 1997, p. 154.
  30. Rodney Stark and Laurence R. Iannaccone, "Why the Jehovah's Witnesses Grow so Rapidly: A Theoretical Application," *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, May 1997, p. 140.
  31. *1996 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1996), p. 51.
  32. Rodney Stark and Laurence R. Iannaccone, "Why the Jehovah's Witnesses Grow so Rapidly: A Theoretical Application," *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, May 1997, p. 140. Mormon sociologist Armand L. Mauss observes that "...the fundamental reality is that we are nowhere near having a 'world church.' We can more accurately be considered a 'hemisphere church,' for 85 percent of all Mormons live in the Western Hemisphere. The church has certainly prospered at certain times in other parts of the world, depending on local circumstances. It appears, however, that success has often depended largely on influences more worldly than spiritual, such as the appeal (usually temporary) of American cultural imports, including religions." Armand L. Mauss, "Mormonism in the Twenty-first Century: Marketing for Miracles," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Spring 1996, pp. 240-41.
  33. *The Watchtower*, January 1, 1998, p. 17.
  34. *1995 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1995), p. 30. In fact, a year later the Society reported that daily book production at Taunus/Selters had climbed to 100,000. See *1996 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses*, p. 50.
  35. *1997 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1997), p. 5.
  36. "Flooding the Earth with the Book of Mormon," *The Ensign*, March 1998, p. 75.
  37. *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993), p. 596.
  38. *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993), pp. 587-598.
  39. *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993), p. 598.
  40. *1997 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1997), p. 7.
  41. *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993), p. 112.
  42. *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993), pp. 599, 602
  43. *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993), p. 597.
  44. *1997 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1997), p. 6.
  45. *The Watchtower*, January 1, 1998, p. 17.
  46. "Update: International Magazines," *The Ensign*, July 1997, p. 80.
  47. *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993), p. 520.
  48. Telephone conversation with JESUS Film Project representative, August 24, 1998.
  49. Stark and Iannaccone observe that "the Witnesses do have many defectors. This can be inferred from the contrasts between the average number of publishers and the peak number for any given year....[W]hen the number of baptisms are aggregated across years, the total soon greatly surpasses the reported increase in the number of publishers. For example, the average number of publishers increased by 848,000 between 1990 and 1994. However, there were 1,250,434 baptisms during this same period." Nevertheless, "it would be quite wrong to interpret this as a sign of weakness. On the contrary, by excluding those with less commitment, the Witnesses so maximize their proportion of devoted publishers

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- that even substantial rates of defection are offset by far more substantial rates of conversion." "Why the Jehovah's Witnesses Grow so Rapidly: A Theoretical Application," *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, May 1997, p. 147.
50. Rodney Stark and Laurence R. Iannaccone, "Why the Jehovah's Witnesses Grow so Rapidly: A Theoretical Application," *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, May 1997, p. 147.
51. Rodney Stark and Laurence R. Iannaccone, "Why the Jehovah's Witnesses Grow so Rapidly: A Theoretical Application," *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, May 1997, pp. 136, 137.
52. "1997 Service Year Report of Jehovah's Witnesses Worldwide," *The Watchtower*, January 1, 1998, p. 21.
53. Rodney Stark and Laurence R. Iannaccone, "Why the Jehovah's Witnesses Grow so Rapidly: A Theoretical Application," *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, May 1997, p. 153.
54. Telephone conversation with David Barrett, October 8, 1997, notes on file.
55. Rodney Stark and Laurence R. Iannaccone, "Why the Jehovah's Witnesses Grow so Rapidly: A Theoretical Application," in *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, Vol. 12, No. 2 [May 1997], p. 148.
56. Rodney Stark and Laurence R. Iannaccone, "Why the Jehovah's Witnesses Grow so Rapidly: A Theoretical Application," in *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (May 1997), p. 142.
57. Paul Carden, "Cults and New Religious Movements in the Former Soviet Union," *East-West Church and Ministry Report*, Summer 1998, pp. 1-5
58. *Charisma*, June 1997, p. 62
59. *1998 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1998), p. 12.
60. *1998 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1998), p. 32.
61. *Deseret News 1997-98 Church Almanac*, pp. 280, 395, 405.
62. Patrick Johnstone, *Operation World: A Day-to-Day Guide to Praying for the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), p. 500.
63. Patrick Johnstone, *Operation World: A Day-to-Day Guide to Praying for the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), p. 454.
64. These include Watchman Fellowship, Personal Freedom Outreach, Spiritual Counterfeits Project, Gospel Truths Ministries, Utah Lighthouse Ministry, and Comments from the Friends.
65. Indeed, few such agencies exist outside of North America and western Europe. The *1996 Directory of Cult Research Organizations* lists 562 evangelical ministries (or resource individuals) worldwide. Of these, 471 are in North America, 46 are in Europe, and 23 are in Australia and New Zealand. Only 9 are listed for Central and South America, and 13 for Asia, India, and Africa combined. (Sadly, some of these are already defunct.) Two of the only North American agencies to commit themselves to translation or ongoing international outreach are Gospel Truths Ministries (which has a variety of high-quality tracts in foreign languages) and Watchman Fellowship (with outreaches to Romania and Moldova).
- The Internet may provide a partial, short-term solution to the present scarcity of resources and distribution, despite the fact that relatively few Christians in the areas of greatest need own computers. For example, David A. Reed of Comments from the Friends is adding foreign-language links from his ministry's web site on Jehovah's Witnesses, and the web site of the Center for Apologetics Research in St. Petersburg offers Russian-language tracts and other studies that can be downloaded and printed even by computers without Russian fonts. (<http://members.tripod.com/~CFAR/index.html>). Christians must prepare to complete effectively in a growing, multilingual Internet environment. According to a recent report by the Worldwatch Institute, use of the Internet is increasing "exponentially," and while most of the estimated 107 million users now online are in industrial countries, 500 million people ("8 percent of humanity") are projected to be online by the year 2001. (Barbara Crossette. "A New Measure of Disparities: Poor Sanitation in Internet Era," *New York Times*, May 12, 1998, p. A11)
66. Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1985 rev. ed), p. 370.

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# How to Reach a Pagan Modern World

*Whether you call them pagans, New Agers, witches or idolaters, there is nothing new about calling modern-day pagans into the family of God. America is a pagan country. The fourth largest pagan population in the world is found in the U.S. This article takes a good look at the early Church and its outreach to paganism in their day and then outlines specific steps we can and should take to reach pagans in ours.*

by Bill Honsberger

According to the National Association of Evangelicals, America has the fourth largest pagan population in the world, and second only to Brazil in the number of missionaries that we receive from other parts of the world.<sup>1</sup> Obviously, other Christians see us differently than we see ourselves. Why this is and how this happened is not the focus of this article. My focus is on what we can and should do about this situation.

The Psychic Friends hotline brought in over \$100 million dollars last year, as one of many different psychic avenues. Wiccan groups like Covenant of the Goddess, have grown over 500% in the past ten years.<sup>2</sup> Movies are teaching young people about the circle of life—the world view of reincarnation, the relativising of morality, and the new gospel of “tolerance” have become bedrock foundations for a new generation. A collective yawn goes out across the country when it is revealed that the First Lady, Hillary Clinton, (someone who professes to be a Christian) spends time talking to the dead with New Age authority Jean Houston. We are a pagan culture. While this may be distressing for many American Christians, the fact is that it is the normative experience for Christians to be a hated minority among a larger pagan culture. America has been the excep-

tion for much of Christian history, not the rule. Since it is not a new phenomenon, it is possible for us to look into history and see if there may be examples of how the Christian Church has operated successfully in reaching pagans societies in the past.

## **God Reaching Out**

God has been in the business of reaching out to pagans for a long time. Whether you call them pagans, or New Agers or witches, or idolaters or whatever else, there is nothing new about calling them into the family of God. In the Old Testament you see the examples of Ruth, Rahab and others. In the New Testament you see Cornelius, Dionysius of Athens, and virtually all of the church at Rome, Corinth, Ephesus and so on. In all of these cases, God reached out and brought to himself those who had been hard core enemies of the true faith. Just as this was uncomfortable for many in the believing community in both the Old and the New Testament, the love of God was and is able to gather in those who oppose him. One could easily see the same reaction happening in the contemporary church. Most Christians want nothing to do with those who are Buddhist, Wiccan, Psychics, because of fear or disgust and maybe other motivations. Others say that there is no need to

witness to other religions because each group “comes to God in their own way.”<sup>3</sup> We, however, must be committed to the biblical certainty that only Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life, and that no one comes to the Father but by him (John 14:6).<sup>4</sup> If we believe that God loves pagans as much as he loves us, and this is certainly what God says (John 3:16-17) then we must take the great commission imperative seriously and commit ourselves to reaching out to those who oppose the Lord.

## **Church Reaching Out**

There has been a concerted effort within the Christian community to reach out to pagans, and unfortunately, it has been largely a failure, although usually not recognized by the participants, at least as of yet. The belief seems to be that if we build impressive buildings, and offer up quality entertainment, that the pagans will be attracted to the Gospel. In this paradigm, the pastor serves as CEO, whose major focus must be on building the customer base of the corporation (church). The pastor must also be the community therapist, whose role is to gauge and assuage the “felt needs” of those within the consumer base, and do all he can to meet those needs. While this megachurch notion is possible and has had

the observable success of building some very impressive campuses in select locations, it is very hard to argue that this has had any effect on the larger pagan culture at all.<sup>5</sup> In fact, it seems very evident that since the advent of the mega-church mentality the culture has become overwhelmingly pagan. While I am not saying that there is a one-to-one correspondence between the two, I can and do say that if this is the best we have, then the Church is in trouble.

I am not a pragmatist, but even if I were, I might have cause to ponder whether the methodology of the mega-church is working. One might glance over to the former heart of "Christendom," Europe, and see if the mega-church mentality will work. One might tour the impressive cathedrals, the beautiful works of art, and imposing repositories of billions of dollars of collective Christian history, and wonder why it is that they in effect are now wonderful tombs, fine museums, and are attended by less than 2% of the local population. If impressive buildings, or "Christian Malls over America," are the key to reaching pagan America, then why has it not worked in Europe? Even since the fall of the Berlin wall, when the initial outpouring into the churches seemed to be such a hopeful sign of great things to come for the church, the report is now that these churches are basically empty too. This is not to say that the Europeans are less "spiritual," because cults, psychics, vampires and all sorts of wickedness are on the move, marching through the towns. England now has several Hindu temples, and the soon to be head of the Anglican Church, Prince Charles, has his own personal Guru.<sup>6</sup> Believe it or not, there are more Muslims in England than Methodists. In less than a hundred years, the English church, once the sending source

of more missionaries than any other church, has less than two percent of its own population in attendance. Do we not see ourselves in this same light? I could go on, but I would rather emphasize what we can do is not only right by principal but also by precedent. This can be shown to work.

We find ourselves looking more like the church of the first century than we could have ever imagined. We now have a better understanding of what Paul must have felt when he entered Athens, with a god on every corner, and spare gods just to cover all the bases. As Chuck Colson noted a few years ago, we no longer live in Jerusalem, where everybody knew who God was, even those who did not believe. We now live in Athens, where you might get a hundred different answers to the question "Who is God?" How did the early church react? How did they effectively minister to their pagan world? How can we do the same?

### **The Early Church**

*Eerdmans Handbook to the History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 66-67) has a series of charts showing the spread of Christian churches during the first three centuries. From the beginning of the church until the end of the third century, the spread of Christianity is impressive. The church spread across northern Africa, up through Europe to Gaul and England and east through Asia minor. What is most interesting about this is that this was accomplished without the help of any of the things we modern Christians think are essential for reaching out to pagans. This was done without church buildings, because the first known church building was not seen until 250 A.D. This was also done without trying to compete with the

pagan world for entertainment. In that day, no one could compete with the pagans for impressive buildings and exciting entertainment. The ancient wonders of the world were religion in stone, all meant to convey the grandeur of the gods they represented. One could not help but be astonished when you came upon the Colossus of Rhodes, or the Temple of Artemis in Corinth. These buildings would be incredible in our day—let alone theirs. For entertainment, the pagans threw the best parties. The Coliseum and the Hippodrome were open daily. The mystery religion of the Eleusians, for one example, threw drunken orgies that lasted for weeks.<sup>7</sup> It is essential that we understand that the early church could not compete at this level. They did not have the funds, the freedom and most importantly, the inclination. Knowing this, how then did they evangelize and spread so quickly without reaching out to meet the "felt needs" of those early pagans? Let us examine what they did and why it worked.

Paul in Ephesians 4:15 tells us that we are to "speak the truth in love one to another." The early church spoke the truth and they did it in love. Let's look at both aspects. There are numerous recorded accounts of early church leaders and apologists, writing letters to the Emperor, the local governors and other officials. There are also a few recorded incidents where the pagan leaders were confronted in person.<sup>8</sup> What was this all about? The most despised thing by the early church was the games in the Coliseum. These were criticized for the slaughter of thousands of people and animals. The early church spoke out against slavery, abortion, and the mistreatment of the poor. They also spoke out against paganism in its religious elements; mystery religions, Gnostic groups, the emperor cult and so on.

The church did not worry about what was “politically incorrect,” and it often cost them a very high price. Fear of offense, which seems to paralyze so many modern Christians, did not appear to be a problem for the early church.

### **The Contemporary Church**

A fear of contemporary Christianity is antagonizing non-Christians by saying that there is only one way to heaven. Pluralism seems so polite, so pleasant and so tolerant, that many in the Church today advocate the inclusion of all faiths under one umbrella. But the early Church suffered under no such delusions. They spoke out against pagan beliefs of all sorts. The apostles spoke out often against false prophets and teachers, (I John, Jude, 2 Peter, Colossians, Galatians) and the first generations followed their example. Ireneus, in his *Against Heresies*, addressed many of the pagan beliefs that we still deal with today, such as reincarnation, Gnostic denigration of the material world and so on. Others such as Tertullian and Justin Martyr spoke out against paganism in all its forms. Pagans, such as the young Augustine, were often struck by the dramatic difference between biblical faith and the pagan pantheons. We must be as clear today. The gospel of pluralism is no gospel. It may make one a better dinner companion but it will not save anyone. By contrast, the early church was often willing to die for the exclusivistic claim of Jesus as Lord—not Caesar, nor anyone else.

### **Using Apologetics**

Another thing to consider when addressing or speaking the truth to pagans is the use of reason in apologetics/evangelism. One favorite technique with the Scriptures is that of

the *reductio ad absurdum* (reduce to the absurd). This means that you assume your opponents position and see where it leads. You can see an example of this in the mockery Isaiah uses when he writes concerning the pagan who, having cut down a tree, takes “half of the wood he burns in the fire; over it he prepares his meal, he roasts his meat and eats his fill. He also warms himself and says, ‘Ah! I am warm; I see the fire.’ From the rest he makes a god, his idol; he bows down to it and worships. He prays to it and says, ‘Save me, you are my

**Pluralism seems so polite, so pleasant and so tolerant, that many in the Church today advocate the inclusion of all faiths under one umbrella.**

god” (Isaiah 44:16-17). Isaiah notes and mocks the obvious; no “god” that I create, can save me! You also see this when Ezekiel meets with the pagans at Mt. Carmel. In I Kings 18:21 ff., Elijah mocks the prophets of Baal, the penultimate nature religion of the day. After noting that all their pleas and bloodletting has not brought forth Baal to challenge the prophet of the true God, Elijah shouts out, “Shout louder...surely he is a god. Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened.” The point is clear: if Baal was really God, then none of the theatrics or obscene rituals were really necessary.

You can also see this type of argumentation being used in the New Testament. When Jesus discussed the resurrection with the Sadducees, who denied it, he points out that the Sadducees themselves pray to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Since this is so, their own words belie their

position. God is not the God of the dead, but rather the God of the living (Mark 12:18-27)! Jesus does a similar thing in the same chapter of Mark, when he points out that the rabbis were teaching that the Messiah is the son of David, and yet David himself says that the Messiah is his Lord. The rabbi’s position is undermined by contrary evidence from within the rabbi’s own Scriptures.

In much the same way, we can use this type of argumentation in talking to pagans. For example, one can take the common belief of “Maya”—the notion that all of reality is but an illusion of the mind, and that even the mind itself is an illusion. The “true” reality is that all that exists is the same exact thing and that it is god. This is the heart of monistic pantheism; all is one and all is god. Many pagans in America are in what I call a “Christian hangover.” That is, they were raised within some form of Christianity and have left it for various reasons and are now pagans. They were Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and now are Buddhists, Hindus and Wiccans. Yet many of them have brought with them various Christians notions, such as caring for the poor, and the environment, etc. For example Marianne Williamson, author of *Return to Love* and many other books, is a proponent and teacher of a (spirit) “channeled” book called *A Course in Miracles*. She claims that this book was written by Jesus, who has come back to the world through this book, “to undo the damage done to the world for the last two thousand years.” What is this damage? The damage is that the Church has taught that people are separated from God because of their sin. The message of this new “Jesus” is that there is no such thing as sin, and that we cannot be separated from God because we are God!

But we ask: why does this not seem to be obvious, and why do our perceptions seem to be marked by so much apparent evil? Well, Williamson says we are living in a hallucination (her description of Maya!) and that all we see is merely the creation of our minds, which are really God's mind. In the meeting where I heard Williamson explain all this, she spoke for close to two hours about how all that exists is an illusion, and that freedom and enlightenment come when one discovers this. At the end of the meeting she took up a collection for AIDS patients! The irony is delicious: if I am an illusion, and the AIDS patients are an illusion and the disease is an illusion and money is an illusion, then the illusory collection is undermined.

Richard Gere does the same thing as a supporter of the Dalai Lama and of Tibetan nationalism. In an article a few years ago, Gere notes that all of reality is merely a function of the mind. This belief was taught him by the Tibetans. At the end of the article, however, he chastises the Chinese government for brutally murdering and destroying the Tibetan people.<sup>10</sup> One might ask, "Mr. Gere, if it is true that reality is merely a function of the mind, as taught to you by the Tibetan Buddhists, then why don't the Tibetans merely change their minds! Poof! No more Chinese." But this doesn't seem to have worked. Perhaps one could take the belief of reincarnation and see if that helps. The Tibetans believe in reincarnation and therefore should appreciate the conclusions that come from its teachings. If Gere were to take the fatalistic Eastern view of reincarnation, then he would know that all actions, or karma, are merely the byproduct of past actions. That is, the explanation for the hardship of the Tibetans today can only be explained by understanding that the Tibetans must have invaded Beijing in an earlier life. Of course this won't

justify Gere's complaint either, so perhaps we can look at the Western spin on reincarnation. Most Western views still emphasize that what people experience is the direct consequence of karma, but we experience this now for our personal growth, and by our personal choice—reincarnation with a happy face! If this is the case, then once again we must ask if perhaps the Tibetans shouldn't just grin and bear it, as their slaughter by the Chinese is something they chose for themselves and something which will help them "grow." Whichever way it goes, the validity of Gere's complaint against the Chinese is undone by his own beliefs.

The best part of all this is something much greater. We have a wonderful opportunity to witness to pagans, because they and we are created in the image of God. That is at least to say that they have moral notions and that this experience is a universal one. We find we can have common ground with people of pagan persuasion in the moral arena. However, since most, if not all, pagan groups deny the existence of absolute ethics, especially those of the Lord, then ethics must be purely relative, perhaps just emotions blurted out, or ethics have become the playground where the self is King, and where we can now play by whatever rules we like. But deeply understood, none of this gives us one reason to help AIDS patients or try to help the Tibetans. The grief that Williamson and Gere share are proof that their own beliefs cannot work.

The traditional response of Eastern religions is some sort of two-tiered notion of reality. The upper level is true reality, where monistic pantheism is true.<sup>11</sup> This is the "true" or higher level of consciousness. The lower level, where we all live in this world, is ultimately a false reality, but for some reason we must play by its

rules. This sets up the believer as a moment by moment hypocrite for living in a false reality and acting like it is real, while all the time believing that the world they live in is not real. Yet as one has stated, even Hindus look both ways before they cross the street! This just shows the inconsistency deeply imbedded within the religious consciousness of the pagan believer.

A further example of this futility can be shown through a conversation I had with a Theravada Buddhist. As a Buddhist of this type, Suddhacitto is deeply committed to atheism and non-violence. Behind all of reality is not God, but rather nothingness—Sunnata, the void. After reading his literature, I told him that I appreciated his stance of non-violence towards living things. But I wondered, as an atheist, how could he know that non-violence was right? And who says so? His answer was that nature teaches us the law of non-violence. I told him that was an interesting idea, but all one had to do was watch a David Attenborough video for five minutes, before you figured out that all nature consists of animals killing each other and making more little animals who kill each other. You can learn a lot from the created world, but you cannot learn non-violence! At that point Suddhacitto yelled at me, "Bill, you just think you need a personal God to teach you right from wrong!" "Exactly," I responded. You see, unlike most relativists, Suddhacitto did not want non-violence to be merely an option alongside of violence. He knows that in order to raise non-violence above the relativistic swamp, there must be something bigger than all our opinions to justify it. Being an atheist, however, he had discarded the possibility that God can ground all our moral certainties or uncer-

tainties. Then he had turned to nature, which is by definition bigger than all of us, but has the slight drawback of being completely unable to teach what he claimed it did.

### **Universal Hopes**

Williamson, Gere and Sukkacitto all share the same *basic desire*: to deal with the consequences of sin. They had experienced disease, war, violence and had been struck by the destructive power of unchecked sin. All desired to see that things could be better, that the situations might be made right. All of these emotions are a *direct denial* of the belief systems that all three hold. If everything is Maya, or merely a byproduct of your mind, or just the void, then there are no moral rights and wrongs, no evils to be rectified, and no clue as to what direction one goes to fix the situation. How can one shape an illusion? What direction can one go, and know that this is the right direction, if there is no "right?" Yet they all seem to instinctively know that wrong is being committed and want things to change. This again points back to the image of God, which as C.S. Lewis argues is universal in its scope. This fundamental feeling, is easy to deny in print, as many New Age leaders do,<sup>12</sup> but much harder to ignore in real life. This gives the Christian a perfect opportunity to present the true Creator of this very real world, introduce what He thinks of sin and evil, and take the New Age follower to the real solution for the problem of evil in this life, to Jesus the Messiah.

Secondly, the early Church acted within the context of love. The early Church was criticized by the pagans as a "slave religion," because so many slaves were becoming Christians. The Church cared for the poor in ways

that no edifice of stone could. They would help bury the dead of pagans; they would buy the freedom of pagan slaves; they would feed the pagans.<sup>13</sup> This was something people understood. What they could not understand was why the Christians would do this. It made no sense to the pagan mind to take care of others who were not your own immediate family. When Jesus gave the new commandment in John 13, he noted that all people

**If everything is Maya, or merely a by product of your mind... then there are no true moral rights and wrongs, no evils to be rectified, and no clue as to what direction one goes to fix the situation.**

would know who his disciples were by "their love for one another." By telling us to love our neighbor in Luke 10, in the Good Samaritan story, he pointed out that our neighbor is anyone we find in need. Together these two concepts provided an unbeatable combination.

### **Learning from Others**

Normally I am very reluctant to say that we can learn something from the pagans, but listen to what one famous pagan, Julian the Apostate, says about us. Julian was the last pagan emperor of Rome, from 360-361 A.D. Wanting to rebuild the grandeur of Rome, but unable to revitalize the pagan religions in the old fashioned way so many of his predecessors had (by slaughtering the Christians!), he funded pagan temples, education, and clergy. In a letter to his high priest in Galatia, he tells Arcasuis something about our own predecessors that we might need to

remember. He states:

Why do we not notice that it is their kindness to strangers, their care for the graves of the dead, and the pretended holiness of their lives that have done most to increase atheism [i.e., Christianity]? I believe that we ought really and truly to practice every one of these virtues. And it is not enough for you alone to practice them, but so must all the priests in Galatia, without exception... In the second place admonish them that no priest may enter a theatre or trade that is base and not respectable... in every city establish hostels in order that strangers may profit by our generosity; I do not mean for our own people only, but for others also who are in need of money... for it is disgraceful that, when no Jew ever has to beg and the impious Galileans [Christians] support both their own poor and ours as well, all men see that our people lack aid from us.<sup>14</sup>

It is very fascinating that Julian has to order Arcasius to build hostels for travelers in need, and then has to emphasize that he wants them open for people other than their own. It seems so clear that the "secret" of the early Church was to simply do what Jesus told them to do—love each other, and even love their enemies. Why did this work and how can it apply to us today?

I think perhaps the clearest explanation is also the simplest; the reason this kind of love worked is that it spoke to the real needs of people. As Dr. Gordon Lewis stresses, apologetics and evangelism must seek for "common ground" with those involved with paganism. *The most common ground of all for human beings is our common alienation from God and from each other.* When the early Church loved people in the simple, yet profound way that they did, they "spoke" a language that the pagans had no counterpoint for. The essence of New Age paganism is narcissic in all its

forms. The self is ultimate and autonomous, with all else being part of Maya—the illusion. This focus on self and self only, under the guise of “spiritual development,” by definition excludes the care for others, and undermines the ultimate idealism often parroted by contemporary leaders within New Age ranks. Why care for the environment if the world is an illusion? Why love your neighbor if all is an illusion? New Age author Joseph Campbell, in the PBS series entitled “The Power of Myth,” explains his version of the commandment to love your neighbor, not as a command to think of others, as seen by Christ’s disciples throughout church history. Rather, he says that the command to love others as yourself is based upon the notion that to love others as yourself is to know that when you do so you are really loving yourself. Why? Because you are your neighbor. This is the logical extension of monistic pantheism. If all is one and all is God, then all distinctions break down into “Maya.” In response, one could note that for paganism, loving a rock in the same way as one ought to reach out to help the poor, is one and the same thing. Rocks and poor people are both part of the illusion so they are the same.

Within this foundation is the heart of the complaint made by Julian. We must imitate the Christians caring for others. Historically this didn’t work, and *this is because the pagan beliefs systematically undermine the concern for the other*. By contrast, Christians are commanded to think of serving other people as a way of serving Jesus. The “benchmark” for the success of the Church in following Jesus, is not our buildings, but rather our reaching out to the very people he reached out to—the poor, the sick, the weak, the orphans and the widows,

While nothing I have said here is original, it is intended as a correction

to the Church in America today. I meet too many people who formerly sat in Christian churches of one sort or another, who are now thoroughly pagan. I also meet too many Christians in churches, who know nothing of their own faith, and yet seem fascinated by Wicca, channeling (communication with supernatural entities), and other varieties of paganism. We must speak the truth in love within our own ranks, and also to the larger community of people involved with the so called “new” religious movements. The good news is that we do not have to reinvent the wheel, nor seek out the latest thing from some marketer. Instead we need to be reminded of God’s word to our predecessors in the faith and remember how well God’s methods work when applied and practiced in reaching out to a pagan world.

### Endnotes

1. The source for this material is a booklet entitled, *America—The New Mission Field*, published by the National Association of Evangelicals. Edited by James D. Leggett, January 1996.
2. The direct statement of this is from Phyllis Culrot, then leader of the Covenant of The Goddess, given in her talk at the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago, 1993. The rest of these types of statements are culled from *Newsweek*, *New Age Journal*, and numerous other sources.
3. The best example of this is found in John Hick’s *An Interpretation of Religion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989). The issue is also discussed in *More than One Way* edited by Dennis Okholm and Timothy Phillips (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing Co., 1995).
4. All biblical quotations are taken from the *New International Version of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1978).
5. This analysis is deeply dependent on the writings (whether they like it or not!) of David Wells in his two books, *No Place for Truth*, and *God in the Wasteland* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993 and 1994 respectively). Also gleaned from George Barna’s *What Americans Believe* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1991), Os Guinness’s *No God but God* and numerous other books, articles and conversations.
6. Taken from article in *USA Today*, July 12, 1991 and other sources.
7. Much of this is taken from *The Golden Bough*, by James Frazer (Avenel, NJ: Random House Company, 1993 edition).
8. For information concerning the early church fathers, see *Eerdmans Handbook to the History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), *Christianity through the Centuries* by Earle Cairns (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1954), and *Church History in Plain Language* by Bruce L. Shelley (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1982).
9. *Return to Love* by Marianne Williamson (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishing Co., 1992 and *A Course in Miracles* edited by Ken Wapnick (published by the Foundation for Inner Peace and Penguin Books, New York, NY, 1975).
10. Taken from an article entitled “Gere Says Reality is Function of Mind,” *Associated Press*, date unknown.
11. The most well known Hindu Philosopher who argued this way was Shankara (circa 820 A.D.) Quoted in *Commentary on Brhadaranyaka Upanishad*, IV, 4, 6 quoted in Elliot Deutsch *Advaita Vedanta: A Philosophical Reconstruction* (Honolulu, HI: The University Press of Hawaii, 1969). Thanks to Dr. Doug Groothuis for this reference.)
12. For example see *The Fireside Treasury of Light* edited by Mary Olsen Kelly (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1990). *For the Love of God* edited by Benjamin Shield and Richard Carlson (San Rafael, CA: New World Library, 1990). *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ* by Matthew Fox (San Francisco, CA: Harper/Collins Publishers, 1988). *Science of Being and Art of Living* by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (New York, NY: Signet Books, 1968) and too many others to list here.
13. See the same historical references listed in (8).
14. See *Eerdmans Handbook to the History of Christianity*, 137-138.

Photo here  
of  
Honsberger

*Bill Honsberger graduated from Denver Seminary in 1981 with an MA degree in Systematic Theology. In 1990 he was appointed as a missionary to New Age and New Spiritualities Evangelism by Mission to the Americas.*

# Are You Ready for E-Ministry?

*Through the modern technology of the WorldWide Web we can make available Christian apologetics to believers, seekers, and skeptics worldwide. Through the use of electronic mail (e-mail), we can offer personalized responses to questions raised by seekers, skeptics, and believers alike. Like the Roman Roads of the first century, today the Internet is a worldwide electronic computer communication network that the Church needs to utilize, sending bold, thoughtful, trained apologists worldwide, using this modern, God-given technology.*

by Keith Seabourn

**R**ecently I received the following email:

..Please help me. I recently began looking into the claims for Christianity and the Bible and was given Josh McDowell's Evidence That Demands A Verdict. I became convinced about the reality of the Christian faith only to have it shattered by [an atheistic] web site. Basically it tears the evidence for Jesus apart. What I am looking for is for you to show me how and why they are wrong. I understand that you may be busy but I am really in need on some proof that Jesus and the Bible are real. I am not a Christian yet and the [other website] article is a major obstacle to me making a commitment to Christ. Therefore please E-mail me with some answers or direct me to somewhere that has answers. Thank you, Martin.

The Internet is a 24 hour-a-day, 7 day-a-week operation with a worldwide scope. There is always somebody, someplace needing information your ministry materials can provide—seeking help personally or wanting resources to equip them to minister to others.

Martin's message above emphasizes two interesting phenomena that have become familiar as we at Christian Leadership Ministries (CLM) have developed a major Internet-based ministry. First, Martin puts more credibility on the

atheistic Web site than he does on the printed book *Evidence That Demands A Verdict*. The atheistic site to which Martin refers does a point-by-point refutation of McDowell's book. The atheistic site "shatters" Martin's faith. It is more powerful to him than McDowell's book.

Secondly, Martin's preferred medium for receiving help is the Internet. He asks for an e-mail response or to be directed to additional Internet materials to help answer his questions.

A growing number of people today, particularly young people, trust electronic media more than printed media. Electronic media is interactive. It is stimulating. It is current and fresh. Printed media is often associated with older ways of thinking. The Internet, and particularly that part called the World Wide Web (or WWW), is the fastest growing version of electronic media ever.

Our engagement in this battle transcends computers and networks, but we still utilize these tools God has given us. It behooves us to strategically employ the powerful media represented by computer communication technologies.

"1996 was the first year in which more money was spent in the USA on personal computers than on televisions. It was also the first year in which the total amount of e-mail exceeded the total amount of surface mail." (Global Monitor, January/February 1997)

Business is rapidly gravitating towards doing business on the Internet. This electronic business is called E-business or E-commerce (electronic business and electronic commerce). In the same way, electronic ministry (or E-ministry) holds tremendous potential.

Through the technology of the Worldwide Web, we can make available Christian apologetics to believers, seekers, and skeptics worldwide. Through the use of electronic mail (e-mail), we can offer personalized responses to questions raised by seekers, skeptics, and believers who visit the sites.

## ***A Modern Roman Road***

The early Church expanded and flourished in a hostile culture because she saw the importance of sending bold, thoughtful, trained *apologists* to take the gospel into new and varied cultures. The pathway that enabled the rapid expansion of the gospel was the Roman highway system. Today,

## Are You Ready For E-Ministry?

we have a new Roman Road—the worldwide electronic computer communication network known as the Internet. Today, the Church needs to return to sending bold, thoughtful, trained apologists worldwide, using the Internet communication system.

In the early days of Christianity, the Roman empire dominated the Mediterranean world. As they conquered, the Romans built an extensive highway system to better control the subjugated territories. Rome's philosophy was to convert conquered peoples into Romans, imposing their language and culture. The highway system allowed greater influence over conquered societies.

The Roman highways were called the Devil's Highway by some. It represented unwanted intrusion into their societies. Some Christians today feel that the Internet represents all that is bad in society: pornography, neo-Nazi hate groups, etc. Parents are afraid that their children will be exposed to all sorts of evil opportunities. Today, some would call the Internet "the devil's highway."

However, the Apostle Paul saw the Roman highway system as God's provision—a means to travel far and wide taking the gospel to the entire known world. At Christian Leadership Ministries, we believe that the Internet is God's latest gift of communication technology to His church—a means of mass communication that is far better than any previous means, that reaches all over the world in ways that no other does.

### ***Ministry on the Internet***

Our extensive experience on the Internet has taught us that ...

The Internet is a unique communication medium. You use the same technology to broadcast your message and for personal counseling, interaction, and follow-up. The Internet marries both broadcast

(one-to-many, like TV and radio) and individual (one-to-one, like telephone and letter) communications into a single medium. This has never before been possible.

The Internet is the least expensive means of communication. Compared to other modes of communication (print, TV, radio), the Internet is a much more cost effective medium.

You can reach people you wouldn't otherwise reach. Through the Internet, you can reach new people who might never hear your message any other way. Our statistics show that our Web sites are viewed by people all over the world, in countries many wouldn't even think had computers. The Internet is everywhere and gaining in popularity and acceptance every day.

People are looking for good materials on the Internet. We regularly receive comments from people who are grateful for our high-quality resources that they can trust. Like television, radio and the cinema, the Internet contains some offensive materials. Therefore, through a Web site, your quality resources will shine even brighter on the Internet.

You can reach people for Christ on the Internet. At CLM we've had tremendous success in outreach through electronic evangelism, or E-vangelism as Andrew Careaga called it in *Charisma*. We've received correspondence from people who have been dramatically affected by something they read on our sites or through e-mail interaction with one of our E-ministry volunteers.

*The Internet is here to stay and is growing.* The World Wide Web has great growth potential, both in its audience and innovative content. More and more people are investigating the information superhighway. Internet traffic is doubling every 100 days, resulting in

an annual growth rate of more than 700 percent. (U.S. Commerce Department, quoted in *Internet Computing*, July, 1998.)

### ***Websites***

There are two basic types of Web sites: electronic brochures and tools for ministry.

*Brochures* talk about *us*, who we are, how you can join *us*, *our* telephone number, *our* recruiting policies, *our* books to sell, etc. There is a place for these *brochureware* or *billboard* sites, but they should not be the only type of Web sites Christians build.

E-ministries focusing on *tools for ministry* are often overlooked when Christian organizations develop a Web site. These sites are designed to minister to others. There are two divisions in this category. *E-quipping* sites mobilize, empower and equip Christians to engage in spiritual battle. *E-vangelism* sites model innovative, compelling, winsome, attractive ministry that targets non-Christians.

A balanced E-ministry designs and operates both E-quipping sites (discipling believers) and E-vangelism sites (interacting with non-believers).

### ***Equipping with Apologetics***

Discipleship sites provide ministry tools for equipping Christians. However, they should do much more than that. The early church grew phenomenally because of many factors. They understood how to be filled with God's Spirit to empower them for ministry. They had a deep understanding of God's Word. They sacrificially committed themselves to the task of world evangelization.

But there were two additional elements that they applied in their strategy to reach their world: (1) they *trained apologists* who could clearly

and articulately apply the principles of Scripture to current issues in society and (2) they *embraced the Roman highways* to spread their message.

In his book *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, Mark Noll said, "The scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind." Most Christians don't know how to think *Christianly*. C. S. Lewis stated, "He [Christ] wants a child's heart, but a grown-up's head." John Wesley reminds us, "Ought not a Minister to have, first, a good understanding, a clear apprehension, a sound judgment, and a capacity of reasoning with some closeness?"

Most evangelical Christians are woefully unprepared to obey 1 Peter 3:15, to be an apologist—to give an answer, to make a defense for their faith. We at CLM have had great success equipping Christians using Web sites that focus on *issues-based apologetics*. We seek to provide the best information in the world on a multitude of issues, informed by a biblical worldview.

The goal is "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith..." (Ephesians 4:12). *The goal is to equip and train apologists who are prepared to give answers to biblical faith and life.*

We also build evangelistic sites. In the present post-Christian era, our E-vangelism starts with an issue of interest to the individual. It proceeds through an exposure to a biblical perspective. It offers opportunity to enter a discussion about a Christian's attitude toward a specific issue. Then we offer an opportunity to receive Christ.

Evangelistic Web sites are most effective when: they follow an

intentional approach; target a specific audience; offer tips and helps on specific issues; allow interested people to drill deeper and deeper into a site as they explore the issue; share personal stories (testimonies) of people who have found satisfaction and significance in life through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ; invite interested people to interact by e-mail. Above all, as the suitable opportunities arise, offer an opportunity to receive Christ.

**"The scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind." Most Christians don't know how to think *Christianly*.**

In addition to providing resources tailored for screen presentation via the World Wide Web (using the HTML language), we prepare every resource in Adobe Acrobat (PDF) format. This allows a high-quality print version to be retrieved. We encourage users to take the print versions and give to friends and then discuss the issues with them. We also provide our resources in ASCII Text (TXT) format. This allows people around the world, who perhaps do not have WWW access, to still obtain resources via automated e-mail request.

### **A Success Story**

Leadership University ([www.leaderu.com](http://www.leaderu.com)) went online in September, 1995, with the goal of putting thousands of resources on the Web—resources that reflect a biblical worldview. To date we make available nearly 6,000 articles, reviews, essays, lectures, debates and other resources on the Internet. We have seen a steady increase in activity. In the last

several months, we are seeing almost 300,000 visits every month (corresponding to nearly three million "hits") by Christians and non-Christians. We receive more than 500 e-mail messages every month requesting help, counsel, asking questions, occasionally objecting to material, etc. We've developed a nationwide network of people who want to be involved in E-ministry by responding to these e-mail messages.

[Insert Text Box 3 here.]

### **Other Websites**

In addition to our main Leadership University site, we operate a number of other sites:

Origins

(<http://www.origins.org>)—scholars on intelligent design of the universe and life.

Stonewall Revisited

(<http://www.stonewallrevisited.com>)—help for homosexuals and those dealing with related questions.

Doug Yeo

(<http://www.yeodoug.com>)—outreach from an accomplished professional musician.

World Religions Index

([wri.leaderu.com](http://wri.leaderu.com))—comparative religions.

Christian Leadership Ministries (<http://www.clm.org>)—mobilizing university faculty for ministry on their campuses.

We have also launched a project called Telling the Truth (<http://www.clm.org/ttt>). Through this project, we also partner with a number of other organizations and individuals who see the tremendous potential to affect the way people think by using the modern Roman road called the Internet.

### **Fulfill Your Vision**

E-ministry can help reach the Martin's of the world—those who look to the Internet to examine answers to

## Are You Ready For E-Ministry?

their life's questions. Is your ministry prepared to help Martin using the communication medium he prefers? Are you using the modern-day Roman road to travel the world and minister in diverse locations?

E-Ministry is electronic ministry via the Internet that provides a 24 hour-a-day, 7 day-a-week presence anywhere in the world. E-Ministry has tremendous benefits in allowing you to affect the way people think and live.

*Keith Seabourn is a member of the staff of Christian Leadership Ministries, the faculty ministry of Campus*

*Crusade for Christ. He directs Internet and web development for CLM. Keith and his wife, Kay, lived in Nigeria, West Africa with*

*their 3 children for 15 years where he taught in government colleges and directed the JESUS Film ministry, recording and producing the JESUS Film in numerous languages and directing film team strategies. He is the author of "Understanding Amateur Radio in the Federal Republic of Nigeria" and "Telling the Truth: A How-To Guide."*