

Light Brings Salt

Volume 6, Issue 09

March 2, 2007



Iron Range Bible Church

Dedicated to the Systematic Exposition of the Word of God
"Sanctify them in the truth: Your word is truth."



Ancient-Future Heresies T.A. McMahon *The Berean Call*

Here's an idea. Let's go back through historical church eras and glean from such time periods those issues deemed to be of value in the development of the Christian faith. Let's review the first-century church, the church between A.D. 100 and 600, then consider the medieval era (A.D. 700 to 1500), followed by the Reformation period (A.D. 1500 and later), and so on. To be effective in this endeavor, it's important to have a good understanding of the cultural context in which the Christians of each era practiced their faith. In addition, we'll need to study the Church Fathers and gain the insights they provided. Why? Well, those who are promoting this "re-presenting the past" believe that today's Christianity will greatly benefit as it "re-invents itself" in order to effectively bring the message of the gospel to the postmodern world. If you think this may not be a good idea, you could be labeled a "traditionalist," one whose faith and practice is inflexible and out of touch with our rapidly changing culture-and church.

That's the view that *Christianity Today* (CT) has of what's going on in evangelical Christianity. In introducing its February 2008 feature article with a cover-page declaration, "Lost Secrets of the Ancient Church: How evangelicals started looking backward to move forward," CT senior managing editor Mark Galli writes:

You might say a number of CT editors have a vested interest in this issue's cover story. David Neff, Ted Olsen, Tim Morgan, and I have been doing the ancient-future thing for many years, at Episcopal and/or Anglican parishes. And if this were not enough immersion in the topic, in his spare time, David Neff heads up the Robert E. Webber Center for an Ancient Evangelical Future, founded by the father of the ancient-future movement.

Acknowledging the magazine's inherent (and *historic*) bias, Galli notes that "the ancient church has captivated the evangelical imagination for some time [yet] it hasn't been until recently that it's become an *accepted fixture* of the evangelical landscape. And this is *for the good*" (emphasis added). That, of course, is Galli's opinion and, sadly, a growing multitude of influential Christian leaders agree.

Robert E. Webber, who died last year, is certainly the "father of the ancient-future movement," and his many books have provided encouragement and content for leaders of Emerging Church fellowships. As a Wheaton College professor for three decades, he also played a significant part in influencing that evangelical institution's capitulation to ecumenism, particularly its support of Roman Catholicism.

Webber wrote in his book, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World*, "Currently, Western society is in a transition from the modern world to a postmodern world... shifting us toward the affirmation of new values...resulting in a whole new culture and raising new questions about the way a biblical Christianity is to be understood and communicated."¹ The solution for Christianity to be viable in this cultural transition, Webber contends, is to "recover the universally accepted framework of faith that originated with the apostles, was developed by the [Church] Fathers, and has been handed down by the church in its liturgical and theological traditions."

This Church Fathers' "framework of faith," along with "its liturgical and theological traditions" is found primarily, according to Webber, in the era of "Classic Christianity," between A.D. 100 and 600. And it was to that church age that most of the speakers at the 2007 Wheaton Theology Conference on "The Ancient Faith for the Church's Future" sang their praises. *CT* describes

what took place at the Billy Graham Center in the Cliff Barrows Auditorium, including taking the audience through prayers from the *Gelasian Sacramentary* (also known as the *Book of Sacraments of the Church of Rome*), a fifth-century book of Catholic liturgy containing the priest's instructions for celebrating the Eucharist and recommending them for worship in today's Protestant churches. One speaker promoted the Catholic "medieval fourfold hermeneutic," which emphasizes the nonliteral interpretation of the Bible, and another "gleefully passed on the news" to this highly receptive crowd "that Liberty University had observed the liturgical season of Lent."

The writer of the article then asks, "Had Catholics taken over?" in this former bastion of conservative evangelicalism. His answer is NO! This Wheaton College conference was simply evangelicals looking to the past for "rich biblical, spiritual, and theological treasures to be found within the early church" as supplied by the early Church Fathers.

Are evangelicals truly paying attention to the Church Fathers? University professor D. H. Williams, author of *Evangelicals and Tradition*, substantiated "the recent upsurge of evangelical interest in patristics (the study of the Church Fathers): 'Who would have thought, a decade ago, that one of the most vibrant and serious fields of Christian study at the beginning of the 21st century would be the ancient church fathers? There has been an opening of new avenues...[created] by the almost overnight popularity of bishops and monks, martyrs and apologists, philosophers and historians who first fashioned a Christian culture 1,500 years ago.'

Although these developments may seem shockingly new to some and seem to have sprung up overnight, *Christianity Today* gives some preparatory background. The article quotes Robert Webber from his then controversial 1978 book *Common Roots*: "My argument is that the era of the early church (A.D. 100-500), and particularly the second century, contains insights which evangelicals need to recover." *CT* notes that 25 years later Webber rejoiced in his book *Younger Evangelicals* that they [emergent fellowships] "want to immerse themselves in the past and form a culture that is connected to the past...."

Nearly a decade earlier than *Common Roots*, a number of Campus Crusade leaders went on their own "recovery" of ancient liturgies, specifically

from Eastern Orthodoxy. Peter Gillquist, Jack Sparks, Jon Braun, and others left Campus Crusade to form what was a forerunner of today's ancient-future-emergent movement. They turned to the writings of the early Church Fathers "to practice a more liturgical form of worship than in their previous evangelical background." They called their movement the New Covenant Apostolic Order and, later, the Evangelical Orthodox Church.

In 1978, Quaker and *CT* advisory editor Richard Foster wrote *Celebration of Discipline*. His book, which introduced Catholic and occult meditative techniques to evangelicals, sold more than a million copies and was selected by *Christianity Today* as one of the top ten books of the 20th century. Foster later formed Renovaré, an organization dedicated to teaching spiritual formation through the mystical beliefs and practices of the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Desert Fathers. Eugene Peterson (*CT* editor), author of the very popular paraphrased Bible, *The Message*, was the New Testament editor of the *Renovaré Spiritual Formation Bible*.

These developments are foundational to today's Emerging Church phenomenon and indicate that such roots will carry it well beyond its merely being a fad among today's evangelical youth. More recent support (noted in last month's TBC) is the change in attitude among evangelicals toward Roman Catholicism fostered by "Evangelicals & Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium," an endeavor of Chuck Colson and Father Richard John Neuhaus (both *CT* editors) and the stunning success (thanks to evangelicals) of Mel Gibson's extremely Catholic *The Passion of the Christ*.

Is any of this "for the good," as *Christianity Today* declares?

Let's both reason from the Scriptures, and simply be reasonable (Isaiah 1:18). The Ancient-Future search to discover gems from "Classic Christianity" comes up short by a century -- the century in which the New Testament was written. The critical difference should be obvious. The writers of the New Testament were *inspired by the Holy Spirit* as they penned God's Word (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21, 22). What writings from A.D. 100 and later can claim such inspiration? None. But we're told that some were disciples of or lived at the time of the apostles. True, but proximity to the apostles is hardly a guarantee against heresy nor does it come close to inspiration. Furthermore, much of the first-

century-written New Testament reproved and corrected errors that had *already entered the church!*

Remember the Apostle Paul's warning to the Ephesian elders, who were certainly closer to Paul than any of the so-called Church Fathers:

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. (Acts 20:28-31)

Again, why this attraction to the ancient Church Fathers? Could any of them say with Paul, "Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you" (Philippians 4:9)? We can trust his God-breathed words *completely*. On the other hand, it takes very little scrutiny of men like Origen, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Cyprian, Justin Martyr, Athanasius, John Chrysostom, Cyril of Jerusalem, Augustine, and others, to see their flaws, let alone their heresies. For example, Origen taught that God would save everyone and that Mary was a perpetual virgin; Irenaeus believed that the bread and wine became the body and blood of Jesus when consecrated, as did John Chrysostom and Cyril of Jerusalem; Athanasius taught salvation through baptism; Tertullian became a supporter of the Montanist heresies, and a promoter of a New Testament clergy class, as did his disciple Cyprian; Augustine was the principal architect of Catholic dogma that included his support of purgatory, baptismal regeneration, and infant baptism, mortal and venial sins, prayers to the dead, penance for sins, absolution from a priest, the sinlessness of Mary, the Apocrypha as Scripture, etc.

It's not that these men got everything wrong; some, on certain doctrines, upheld Scripture against the developing unbiblical dogmas of the Roman Catholic Church.

Nevertheless, overall they are a heretical minefield. So why seek them out?

Worse yet are the Desert Fathers and the Catholic mystics. Anthony the Great, known as the father of Christian monasticism, is the most revered of

the Desert Fathers. According to Athanasius, the devil fought Anthony by afflicting him with boredom, laziness, and the phantoms of women, which he countered by becoming a hermit and isolating himself for years inside a tomb. He communicated with the outside world through a crevice that enabled him to receive food and to offer spiritual advice. Supposedly, the devil, upset by his holiness, would come and beat him unmercifully.

Later mystics were no less bizarre-or *unbiblical*. Benedictine nun Julian of Norwich, a favorite of evangelical mystic wannabes and "Christian" feminists, believed in universal salvation, that God was in all things, referred to God as "Father-Mother," and experienced intense visions of heaven and hell. Her most famous saying became a positive mental attitude mantra: "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well." Like Anthony, she had herself walled off from society, living for 20 years in a cell attached to a church, where a small window provided access to food and a view of the church altar and of the Eucharist.

Could these hermits and mystics really interest evangelicals? *Christianity Today* says they do. Referring to "monastic evangelicals" and the "new monasticism," an insert in its cover article observes how "growing numbers of evangelicals" are "taking their newfound love affair with Christian tradition" beyond "books and talk" and are "now experimenting with advent candles [and] sampling [Catholic] practices associated with Lent...." *CT* credits Richard Foster's *Devotional Classics* as possibly fueling this latest trend, and it notes that Brian McLaren, Tony Jones, and a number of emerging church writers have "been calling evangelicals to monastic models as a guide for the future."

As a former Roman Catholic, I am staggered when I see who and what *Christianity Today* is blatantly promoting. Robert Webber, for example, writes in *Signs and Wonders* of an experience that changed his Protestant life. He received the Eucharist (allegedly the "actual body and blood of Christ under the appearance of bread and wine") while at a Catholic retreat center: "You might say I was surprised by joy!...I had never had an experience like that in my life....I had been in dialog with another worship tradition, and I was surely the richer for it." Thousands of steadfast biblical Christians were martyred for refusing that idolatrous and gospel-denying "worship tradition."

Campus Crusade leader-turned-Orthodox-priest Peter Gillquist explains the "mission" he and those who joined him are on: "Our desire is to make North America Orthodox!" As former conservative evangelicals, they believe that "if we [could] become Orthodox, then anyone in North America can!" Furthermore, due to their apologetics and evangelism training, "...we represent a strong force for *Orthodox* evangelization....And we know there are many others just like us who if given the time and persuasion will join the Orthodox ranks just as we have."

Will this soon pass? No. It's all part of related agendas that are building the end-times apostate church (Revelation 13:8). Its tools are experientialism, subjectivism, mysticism, and dominionism, all of which aggressively and obstinately subvert the Word of God. They are intentionally (in some cases unwittingly) being used to work out Satan's primary scheme against God and mankind (Genesis 3:1: "Yea, hath God said...?") as they undermine His Truth. Is God doing anything about it? Yes. As evidenced by what's been presented here and so much more, He is sending "strong delusion" among those who have not a "love of the truth" (2 Thessalonians 2:10,11).

We desperately need to heed the words of Jesus in Revelation chapters 2-3 that give critical warnings to churches that profess to be His. To Laodicea, which very likely represents the last church age before His return, He declares,

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. (Revelation 3: 19-22)

News Note:

Oil prices on the world market have topped \$102 per barrel...gasoline prices at the pumps are rising through the \$3.13 per gallon mark...federal and state taxes comprise about 41 cents per gallon...costs of refining, distribution and marketing are approximately 60 cents per gallon and the cost of crude oil for a gallon of gasoline

purchased in the United States is approximately \$2.12. A scan across news stories in recent days would indicate that reporters are writing a lot about the cost of oil rising, but not giving many reasons as to why. They are increasingly pointing toward demand by China as one culprit. Supply, however, has not been readily cited as a problem—but refining capacity has.

If refining capacity—the ability of oil companies to turn crude oil into gasoline—were the issue, as OPEC ministers say it is, then it doesn't track that the cost of crude oil as a portion of the gallon of gasoline would be the main problem. But of course, if the United States could have higher refining capacity coupled with the ability to extract its own natural resources for oil, the price you and I pay at the pump for gasoline would likely be well under \$2.00 per gallon. But this is where the problem comes in for American citizens. Environmentalists and liberal politicians have put a legal straightjacket on oil refinery capacity and oil exploration.

Here is what the liberals in Congress have done: The Department of Energy reports that In 1981, the U.S. had 324 refineries with a total capacity of 18.6 million barrels per day. Now there are about 132 oil refineries with a capacity of 16.8 million barrels per day. The last oil refinery in the United States was built in 1976. So after about 20% of America's refining capacity was shut down by hurricane Katrina, some conservatives in Congress passed legislation to encourage the building of refineries. This legislation was opposed by mostly environmentalists and Democrats. Democrats and moderate Republicans have also been responsible for not allowing oil exploration in Alaska.

If, however, all regulations and legal roadblocks were taken off, it would be years before Americans would see the benefits of new refineries and oil exploration. The leftist U.S. Congress has now voted to tax oil companies another \$18 billion a year—as if the federal government would spend that money better. And you know what happens with taxes on corporations, they are passed on to the consumer. So as we sit with our tanks nearly empty, in our cold houses because we can't afford the utility bill that has tripled since last year, we contemplate on what Jesus said in Matthew 22:21, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." In America, don't we have a say in that?