

# Templates of Christian Religion

## Introduction

There is the truth; this is all the things that are centred in God's word and testify to Jesus Christ. Churches that follow the truth and glorify Christ do not follow set formal characteristics, other than the prescriptions in God's word (just as every Christian family obeys God yet each one is different). They do not follow men, or the fashions of the world, or the whim of current ideology. They seek to be faithful to the Lord God and to obey all that he says.

Thus different churches in different locations, while obeying all the vital points of God's word, may have different characteristics and flavours. In the same way that the apostles were all different personalities and these characteristics worked their way into the Scriptures they wrote. Yet they all served God and all represented Christ as a faithful ambassador, but with different attributes. Paul's approach was intellectual unravelling and rational instruction while Peter's was passionate exhortation; John's approach was authoritative encouragement and revelation.

The truth is the truth. Churches founded on the truth are sound.

Beyond this there are a range of characteristics, which we may term 'templates' which become fashionable from time to time for churches. They often swing from one extreme to its opposite over time.

These characteristics tend to be the deciding factor that determines what church a Christian decides to attend and are often the result of following a certain man or a certain fashion. In extreme cases certain church types manifest animosity to what is considered as a lesser church type. For example in recent years elitist, radical Charismatic churches have spoken in violent and abusive terms about conservative churches.

Despite the vaunted proclamations of churches, all these church types have appeared throughout history and follow certain patterns that can be observed. Almost all churches fall into one or another of these templates, while some unite two or more templates. It is worth examining them.

Since I am trying to compile a succinct overview of types, I will try to keep my analysis simple and concise. I have detailed studies of these types elsewhere.

## The Truth

We do not need to expand on this since it means that a church is thoroughly Biblical. Churches founded solely upon God's word only do what is true and believe what is sound. They are balanced in expression and do not follow the characteristics of what is happening around them.

For example: such churches are led by a team of equal elders who all teach with authority and lead as fathers to the church family; no elder has superior authority over another. This means that all other forms of leadership are false: senior pastors, rigid hierarchies, moderators, general managers, formal religious leaders (vicar, archbishop, cardinal etc.), apostles over elders, prophets over elders and so on.

Sadly, such churches are very rare.

## Mysticism

### Human expression

God in me; or inner union with the divine.

This is the first great divide, which encompasses a wide range of types.

The opposite of mysticism is rationalism and the history of the church tends, in very general terms, to swing from periods where mysticism was in the ascendancy to when rationalism prevailed.

For example, after the intense intellectualism of the Reformation and the scholastic development of Protestantism that followed, mystical movements sprang up in reaction to the dogmatic approach of the Reformers. Thus we had various movements, such as Pietism and Quietism, followed by outright mystical sects like the Quakers, Ranters and Shakers.

### What is mysticism?

Mysticism is an anti-intellectual approach to spirituality that approaches pagan occultism. It presumes that God is within man and that man must die to himself to find the god within. He does this through a variety of methods, depending upon the chosen mystical discipline. Some use asceticism, self-renunciation, extreme physical disciplines, dancing, fasting, pain, pleasure, drugs, meditation and so forth.

In many cases there is a ladder of perfection that must be climbed through stages, achieved by deeper and deeper dying to the self. Gradually the thinking and volitional processes are subdued while the emotions are stirred up and this emotionalism is thought to be spirituality.

Sometimes this is summed up in Neoplatonism terms as: purification, illumination and union with the divine (Plotinus<sup>1</sup>); sometimes as a transformation; at other times as a progression up 12 rungs of a ladder; a threefold path (Evagrius Ponticus, 345-399), a five-stage path (Evelyn Underhill, 1875-1941), entering a mystery, entering the silence or

<sup>1</sup> One of the founders of Neoplatonism.

treading four paths of delight (Matthew Fox). Often it emphasises, letting go (Higher Life); abandoning thought (Rodney Howard-Browne), dying to the will etc.

One example of contrary practices is mediation. Some disciplines emphasise stillness, wordlessness, imageless concentration (this is called Apophatic mediation; e.g. Quietism, Meister Eckhart, the Cloud of Unknowing, Encratism<sup>2</sup>). Others emphasise the imagination or using words (this is called Cataphatic mediation; e.g. Pietism, Francis of Assisi, Ignatius Loyola). Another contrast is those mystics who concentrate on illuminating the mind ('speculative practice'; e.g. Encratism) compared to those who centre on affecting the heart/emotions ('affective practice'; Quietism, Pietism).

I have explained this in many papers.

### **Expressions in churches**

Mystical churches tend to centre upon emotionalism, engendering passivity in meetings leading to religious ecstasy, celebrating esoteric experiences and such like. They are apt to downplay, or even ignore, doctrinal instruction and practical theology. Often they subdue member's abilities, emphasise submission to a central leader, and shun intellectualism. They incline to centring on super-spiritual messages to die to self, downplay sin, imply perfectionism and ignore human responsibility. Many so emphasise faith as to circumvent practical obedience to God; thus holiness is by faith; this ignores the Biblical commands to prove faith by works or to wrestle against the flesh and war against the enemy. Similarly healing, prosperity, financial security, possessions and happiness are all obtained by faith with no concern about obedience, responsibility, wisdom and common sense.

Often prayer becomes the subject of mystical ideas instead of communication with God that is performed with daily discipline, wisdom, being founded upon truth and importunate persistence. There are different fashions regarding this but Contemplative Prayer methods are common, which are based on Roman Catholic mysticism. Other mystical influences in prayer emanate from Quakerism (silence until the inner light inspires words), Pentecostalism (uttering gibberish sounds believing that they are the words of angels – when angels have no physical mouth<sup>3</sup>) or Buddhism (silent meditation with no petitions) and so on.

### **Some methods**

Any church service that engenders the following is leading towards mysticism:

- Increasing passivity of the congregant and diminishing intellectuality and volition.
- Deliberately heightening emotions to a fever pitch.
- Demanding that people stop thinking, throw their brains out of the window, 'drink not think' etc.
- Using hypnotic manipulation, either deliberately or unintentionally.
- Using repetitive choruses until people become dumbed-down and suggestible.
- Using music as an ambient drone to heighten passivity.

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<sup>2</sup> An ascetic 2<sup>nd</sup> century 'Christian' sect who forbade marriage and meat. Supposedly founded by Tatian (compiler of the Diatessaron - a harmony of the Gospels), they were a type of Gnostic.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor 13:1 is poetic and figurative referring to a hypothetical situation.

## Examples of mystical churches and movements

- Charismatic denominations and sects.
- The Jesus Army.
- Pentecostal denominations and sects.
- The Emerging Church.
- Quakers. [Note that certain preachers with a Quaker background have strongly influenced some modern churches in a mystical direction, such as John Wimber and Richard Foster.<sup>4</sup>]
- Shakers. [Many Shaker principles have entered the church through radical Charismatics. What started as a mystical Christian cult ended up as a thoroughly occult, shamanistic religion.]
- The Irvingites. [This Victorian mystical church was a prototype of modern Charismatic churches and included the concept of apostles and prophets. It collapsed in scandal with many broken people.]
- Many Holiness churches and leaders; e.g. Maria Woodworth-Etter (who was called 'the Voodoo Priestess').
- Roman Catholic mystics and those who copy them (e.g. the American contemplative prayer movement). [E.g. historic: Ignatius Loyola, Julian of Norwich, Theresa of Avila and Meister Eckhart. Modern: Morton Kelsey,<sup>5</sup> Rudolph Steiner,<sup>6</sup> Padre Pio<sup>7</sup> and Thomas Merton.<sup>8</sup>]
- Latter Rain theology and proponents.
- Mind Science doctrines: Christian Science churches, New Thought, Unity.
- Inner Healing doctrines. [Agnes Sanford, David Seamands, Ruth Carter Stapleton.]
- Renovare. [Mystical training centre founded by Richard Foster in 1988 centring on 'spiritual formation'.]

## Gnosticism

### Human Expression

Hidden knowledge; a mystery revealed to the elite.

Gnosticism has many similarities with mysticism and enthusiasm, but they are different.

While Gnostics may use mystical techniques to achieve enlightenment, the chief factor in Gnosticism is the attainment of a hidden, revealed, mysterious knowledge (gnosis) that

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<sup>4</sup> Author of 'Celebration of Discipline'.

<sup>5</sup> 1917-2001; an Episcopal priest & Jungian therapist who was greatly admired by John Wimber.

<sup>6</sup> 1861-1925; founder of the Anthroposophical Society, a sort of Christian Theosophy.

<sup>7</sup> Padre Pio of Pietrelcina (1887-1968); Catholic priest, stigmatic and mystic.

<sup>8</sup> 1915-1968; a Trappist monk.

emanates from God through various mediators, usually a sort of angel. Gaining this knowledge often requires being trained by an adept of some sort for a probationary period of varying length until one achieves sufficient illumination by understanding mysteries (hence 'mystery religion'). In this, Gnosticism is very similar to the oriental mystical teaching of a guru to a disciple. Enlightened Gnostics thus become an elite group of illuminated people. Mysticism is more about an inner, personal experience of 'god' through heightened emotions.

When we see a modern Charismatic leader demanding that people accept that he has a direct line to God as an apostle or prophet and that ordinary church members must do what he says to do God's will, that is a form of Gnosticism. This is also a form of blasphemy since such men are usurping the mediatorial role of the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>9</sup>

Like mysticism, Gnostics may also use a variety of, sometimes, contradictory methods to help gain spiritual knowledge, such as: fasting or gluttony, asceticism or hedonism, fornication or celibacy, exuberance or stillness and so on. Unlike mysticism Gnostics use a variety of rituals combining Christian ideas with Greek philosophy and oriental religions.

Gnostics are also dualists; matter is evil, the spirit is good. This dualism is then transferred into legalistic rules for behaviour to avoid corruption. Seeking to avoid contamination from the world by withdrawing from it (e.g. monasticism) is a form of dualism.

Gnostics are usually pantheists; that is that God is discovered abiding in nature. Churches that get caught up in modern Green issues can find themselves attached to such ideas because the environmentalist lobby is very infected with occult ideas about Gaia (the earth goddess). This also applies to modern eco-Feminism.

The Gospel is a proclamation of good news to man based upon the open truth found in the Bible and widely preached. Gnosticism, however, is a mystery that is only understood by the initiated and illuminated ones. Thus any sect which emphasises a hidden, secret doctrine, experience or practice, known only to the initiated elite, is essentially Gnostic in character. This applies to Pentecostalism and Charismaticism who claim that it is necessary to have a 'baptism in the Spirit' mystical experience mediated by an adept in order to fully experience God.

### **Examples of Gnostics**

- Some modern Charismatic sects.
- The Jesus Army.
- Historical mystical sects.
- Catholic monasticism.
- Neoplatonism and thought influenced by it.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Protestantism celebrates the Biblical doctrine of the priesthood of all believers and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit revealing Christ to us.

<sup>10</sup> Historically, Neoplatonism arose after the third century in Alexandria and was developed by Plotinus and Porphyry. It was a system of thought which spurred on mystical ideas in various religions. Essentially, it was a combination of Platonic dualism with oriental mysticism. God is above being, but revelatory light streams from divine perfection. Existence is a desire for the light hindered by irrational behaviour. The mind can overcome the hindrances of life by meditation or focusing to get a mystical illumination of the divine. This overcomes Platonic duality by direct union of the soul with God.

- Churches embracing the ‘Cosmic Christ’. [Such as the teachings of the New Age priest Matthew Fox.]<sup>11</sup>

## Enthusiasm

### Human expression

Wild behaviour; uncontrolled exhibitionism.

‘Enthusiasm’ is an old term used to describe religious extravagance, unrestrained emotionalism, uncontrolled human behaviour and ecstatic phenomena. Today we would use the term ‘Charismatic’.

Enthusiasm has been in evidence since the beginning of the church and the first major example would probably be the Montanists. This was an ecstatic group, a sort of proto-Charismatic movement, that had supposedly inspired prophecy, ecstatic tongue speaking, and exotic behaviour. It began as a reform movement opposed to stale and dead orthodoxy but degenerated over time into a wild ecstatic cult led by women.

Throughout church history there have been occasions, from time to time, when similar emotionalism broke out; especially in times of claimed revival. Thus we have frequently seen expressions of extreme behaviour very similar to what was manifested in the 90s Toronto Blessing. None of that was new at all. I describe many of these historic cases in my book, ‘The Origins of Pentecostalism’. The standard work on major expressions of historic enthusiasm is, RA Knox, ‘Enthusiasm: a chapter in the history of religion’, Oxford, Clarendon Press (1950). This surveys history from Montanism to John Wesley.

Now enthusiasm is often very closely connected to mysticism, yet the two are different. Mystics are often quiet, contemplative and reclusive while enthusiasts are loud, expressive and gather in groups. Nevertheless, enthusiasts are very often subject to mystical foundations and expressions.

### Examples of extreme behaviour

- Crying uncontrollably.
- Shouting.
- Screaming.
- Making various animal noises.
- Jumping up and down.
- Rolling around the floor.
- Running around the room.
- Exposing one’s nakedness.
- Imitating giving birth or sexual orgasm.

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<sup>11</sup> These include mystical ideas such as ‘Mother Earth (Gaia)’ as a real spiritual being (pantheism); the earth is a hologram etc.

But the most commonly seen behaviour is falling down backwards in a trance (or 'altered state of consciousness'). This has been variously named in history, such as 'fainting fits', prostration, 'overcome by the Spirit', 'resting in the Spirit' or 'falling under the power', but the common modern term is, 'being slain in the Spirit'; a term which derives from Holiness and Pentecostal revivals.

### **Examples of enthusiasts**

- Many revivals. [See my paper 'Preoccupation with Revival'.] E.g. the 1859 Irish Revival, the Cane Ridge Revival, the 1904 Welsh Revival.<sup>12</sup>
- The Montanists.
- Certain Anabaptist sects.
- The Zwickau Prophets.
- Jansenist extremists.
- Some Quietists.
- Quakers and Shakers.
- The Convulsionaries.
- The Cevennes (French) Prophets.
- Some Moravians.
- Some of John Wesley's followers.
- Charismatic sects.
- Pentecostal sects.
- The Kansas City Prophets.
- The Toronto Blessing.
- The Pensacola Revival.
- The Signs and Wonders Movement.
- The New Apostolic Reformation movement.

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<sup>12</sup> For example, during the Welsh Revival nothing unusual would happen in a service until Evan Roberts began to pray, 'Bend me oh Lord' whereupon people would begin to wail, fall over, cry and behave without control; Roberts would be unable to preach the Gospel at all. When more sound preachers were in charge, such as RB Jones, this never happened.

## Rationalism

### Human behaviour My mind is king.

Intellectuality is not a bad thing; in fact a good intellect submitted to divine revelation is a useful tool in the hand of God. Instruction in divine things is a vital part of church life and this requires a certain amount of intellectual capacity.

#### **Expression one: human authority supersedes divine authority**

Extreme rationalism is when the intellect of man becomes king, or at least has too much authority. It is trusting in the wisdom and logic of men above all else. Thus for extreme rationalists, miracles cannot happen, Noah's flood never occurred and Jesus did not rise from the dead. Yes, many church leaders have made exactly these statements; especially Anglican bishops in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The great expression of rationalism in modern history was the Enlightenment, and this produced a number of philosophers and theologians that impacted the church for the worse, such as Schleiermacher.<sup>13</sup>

#### **Expression two: dead orthodoxy**

Some expressions of milder rationalism are not as extreme as the former rationalism but have still had a deleterious effect on the church; this is when dogmatism becomes dead orthodoxy. Overly dogmatic theologians may not go as far as denying miracles, but may place too much trust in the logical formulas and systems of religious leaders.

A balance is required in this since being dogmatic is not necessarily a bad thing when it is defending the truth in axiomatic statements; but it is bad when it becomes a stale, lifeless regurgitation of turgid dogma that has no spiritual vitality. It is the words of men with no life of the Spirit.

Rationalists enjoy church services that have a challenging, logical sermon while mystics would enjoy a Charismatic worship service that engendered passivity and emotionalism.

#### **Examples of rationalism**

- Roman Catholic scholasticism. [The example traditionally given of foolish extreme rationalism is the scholastics debating how many angels could dance on the head of a pin.]
- Anglican speculative theology; e.g. liberal Bishop John Robinson of Woolwich who denied the resurrection and spearheaded the rise of secular theology.
- Liberal theology. [Diverse movements, (including Modernism – that is, modern philosophical perspectives, Evolutionary Theory, Rationalism, Mechanistic Theory and others) to understand God and interpret the Bible in a secular manner based upon the Enlightenment. It is not a set of agreed theological propositions.]
- Secular theology. [This took the 'Death of God' theology of Thomas JJ Altizer and the philosophical existentialism of Paul Tillich and introduced them into mainstream Anglican theology. It was also influenced by Neo-Orthodoxy, Bonhoeffer, and Kierkegaard.]

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<sup>13</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher [1768-1834] was a German philosopher, theologian who attempted to reconcile the Enlightenment with Protestantism. This was the beginning of Liberal Theology.



- Modern UK Methodism.
- Enlightenment theologians.
- Existential theologians. [E.g. Soren Kierkegaard, Rudolph Bultmann, Paul Tillich, John Macquarrie.]
- Sandemanianism.<sup>14</sup>
- Certain Hyper-Calvinist sects. [Such as those that demand an understanding of Calvinism in order to be saved; in other words preaching an intellectual Gospel; e.g. Marc Carpenter's 'Outside the Camp'.]

## Traditionalism

### Human behaviour

We have always done it this way.

The Bible speaks about the traditions of the apostles and this was teaching or practice that set precedents for the church. Their behaviour, which led to their traditions, manifested the truth of God's word and thus became authoritative, such as breaking bread on Sunday. The establishment of Sunday as the Lord's Day in honour of Christ's resurrection was an apostolic tradition.

Traditionalism, however, is something else. This is the traditions of men, or earlier church practices, that have no sanction from God's word but are held in esteem as if they were truth. Churches, especially conservative churches, are riddled with such traditions that cannot be defended.

### Examples of traditionalism that have no Biblical sanction

- **Having two formal church services on a Sunday, one in the morning for worship and one in the evening for supposed Gospel preaching.** [The NT shows one Sunday meeting for the whole family, most often in the late afternoon or evening. There was no such thing as Gospel services; Gospel preaching was always outside the church in public places.]
- **Having a dedicated church building.** [NT churches always met in homes and nowhere else.]
- **A senior pastor.** [Never mentioned in the NT and contradicts the apostolic principle of equal elders working in a team.]
- **Sharing the wine in lots of small glasses.** [Contradicts the NT precedent of one shared cup and ruins the symbolism of unity.]
- **Meetings dominated by a single man.** [Destroys the NT teaching on plural ministry, mutual edification and koinonia (fellowship).]

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<sup>14</sup> The beliefs of the Scottish ministers John Glas and his son-in-law Robert Sandeman (1718-1771) who developed a minor Christian sect. Its main heresy was the insistence that faith is merely intellectual assent in the resurrection. The scientist Michael Faraday (1791-1867) was a Sandemanian.

- **Clergy / laity split.** [Completely undermines the whole point of the gathered church, which is for all the saints to share in edifying each other as a family under God according to the freedom of the Spirit. It leads to elevated, elite leadership and a silent, frozen majority of members.]
- **Church meetings that do not include the Lord's Supper.** [The two reasons for gathering on Sunday were: 1) to break bread together and remember Christ's death; this was the centre of the Sunday gathering. 2) Gathering in order to edify one another and encourage one another in various ways.]

We could continue listing human traditions extensively.

Many different sorts of churches have their own sorts of traditions. The traditions of conservative Reformed churches will be very different to the traditions of radical Charismatic churches – but all are wrong unless they have a Biblical pedigree. Some church traditions actually stem from pagan ideas and practices, especially in the Roman Church. For example the fixation on Mary and the mother and baby images is directly lifted from Babylonian religions. Charismatic churches have taken many ideas from paganism (see 'Paganism').

For a genuine testimony, only what is sanctioned by God's word can be the foundation of our church practice.

## Pragmatism

**Human behaviour**  
If it works it must be right.

### Human standards

This is when the church becomes like the world. It is centred in the dogma that 'what works is true' or 'what succeeds is right'. This is measuring supposed spiritual success by human standards and is a philosophy aimed at human results (such as measurable increases of membership or increased giving of money).

The folly of this is that church success is hidden in God and cannot be defined in human terms. The book of Revelation shows us God's analysis of seven churches and the ones that were humanly successful were chastised by the Lord while those that were unsuccessful, e.g. suffering persecution, were praised. A church is successful to God if it does what God wants. In some cases that is to be persecuted and destroyed.

Similarly, Jesus chose 12 disciples to be his apostles and their lives were very different but all successful. Yet James was beheaded very quickly; but this was God's will for him as Jesus had warned him earlier. James was successful, but died a young man while his brother lived to the end of the first century and was not martyred. We cannot compare these two ministries in human terms.

### Human philosophy

In practice, pragmatism takes human ideas and applies them to church aspirations. For example, it adopts secular management systems, military leadership structures and worldly marketing techniques to form strategies. Inevitably, these policies are based upon what sinners want rather than what God commands.

### **It doesn't work**

Pragmatism affects all sorts of churches in all denominations, but it is especially predominant in Charismatic churches, which by nature are very worldly.<sup>15</sup> This is why Charismatic churches tend to follow human fashions: such and such works at the moment so we will copy it – but after a while it becomes dated and stops working, so they move on to something else. The item seemed to work for a while because it is novel and interesting, but it soon becomes jaded.

This is a noteworthy point that what is considered as pragmatic, and therefore must be done, is usually found to not work after a long period of commitment to it. Sometimes there is a superficial success overlaying hidden corruption that later destroys a work. For example, the Seeker Sensitive ideas promoted by Bill Hybels at Willow Creek Community Church, Chicago made it a very large church for many years; but later studies showed that, year on year, mature Christian couples and families left what had become a superficial church. Eventually it was a mere shell of its former self in maturity though it still has large numbers.

I have seen large Charismatic churches adopt all sorts of pragmatic methods to increase membership artificially over and over again only for their numbers to remain stable or decrease over decades.

Another failure is that such churches get filled with professing Christians who are not really saved and the whole balance of church life is skewed to worldliness. Inevitably, good Christians leave.

Instead of measuring a church by the current numbers, someone should start measuring large churches by the huge numbers that have left the church over the years and discern what character the leavers demonstrated. I know of one of the largest Charismatic churches in the country that has a membership of less than 1,000 but has had many thousands of extremely mature Christians leave it in two decades. In one 18-month period alone, 610 people left.

### **Examples**

- Norman Vincent Peale ('Power of Positive Thinking').
- Self-esteem counselling.
- Christian psychologists using secular psychiatric methods.
- Churches that use modern marketing methods to aid church growth.
- Charismatic fashions. [There are multitudes of these: shouted prayer, marching round the room, Celtic spirituality, praise marches, fighting territorial spirits etc.]
- Alpha Courses. [There is much wrong with these (doctrinally and ethically) but their chief attraction is the pragmatism of love-bombing and community rather than obedience to God's word.]
- Emergent Church.
- Purpose-Driven Church. [Rick Warren.]

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<sup>15</sup> They are worldly because they include many forms of worldliness: worship as entertainment or hierarchical leadership copied from the world, for example. But worst of all they bring in worldly pagan ideas and practices masquerading as spirituality.

# Populism

## Human behaviour

I want to be accepted and loved.

This is where churches adopt practices and doctrines for popularity; that is to attract people to their church and increase numbers. As public fashions change so the church constantly has to adapt to continue to be interesting to outsiders. It is closely connected to Pragmatism. Pragmatism concerns methods that work in the world to achieve success; populism regards what is popular in the world to be attractive.

This means that anything considered to damage the chances of attracting outsiders must be avoided; in many cases it means the heart of the Gospel thrown overboard: the problem of sin; the judgment of God on sinners; the Lordship of Christ; personal accountability personal responsibility to God as Creator etc.

It also means bringing in worldly things that have no place in church gatherings: music as entertainment; ambient lighting; dancing; comedy; coffee during the actual service; powerful personalities on a stage etc.

Everything about populism has to do with worldly / human attractiveness. It is a deliberate disobeying of God's command not to be a friend with the world. Thus the leader must be attractive and dress, speak and act like outsiders. He should use slang colloquialism or worse, hip-hop terms. He should be provocative about risqué subjects, speaking publicly about intimate issues. He should use a computer slide-screen presentation. He should have a rock band supporting him. We could go on.

Populism is worldliness, plain and simple. It is forbidden by God's word.

### Examples

- All Seeker Sensitive churches, such as Willow Creek.
- Purpose-Driven churches.
- Emergent Churches.
- Mark Driscoll.
- Certain Anglican churches with modernistic services.
- Churches that meet as a coffee morning or discussion group. [There are some UK Anglican churches and Assemblies of God churches that do this.]
- Post-Modern churches, such as those meeting in pubs.
- Anyone adapting the Gospel to human sensitivities.

## Culturalism

### Human behaviour

This is the way we do it round here.

This may seem similar to populism but it is not. Culturalism is a template whereby the prevailing culture of a place exerts a significant effect on a church, whether or not those characteristics are popular in the local situation.

The aspects of culture that dominate a church may be the local culture or they may be a distant one.

#### The influence of local culture

We see this, for example, where local customs directly affect the interpretation of Scripture. Here are some examples:

- The local toleration or support of homosexuals, bisexuals, trans-genders and transvestites leads to churches altering Scriptural teaching about these issues. In the worst cases there are churches that are devoted to this social group or when gender inclusive Bible versions are published.
- Feminism: this cultural group also affects the interpretation of the Bible and in the worst cases leads to women having leadership positions in churches or even churches being founded upon feminist principles.
- Local customs in the west often force Christians to take a wrong view on Biblical items that are affected by them. For example, the head covering of women in church is a very clear Biblical command that has been observed throughout history until very recently, but because this is seen as infringing women's rights today many churches have abandoned this teaching and interpret the relevant verses in convoluted and irrational ways.

#### The influence of distant or historic cultures

This is where a church or a church movement is enamoured of a certain foreign or historic culture to the degree that a church will become centred upon this culture above all else.

A clear example of this is the Messianic Christianity and Jewish Roots movements. Though there are many shades of this, some churches become entirely centred upon all things Jewish. Names of people, churches, meetings, God, Jesus, and many other things are changed to Jewish equivalents. Meetings are changed to a Saturday. The NT is downplayed or even ignored while a literal interpretation of the OT is emphasised. Jewish cultural idioms are advocated. Jewish implements, like the shofar (horn trumpet), are utilised while Jewish feasts and ceremonies are practiced. Finally, public declarations of loyalty to Israel are published, even when it commits human rights violations. We could list many more things but this is enough. [See my many papers criticising this idolatry or my booklet, 'The Veil of Moses'.]

Another short-lived example was the Charismatic exhortation for churches to become like the Celtic churches in England and Ireland after the Romans left. This was particularly foolish as there is little detailed information about such churches and much of the doctrine was based upon myths, anecdotes, hagiography, romanticism and plain lies. Furthermore, there was much variety in the various Celtic groups while most of the Celtic leaders were monks living in monasteries. [For commentary and criticism of this fad see my booklet, 'Modern Celtic Spirituality'.]

All of this is adapting a foreign culture to an English church. This is a flat denial of the NT command to ignore human cultures, specifically citing Jewish culture.

## Paganism

### Human behaviour

The religious world before Christianity came along. The old ways.

Paganism is changing the church to include, or be founded upon, pagan [i.e. non-Christian, heathen] principles and utilising pagan practices and doctrines.

Several of the templates in this paper include promoting pagan ideas, such as mysticism, Gnosticism and enthusiasm; but there is a worse sort.

### Obvious paganism: witchcraft

There are some churches, especially of the Black Pentecostal variety, that have taken on board principles of paganism that their culture is familiar with to a large degree. Thus we see pastors / bishops promoting practices under the guise of Christianity but which are outright witchcraft or occultism.

Most common in this field is the practice of demonic exorcisms using methods straight out of African animistic shamanism. As in local witchcraft in tribal Africa, there are often casualties in this (to this day supposed witches are still being burned). People have been injured or even killed by the violent methods used to attack the so-called demon. Sadly children have been killed in Britain due to this sinful behaviour. Methods of attacking a supposed demon have included: violent attack using sticks, hands, knives, or other weapons; burning at various levels; putting bleach into the throat or on the skin etc. This is plainly satanic.

Sometimes very odd practices develop. Recently a Black Pentecostal pastor has been filmed spraying toxic insecticide into the faces of gullible people hoping that this will cure blindness, deafness and illness, because the young pastor said it would. This is not just pagan, it is brutally cruel.

In America there has been a trend, where churches that have become New Age<sup>16</sup> or feminist, have ended up as occultic.<sup>17</sup> Feminists have become witches in large numbers, especially Third Wave groups.<sup>18</sup> Historically, the Shakers began as cultic Charismatic extremists but ended up completely occult spiritualists, even adopting Native American shamanism.

### Less obvious paganism

However, slightly more moderate than these outright forms of occultism, there are many expressions of hidden paganism within Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. This varies from the intellectual (e.g. adopting secular philosophies and practices),<sup>19</sup> the soulish (e.g. inner healing, releasing Kundalini yoga<sup>20</sup>) to the spiritual (spiritualism, channelling,

<sup>16</sup> Such as the one led by American priest Mathew Fox.

<sup>17</sup> Very many US nuns became feminists and then became witches.

<sup>18</sup> See my paper on Feminism.

<sup>19</sup> For example using secular psychiatric therapies in counselling, which emanate from pagan and occult sources in Jung and Freud.

<sup>20</sup> This inner psychotic power is what is stirred up in forums like the Toronto Blessing. The Kundalini form is a radical Hindu therapy that is usually avoided by gurus as it is so dangerous. The Hindu expressions exactly mimic what was seen in Toronto.

visualisation, divination, demonisation)<sup>21</sup> to the outright satanic (e.g. idolatry, necromancy<sup>22</sup>).

### Feast days

More traditional is the fact that many of the feast days in the Anglican, Catholic and Episcopal calendar are taken directly from pagan mythology and worship. We cannot discuss this again here but a short list includes:

- **Christmas**: the pagan mid-winter solstice festival, of which there were many forms. These include the British Yuletide, derived from Germanic tribes, or the Roman Saturnalia held to worship Saturn on 17<sup>th</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> December, which included giving of gifts.
- **Easter**: derived from the German, pagan, fertility goddess Eostre, which was a derivation of the Near East's Astarte (Babylonian Ishtar). It was adopted by the Saxons in England. Easter eggs and Easter rabbits represent fertility symbols; the egg was symbolic of fertile female purity while the rabbit was an obvious symbol of fertility but was also Eostre's sacred animal.
- **Halloween** (All-Hallow's Eve): Jack-O'-Lanterns derive from Celtic paganism celebrating the start of winter and represents a soul caught between two worlds (before pumpkins were available they used turnips). Various pagans believed that the souls of the dead roamed the land at this time of year and lit bonfires to scare them away. Animals were slaughtered to appease evil spirits. Samhain was an Irish Gaelic festival marking the end of the harvest season and the beginning of winter.

### Examples

- Certain extreme Black African Pentecostal churches that exhibit witchcraft.
- Feminist churches that have become occultic.
- Many Charismatic / Pentecostal doctrines / practices. [E.g. being 'slain in the Spirit', exorcism, tongues as gibberish, singing in the Spirit as corporate gibberish, word of knowledge as prescience, faith healing, territorial spirits, exorcisms.]
- Visualisation. Paul/David Yonggi Cho, Kenneth Copeland, Kenneth Hagin, Morris Cerullo.
- Necromancy. [E.g. 'grave sucking'.<sup>23</sup>]
- Latter Rain doctrines. [This theology contained multiple examples of paganism and occultism.]
- The church calendar based upon pagan feast days.

For further information on Charismatic paganism and occultism see my paper, *'Occult inroads into the Charismatic Movement'*.

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<sup>21</sup> For example worshipping angels, communicating with demons.

<sup>22</sup> Communing with the dead. Many Charismatics claim to do this to gain power from the dead person, such as Benny Hinn talking to Kathryn Kuhlman on her grave.

<sup>23</sup> Lying on a dead saint's grave, or laying hands on the headstone, performing certain prayers and obtaining the blessing that they expressed during life. This is being done in Word Faith churches and Bill Johnson's church.



## Dominionism or Triumphalism

### Human behaviour

I want to control everything and rule everybody.

There are two essential types of modern Dominionism: Conservative and Charismatic.

#### Conservative Dominionism

This is a type of Dominionism found in certain Reformed churches, most of which are in America. These are called Reconstructionist (since they want to reconstruct society) and the theological basis is called Theonomy ('God's law', since they want to introduce the Mosaic Law as the basis of society). It began to arise in the 1960s under the teaching of Rousas Rushdoony, now deceased, which was a type of triumphalist Postmillennialism.

Such churches are slowly working towards social change so that as the church achieves greater and greater influence in the world it can eventually change the laws of society to comply with Mosaic statutes; including stoning adulterers and homosexuals, and killing rebellious children.

#### Charismatic triumphalism

This is tied in with the doctrine of a global Charismatic revival which will put the church in power over the world. The leaders of this church, Charismatic apostles and prophets, will rule the earth like kings. A purified elite group of overcomers will manifest Christ and possess the Spirit without measure & purge earth of resistance. Some added that 'overcomers' will redeem all creation and eventually overcome death.

Some aver that this church will wage war on its enemies, including conservative Christians that reject Charismatic theology.

Radical extremists in this group are deeply affected by Latter Rain heresies and claim that Spirit-filled believers in this triumphant church will have supernatural powers; they will be able to fly, walk through walls, never need to wash, and will be invulnerable to bullets.

#### Moderate forms

There are many Charismatics that do not hold (or even know about) the errors of Latter Rain but still hold to triumphalist ideas about the future of the church due to the teaching of their leaders, usually some claimed apostle. While they may be more accommodating and less threatening, they believe that a global revival will soon lead the church to govern the world and introduce a golden age. Note that multiple prophecies about a global revival beginning here or there, by famous leaders, have all proved false.

#### Examples

- Reconstructionist churches and leaders. [Rousas Rushdoony (now deceased), Gary DeMar, Gary North, David Chilton and Greg Bahnsen.]
- Dominionist Charismatic churches. [E.g. the New Apostolic Reformation, UK Restorationism, global revivalists, authoritarian Charismatic churches. John Wimber, Paul Cain, Rick Joyner, Jack Hayford, Ed Silvoso ('Transformation Network'), Alice Patterson, CL Jackson, Ted Haggard, Lou Engle (founder of 'The Call'), Mike Bickle and many others]
- Latter Rain doctrines and teachers. [Originated in Canada in 1947-8 in a supposed revival at Sharon Fellowship, North Battleford, where Toronto-type phenomena occurred. Key leaders in this movement were George and Ern Hawtin, Percy Hunt



and Herrick Holt. The main influences were the teachings developed by Franklin Hall, George Warnock and William Branham. In time it became elitist, authoritarian and sectarian. In 1949 the Assemblies of God churches outlawed the movement, which went dormant until revived under John Wimber and Paul Cain.]

- The Manifest Sons of God movement (a radical sect arising out of Latter Rain ideas). [William Branham, Paul Cain, Rick Joyner etc.]

## Socialism

### Human behaviour The people rule OK.

The final template under review is Socialism. This is a human political movement that developed out of Marxism and other Communist ideas that were widely published in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century. Like Communism itself, Socialism fragmented into a myriad different emphases which varied from country to country.

In terms of political theory, the chief principles are: turning over the means of production and distribution to be controlled by the people and operating according to equity and fairness rather than market principles. According to Marxist theory, Socialism was the stage after a proletarian revolution when a society is changing from capitalism to Communism, marked by pay distributed according to work done rather than need.

While UK Socialism has been, mainly, the development of the Labour Party working within a democratic parliament, in many countries Socialism has led to violent revolution or even civil war.

Reducing Socialism to very simple terms we could say that it represents gaining the freedom of the proletariat from oppression and establishing an equitable society where there is equal prosperity and fair rewards for hard work in decent living and work conditions with guaranteed rights.

Now such conditions do not exist in many areas of the world, especially in poorer countries. It is in these that supposedly Christian Socialism developed in various forms, such as Liberation Theology.

Liberation Theology is not a homogenous matter; there are many forms of theology under this banner in different countries. Despite diverse approaches, there are some basic common principles.

- All people should attain to the high standard of living of western societies.
- A strong emphasis on the unity of the spiritual and the secular.
- There is a strong emphasis upon liberation from oppression.
- Salvation is linked to actions in this life, not faith in Christ. Denouncing the world and working for the good of others leads to salvation.

The essence of Liberation Theology is to bring about freedom for the oppressed.

Liberation Theology, in practice, is less dependent upon theology proper than the social sciences. It relies upon praxis (a recurring dialectical<sup>24</sup> process where action forces reflection then reflection forces action). Theology then follows praxis. This is the opposite of the right process where theology comes from divine truth to humble men.

While Christians are concerned about the poor and seek to do good to all, it is not the job of the church to become political, get immersed in the world and seek to change society. The church is called to preach the Gospel and glorify God.

In many cases, proponents of Liberation Theology have resorted to armed violence and attempts to overthrow local or national governments by allying with a popular uprising, usually Marxist. It was partly inspired by the Cuban revolution led by Fidel Castro, giving hope to the poor of Central and South America after centuries of dominion by Spanish, then British then American imperialism which improved the middle class but did nothing for the rural poor.

The Roman Church has been particularly involved in this, prompting theologians to react in response for the poor, mixing the church with Marxist social principles. Catholic theologians were also inspired by Vatican II and the documents that flowed from it in the mid-60s, which prompted them to seriously consider pastoral concerns. Another catalyst was Medellin; a 1968 conference of Latin American bishops in Colombia identifying the church with the poor.

In my view it is ironic that the richest church on earth with untold billions of wealth did not respond by giving money to the poor but by developing a rogue theological system prompting revolution and publishing charitable platitudes.

### Examples

- Liberation Theology. [E.g. theologians Gustavo Gutierrez (Catholic), Jose Miguez-Bonino (Methodist), Leonardo Boff (Catholic).
- Black Theology. [Inspired by Liberation Theology, it followed on from the civil rights movement of Martin Luther King Jnr. E.g. Albert B Cleago, James Cone, J Deotis Roberts.]
- African Liberation Theology. [Not quite the same as the American Black Theology; Desmond Tutu.]
- Korean Liberation Theology ('Minjung' Theology). [A movement focused on human rights originating in the 1970s.]

## Conclusion

When people flock to a new church that is emphasising one of these templates, they think they are joining something new. In fact, all the templates are as old as history because they are the work of men and man never changes. There is nothing new under the sun. If that aphorism was true in Solomon's day, how much more true is it today?

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<sup>24</sup> Here, investigation of the truth through discussion; debate to resolve conflict between two contradictory ideas.

In reality, many church systems adopt a number of these templates all at the same time. Those churches that have the most templates in operation are the most apostate. For example:

- Radical Charismatic churches can exhibit: mysticism, Gnosticism, populism, Dominionism, paganism, culturalism, pragmatism and enthusiasm. This is proof that they are far from being Biblical and very dangerous.
- UK Anglican churches today often exhibit: rationalism, traditionalism, populism, and pragmatism.
- Roman Catholic churches (while there are a wide variety of types) can manifest: paganism, traditionalism, socialism, mysticism, Gnosticism and Dominionism.
- Messianic churches reveal: culturalism, Gnosticism and mysticism.

Christians do not need to follow any of these templates. They have all they need in the Bible, which is God's provision of truth (2 Tim 3:16-17). If the word of God equips us for every good work, we have no need of the formulations of men to 'improve' it.

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