

Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc.

# Journal

Volume 10 No.2

"Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?" Galatians 4:16

Spring 2004

## PASSION ABOUT THE PASSION

By L.L. (Don) Veinot and Joy A. Veinot

For nearly a year before the release of Mel Gibson's film *The Passion of The Christ*, controversy—public and private—swirled around the project. As is so often the case, many had made definitive decisions about the film without ever having viewed it. Liberals were sure the film had to be denounced and scrounged around desperately for aspersions to cast upon it. Some Jewish organizations strongly condemned the movie as being anti-Jewish, perhaps, genuinely fearing a resurgence of Christian anti-Semitism, as unfathomable as that may be to us who love Jewish people and Israel. Meanwhile, Roman Catholics, Fundamentalists, and Evangelicals early on were unsure of what to make of the movie, and whether it would be wise to endorse it. It was originally reported that the Pope, having previewed the film, said simply, "It is as it was." Later, it was reported that the Pope *had not* endorsed the movie, nor said any such thing, and this went back and forth until we have no idea of what actually happened there. ☺ Perhaps Rome was weighing what damage might result from an endorsement. As the date for the film's release drew closer, sides were being taken and lines drawn for the battle. Mel Gibson took the film on the road for pre-screening and comments. Gibson met with a number of Evangelical leaders in pre-screenings and garnered their endorsement. This, of course, further infuriated liberals and added fuel to the fire.

Media big wigs all predicted that the movie would be an abysmal failure. After all, it is a religious film which, according to Mel Gibson, strove to be fundamentally faithful to the Biblical text on which it was based. Moreover, it was done in ancient foreign

languages with subtitles added in. Who would go see a movie like that? Some Hollywood elites were so put out with Gibson for going ahead with his production after their public rejection of it, that they reportedly threatened that they wouldn't work with

Gibson again. If he went ahead with it, his career would be history. Can you say "blacklist," boys and girls? Isn't blacklisting what liberals are always accusing conservatives of doing? We suppose that only evil and unfair conservatives can "blacklist"—liberals just exercise their "freedom of choice."

As everyone now knows, 12 days after the film opened, it was slotted into number 47 of the top 50 highest-revenue-producing films of all time. Current projections are that it will gross 400- to 800-million dollars.<sup>1</sup> Now, the same industry moguls who rejected Gibson's idea are scurrying to find more religious scripts! It also

recently was reported that Twentieth Century Fox, who had earlier rejected distributing the film, is close to signing a home-video distribution deal.<sup>2</sup>

### Our Take

We, along with several others from MCOI, and some friends, went to see the film on opening night—February 25. Overall, we thought it was a good movie and well done. We cannot say we "enjoyed it"—in the sense of being entertained—for that is not the nature of this film. It was made to challenge our thinking and sensibilities to the point of asking ultimate questions. "Who



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Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc.  
P.O. Box 455, Lombard, IL 60148-0455  
Phone: (630) 627-9028  
Fax: (630) 627-6829  
E-mail: info@midwestoutreach.org

Don Veinot .....President  
Joy Veinot.....Director  
D.L. McGehee.....Editor  
S. Todd McGehee.....Layout/Art

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is this Jesus?" "Did this really happen?" "Does it or should it make any difference in our personal lives?" Mel Gibson doesn't attempt to answer those questions in the film, as it focuses primarily on a 12-hour period of the life and death of this itinerant Jewish Rabbi called Jesus the Christ. Frankly, we expected that a movie produced by an ardent (dare we say "passionate") Catholic would reflect his Catholic belief system; so we are not surprised that, in some ways, the movie reflects a rather "Catholic" portrait of the last hours of Christ, including a portrayal of the Stations of the Cross.

We feel confident Most Christians will not be drawn into Catholicism or Mysticism by viewing this film. In fact, without a Catholic background, we feel that believers may not even recognize the "Catholicism" in the film much less feel a compelling need to attend a Mass.

That said, we do have concerns about the film; and though we completely endorse Gibson's right to make a movie that reflects his deeply held beliefs, we also think it is our responsibility to point out where Gibson is coming from and what sources he is drawing upon.

### Gibson's Passion

Gibson is a capital "C" Catholic. ☺ David Neff, in an article for *Christianity Today* entitled "The Passion of Mel Gibson – Why evangelicals are cheering a movie with profoundly Catholic sensibilities," writes:

**Mel Gibson is in many ways a pre-Vatican II Roman Catholic. He prefers the Tridentine Latin Mass and calls Mary co-redemptrix. Early in the filming of *The Passion*, he gave a long interview to Raymond Arroyo on the conservative Catholic network EWTN. In that interview, Gibson told how actor Jim Caviezel, the film's Jesus, insisted on beginning each day of filming with the celebration of the Mass on the set. He also recounted a series of divine coincidences that led him to read the works of Anne Catherine Emmerich, a late-eighteenth-, early nineteenth-century Westphalian nun who had visions of the events of the Passion. Many of the details needed to fill out the Gospel accounts he drew from her book, *Delorous Passion of Our Lord*.<sup>3</sup>**

One example of Emmerich's teaching that Gibson draws upon is the scene where Jesus is hung by chains over the side of a bridge while Judas looks on. Another is the

scene where Pilate's wife hands Mary some linen, which Mary used to wipe Jesus' blood from the stones, where he had just received a tortuous beating. Also notable is the intense focus on the blood and the physical sufferings of Christ. Emmerich was part of a tradition that believed the way to total sanctification was through concentrating on and attempting to *physically experience* Christ's passion. As Pastor and Apologist G. Richard Fisher points out:

**People just do not understand Passion mysticism and the belief that concentrating and obsessing on the flayed flesh and bloody pulp of Christ's body was the only way to entire sanctification. It is the only way to get spiritual.**

Gibson's affinity for this "prophetess" is not something he attempts to conceal. In fact, he carries an Emmerich relic with him in his pocket which was given to him by an antiques dealer in Philadelphia.<sup>4</sup>

How much of Emmerich's teachings were incorporated into the film? Again, Fisher, who has taken the time to read Emmerich's works and become familiar with her teaching, remarks:

**I don't think that her work dominates the film. I think [the film] is probably 70% Gospels, 20% artistic embellishments, and maybe, 10% Emmerich. Those pieces are minor.**

Fisher sees Gibson's endorsement of Emmerich in his interviews as being more problematic:

**The one huge problem I see is that Gibson has endorsed Emmerich, and people are rushing to buy her book ... That is the worst fallout.<sup>5</sup>**

There is merit to his concerns. Since Gibson mentioned her works in his interviews, and especially since the release of the movie, the sales of her material have skyrocketed. Last year, *The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ* sold fewer than 3,000 copies for the entire year. This year—in the month of February alone—it sold 17,000 copies.<sup>6</sup>

Does Gibson's Catholic passion mean that the entire film is polluted and should not be seen? We don't think so. The film—*The Passion of The Christ*—is substantially faithful to the text of the New Testament. It fairly accurately dramatizes the events of the last 12 hours of the life of Jesus. But people should be aware of the problems with the movie and use their judgment as to whether they wish to take friends to see

it. Berit Kjos has written a more in-depth critique about Gibson's "Emmerich connection" and other concerns about the film. You can find her critique at ([www.crossroad.to](http://www.crossroad.to)).

## Is The Film Anti-semitic?

Let us be clearly understood; if *The Passion ...* was, in our view, an anti-Semitic film, we would be the first to condemn it for that reason alone. We are very offended by anti-Semitism. But we did not find it to be so. True, many of the antagonists in the movie were Jewish—but so were *all* of the heroes of the movie. The main hero, of course, was a Jewish Rabbi named Jesus. Maia Morgenstern, the woman who plays Mary in the film, is a Jewish woman who is the daughter of Holocaust survivors. She found nothing offensive in the script and stated that she certainly would not have played the part had she found it to be anti-Semitic.

So why did groups such as the ADL (Anti Defamation League) so harshly attack the movie as being anti-Semitic? Writing in *Christianity Today*, Michael Medved, a self-described "film critic and nationally syndicated radio host who also happens to be an observant Jew and longtime president of an Orthodox congregation,"<sup>77</sup> who, "in the past, has supported and spoken for the ADL,"<sup>78</sup> says of the movie:

*The Passion of The Christ* offered a convincing, richly imagined recreation of first-century Judea and heartfelt performances. But it remains a difficult movie for any committed Jew to watch. In discussing my reactions to his work after the screening, Gibson insisted that his movie is meant to make everyone uncomfortable, not just Jews. For Jews, however, there's a special squirm factor in watching the officials of a long-destroyed Temple, which we still revere as a holy gift from God, behaving in a selfish, officious and sadistic manner. I might have preferred a movie version of the crucifixion that interpreted the Gospels to place primary blame on the Roman authorities. Gibson, however, remained determined to bring to the screen what he considers the truth of the New Testament. Certainly, his account of the story—in which the Judean priests and the Judean mob force Pilate's hand in ordering the death of Christ—falls well within the Christian mainstream and corresponds to numerous references in the Gospels. Gibson's critics may resent these elements of the drama, but they must blame

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John rather than Mel ... the film seemed to me so obviously free of anti-Semitic intent that I urged Gibson to show the rough cut to some of his Jewish critics as a means of reassuring them.<sup>9</sup>

In an attempt to help Christians to understand the emotions that might cause Jewish people to denounce the film sight unseen, Medved mentions three factors which he says "have contributed to the Jewish unease about Mel Gibson's well intentioned project." He writes:

**First, we live at a moment of rising anti-Semitism in every corner of the world ... Synagogues recently have been bombed in Turkey, set aflame in France, defaced and sprayed with gunfire in California. Hostility to Jews and conspiracy theories about Jewish power have received prominent exposure, even in respectable media (especially in Europe). But the new wave of Jew hatred is not arising from believing Christian communities.**

The second factor making Jews nervous about Gibson and his movie concerns Mel's outspoken identification with a Catholic traditionalism that rejects many of the reforms of the Second Vatican Council. All Jewish leaders feel grateful to that reform-minded body of 40 years ago because it put a formal end to the Catholic perception of collective Jewish guilt for the crime of deicide. That Catholic traditionalists oppose some innovations by the Second Vatican Council (in particular its move away from the Latin Mass) doesn't mean they reject all of its changes ... Gibson has made clear in private conversation and in several on-the-record public statements that his personal thinking is far more closely aligned with contemporary church teaching than with the older doctrine that led to so much persecution of European Jewish communities.

Finally, many Jews feel a visceral fear of intense Christian religiosity based upon the long history of anti-Semitic depredations. In medieval Europe, Easter always marked the favorite occasion for anti-Jewish pogroms and riots.<sup>10</sup>

While understanding where some of

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## MCOI Branches

### MAIN OFFICE:

#### Lombard, Illinois

Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc.

P.O. Box 455

Lombard, IL 60148-0455

Phone: (630) 627-9028

E-mail: [Info@midwestoutreach.org](mailto:Info@midwestoutreach.org)

President: L.L. (Don) Veinot, Jr.

Director: Joy A. Veinot

### Spring Hill, Florida

Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc.

3338 Landover Blvd.

Spring Hill, FL 34609-2619

Phone: (352) 684-4448

E-mail: [dgholson@atlantic.net](mailto:dgholson@atlantic.net)

Director: Diane Gholson

### Pontotoc, Mississippi

Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc.

170 Hester Ln.

Pontotoc, MS 38863

Phone: (662) 840-5873

E-mail: [gadfly7@aol.com](mailto:gadfly7@aol.com)

### Lohrville, Iowa

Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc.

408 Main Street

Lohrville, IA 51453-1004

Phone: (712) 465-3010

E-mail: [mco@cal-net.net](mailto:mco@cal-net.net)

Director: Jeff Hauser

### Scranton, Kansas

Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc.

P.O. Box 201

Scranton, KS 66537

Phone: (785) 793-2143

E-mail: [mcoscranton@usa.net](mailto:mcoscranton@usa.net)

Director: Randall Birtell

### Cape Coral, Florida

Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc.

P.O. Box 150584

Cape Coral, FL

Phone: (239) 524-1914

E-mail: [ronhenzel@msn.com](mailto:ronhenzel@msn.com)

Director: Ron Henzel

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his brethren are coming from, Medved disagrees with their knee-jerk reaction.

**The many Jews who react in this fearful manner to the prospect of deepening Christian commitment in the United States have allowed the past to blind them to the present—and the future. In today’s America, the notably philo-Semitic tone of born-again Christianity makes it more common for Christians to support and defend their Jewish neighbors than to persecute them.<sup>11</sup>**

Medved puts his finger on another form of “prejudice” that exists in our society today that might go far in explaining the outrage of the ADL and other groups that stirred up this controversy—anti-Christian bigotry. He states:

**I’ve also expressed my conviction that the attacks on an unseen movie reflected the predominantly liberal political orientation of the ADL and other groups that represent the Jewish establishment. Numerous commentators have noted recent shifts in the allegiance of Jewish voters. George W. Bush has won greater popularity in the Jewish community than any Republican since Ronald Reagan, and fervent support for Israel by Evangelicals has produced a friendly alliance between them and committed Jews. The ADL, which has been bitterly critical of the so-called Christian Right, clearly looks askance at this coalition.<sup>12</sup>**

We think Medved “nails it” with his analysis of the liberal leanings of the ADL and many other Jewish groups and how that liberal bent impacted this issue. Liberal political correctness, taken to its logical extreme, is the natural enemy of truth. When truth must be judged by whether or not human egos are ruffled, truth will inevitably lose its potency.

Imagine retelling the story of the Holocaust, in a movie such as *Schindler’s List*, if German feelings must be given priority over the truth of what actually happened. Imagine a film about slavery in America, where whites insist that the slave-owners be cast as Asians in order to assuage the feelings of European-Americans. Truth is truth. No race has an edge over another when it comes to righteousness—or evil. *All* have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

Racism? Please excuse us for a minor digression here. If you want to talk about racism in Hollyweird, look at their normative portrayal of blacks as gangsters and criminals and whites (Christian men particularly) as bigoted ignoramuses. Is this likely to foster “harmony” and “brotherly love” between the races? Meanwhile, “terrorists,” on television and in the movies, are generally portrayed as anything *but* middle-eastern types! One example is the popular television program, *24*. In the first season, the bad guys were white conservatives seeking to block, by assassination, the election of a black liberal. In the second season, the “terrorists” were white conservative politicians with Big Oil connections trying, by terrorist action, to incite a war with an innocent Arab nation against the will of the good liberal President. This season, the “terrorists” are members of Mexican drug cartels aligned with greedy white men willing to release a deadly virus just to make a buck. It is so ridiculous as to be laughable. In order to avoid besmirching Arabs and/or Muslims, the program eagerly bashes others. Political correctness demands that the world be divided into “white hats” and “black hats”—victims and victimizers.

Some groups are protected, while others are “fair game;” and that determination is made by the liberal establishment.

### Who Killed Christ?

Most Christians take the position that it is neither the Jews nor the Romans who killed Christ, but that *all* of mankind is implicated in His murder. However, in light of past centuries of evil and completely anti-Biblical persecutions of the Jews as “Christ killers” by “Christians,” it seems appropriate to us to address the issue here.

Certainly, the text of the New Testament has a crowd led by the Jewish leadership calling for His death “*All the people answered, ‘Let his blood be on us and on our children!’*” (Matthew 27:25). On the other hand, Jesus was Jewish, his followers were Jewish, and the early Church was populated by Jews. The Bible portrays the heartrending fact that Christ came unto “*His own*” and “*His own*”—*as a nation*—“*...did not receive Him.*” (John 1:11) That is sad, but it is not a reason for anti-Jewish sentiment. A *remnant* of Jews did believe in Jesus and died cruel martyr’s deaths for that faith. The Apostle Paul makes it clear that God has not rejected His people. Just read Romans Chapter 11. A few select verses make plain this truth. Paul, addressing the Church in Rome, many of whom were Gentiles by this point, says:

*I ask then: Did God reject His people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject his people, whom He foreknew ... I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The deliverer will come from Zion; He will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is My covenant with them when I take away their sins. (Romans 11: 1, 25)*

Obviously, there have been many people who have not heeded Paul’s words here, who became conceited and arrogant towards the Jewish people, and did not remember, as Paul states elsewhere in the chapter, that:

*If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: you do not support the root, but the root supports you. (Romans 11:17-18)*

Israel is the olive tree; Gentile Christians are the wild branches that have been grafted in by God’s grace. The olive tree was *not* chopped down; *some* branches were broken off, and the wild branches were grafted in *among the others that remained*. The root stayed, and sustains the tree—including all Christians—for the last 2000 years. Arrogance among Christians against the Jewish people is completely unwarranted, evil, and has not gone unseen by the God Who still loves His people and always will.

### What About The Romans?

Was Pilate given a pass by Gibson as some have alleged? We certainly do not think so. Pilate recognized, beyond a doubt, that he was about to order the murder of an innocent man; and in his weakness, he did it anyway! The Romans did not have much

compunction about killing the innocent, generally speaking, so we can only speculate as to why the Gospel text plainly shows that he did not *want* to condemn Jesus to death—aside from the fact that his wife asked him not to do so. Perhaps, Jesus scared him. He probably did not meet many men who spoke to him as Jesus spoke to him, and Who did not beg or barter for His life. But whatever reason Pilate had for not wanting to sentence Jesus to death, he did it anyway! This is not a “good” man or a “just” ruler. So are the Romans mainly to blame? That would be convenient since the Roman Empire is no more; but it is really a moot point in our view. Our LORD, while He was suffering this indescribable agony of body and soul, asked His Father to *forgive* the perpetrators. He said that they did not know what they were doing (Luke 23:34). If Jesus forgave his tormentors, who are we to cast blame on others? Better to look to ourselves. We are all in need of forgiveness. None are righteous (Rom. 3:10).

### The Passion Of The Savior

The truth is neither the Jews nor the Romans *took* the life of Jesus that day. Because God so loved the world—Jews and Gentiles alike—Jesus *freely gave His life* to save us all (John 10:18). The answer Jesus gave to Pilate is so instructive, “... **You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; ...**” (John 19:11, NASB). Who gave that authority? God!

The Passion of Jesus the Christ came about, not because anyone took Jesus’ life, but because God gave it. God gave it because of His great compassion for all of us who are sinners—by nature and practice, and have been separated from God, and headed for judgment and Hell. As Mary could not rescue her son from the judges and rulers that day, we could not, by any means, rescue ourselves or our loved ones from the penalty of our own sinfulness. We are all guilty, “... **for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God**” (Rom. 3:23). However, “... **the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord**” (Rom. 6:23).

God took on flesh and became man in the person of Jesus Christ (John 1:14). He lived a perfect life which we cannot live (Heb. 4:15), suffered ignominious torture and death (Heb. 2:9) by His choice (John 10:14-15), and was raised on the third day to secure our redemption (1 Cor. 15:3-4). The Apostle Paul writes:

*... being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*  
(Romans 3:24-26, NASB)

We are sinners by nature. But God has provided a Savior. People are not condemned to Hell for nailing the Son of God to the cross. Rather, people are condemned for *rejecting the Savior* Whom God provided—thus spurning the greatest gift, the greatest sacrifice of all time (John 3:18).

### The Anti-Christian Passion Of The Liberals

What we find as the most interesting aspect of the whole *Passion ...* phenomenon is the openly bare-fanged, anti-Christian (and

anti-Biblical) reaction of the liberals, particularly in Hollywood and the mainstream media. To the liberals, it is not Gibson’s extra-Biblical content that is problematical in this movie. It is the *Biblical* content that infuriates them. Their apoplectic reaction puts in mind a quote by Mark Twain: “**It ain’t those parts of the Bible that I can’t understand that bother me, it’s the parts that I do understand.**” © The Bible is very direct and seemingly takes little thought for human ego—except to condemn it (Proverbs 8:13). It just states what happened and what IS. It neglects to couch its message in the soothing and “tolerant” language of twenty-first-century liberalism. How dare Mel Gibson, or anyone else, actually portray the sacrifice of Christ as fact? How barbaric! And, in any case, I’m okay, you’re okay—we’re not sinners in need of a Savior! What we need is more money for education.

Antagonists of the movie practically nearly became unhinged in their passionate attempts to portray the movie as a very bad and dangerous development. The media drew on some of their popular liberal scholars to lend credence to the anti-Semitism charge, openly proclaiming that it is the Bible, not just Mel Gibson’s portrayal of Christ’s Passion, that is anti-Semitic at its core. They trotted out the Jesus Seminar crowd such as Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan to proclaim that the New Testament is anti-Semitic and is responsible for the anti-Semitism of, say, the last 2000 years. Of course, Crossan, Borg and other Jesus Seminar members view the New Testament as mostly myth [according to them, only about 18% of the words attributed to Jesus were actually or possibly spoken by Him (see “The Hysterical search for the Historical Jesus,” *MCOI Journal*, Nov/Dec 1998)]. They openly opine that the Christian teaching that God sacrificed His Son amounts to the worst form of child abuse. In their view, Jesus was little more than a political “activist” (aren’t you sick of that word?) who was killed by the Roman government as an insurgent. The balance of the New Testament Gospels, according to them, included material *designed* to be anti-Semitic. They offer nothing like *actual evidence* for their positions, but they are well loved and respected by liberal media types.

On CBS’ *60 Minutes*, tolerant, grandfatherly figure Andy Rooney called Gibson a “**wacko**” and a “**nutcase**” and implied that God regretted even creating Gibson. Why would Rooney say such things? What happened to the liberal ideal that everyone’s “truth” is just as valid as anyone else’s “truth?” Isn’t Gibson’s “truth” just as worthy of a hearing as Rooney’s?

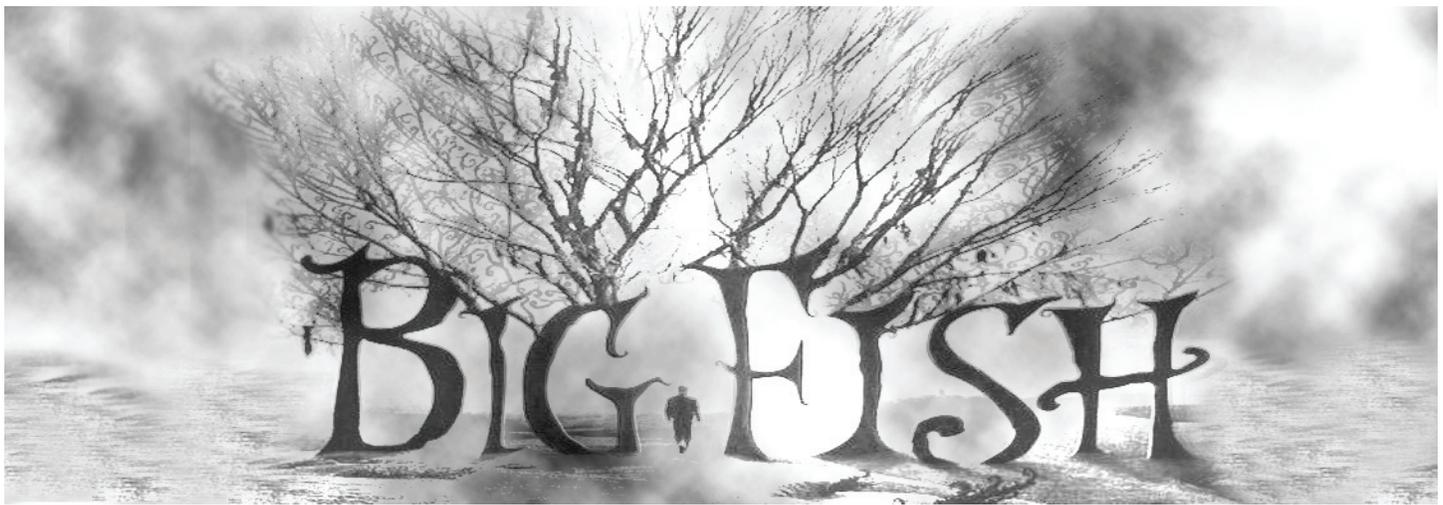
Then there was *Washington Post* columnist Richard Cohen, who said of the film: “**It is fascistic.**”<sup>13</sup> He also asserted that “...**portions of the New Testament are—an assignment of blame that culminated in the Holocaust.**”<sup>14</sup> He seems very unaware of the nature and origin of Adolf Hitler’s views—grounded as they were in occultism, Social Darwinism, as well as his utter rejection and hatred of Christianity.

*FrontPageMagazine.com* columnist, Don Feder, addressing this liberal scare campaign, stated:

**The idea that *The Passion ...* is going to excite an American Kristallnacht is truly twisted. Today, organized anti-Semitism is almost exclusively a Moslem phenomenon. Hatred of Jews thrives in mosques and madrashes. It is promulgated by Islamic religious authorities, from mullahs to ayatollahs.**<sup>15</sup>

Yet, the media hysteria generated by Gibson’s portrayal of a historical event far outweighs the muted response of our media

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# Postmodernist Nonsense Equates Facts With Falsehoods

**Movie Review by Frank York**

**Big Fish**, the latest film from Tim Burton (*Planet of the Apes*, *Nightmare Before Christmas*, etc.), is the most recent example of the postmodernist belief that there is no such thing as objective truth.

Professor Gene Edward Veith, writing in *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture*, notes that the postmodernist philosopher replaces the intellect with the will, and that **“Reason is replaced with emotion. Morality is replaced by relativism. Reality itself becomes a social construct.”**

The characters in *Big Fish* live out this philosophy of relativism and deliberately confuse the distinctions between facts and lies.

The story describes the strained relationship between the father, Edward Bloom (Albert Finney), and his son, Will (played by Billy Crudup). Will returns home after he learns that his father is dying and tries to get his dad to tell the truth about his life—instead of the series of tall tales he has told his son.

Will has become a UPI reporter and deals with facts and seeks to write truth in his reporting. His father, however, has told elaborate myths about his own life. Will demands to know the truth, so he can separate fact from fiction.

Edward had told his son that he had worked for a circus master who became a wolf at night, rescued two Korean conjoined twins during a secret parachute drop during the Korean War, and other tall tales. Were they true or partly true? Does it matter?

In one scene where Edward is bedridden and telling tales to his daughter-in-law, she observes that Will never told her any of

these stories. The father responded that Will would have provided **“all facts and little flavor”** if he had told these tall tales.

By the end of the movie, the viewer is taught it doesn't matter that Edward's life story is a blend of lies and facts. What matters is that he lived life to the fullest and was true to himself. Will finally accepts this and tells the viewer in a voiceover that a man eventually becomes his stories.

## Is Lying Okay If It Conveys Truth?

*Big Fish* Screenwriter John August said the conflict between Edward and his son, Will, was over the difference between **“intellectual truth and an emotional truth. The flavor of what Edward is trying to say is more honest than if he had just literally said, ‘These are the events of my life.’”**

The postmodernist view of truth is that each person has his own “truth,” and what is “true” for one person may not be “true” for another. Edward Bloom assumed he was conveying “truth” to his son, even though his stories were mostly lies.

In short, it didn't matter that Edward had told lies about his life to his son. What mattered was the **“emotional truth”** conveyed through those lies.

Christian and secular film reviewers have gushed over this film. The only negative review I found is from Screenwriter Brian Godawa who frequently writes for the *Spiritual Counterfeits Project Journal*. Godawa is familiar with occult and pagan thought in filmmaking.

In a blog\* published on January 2, 2004, he writes:

**“Christian and secular film reviewers have gushed over this film. The only negative review I found is from Screenwriter Brian Godawa who frequently writes for the Spiritual Counterfeits Project Journal. Godawa is familiar with occult and pagan thought in filmmaking.”**

Truth is no longer important, just story. It doesn't matter if the stories (or mythologies) are true, what matters is the meaning it gives our lives. Well, hey if it ain't true, the meaning is fraudulent. Saying one thing and doing another, we used to call 'hypocrisy.' Now it's a virtue? I think not. ... The fact is, at the end of the story, the son was a total failure and never did know his father truly because his father never revealed his true experiences and choices in life.

In fact, Edward Bloom was what we would describe as a pathological liar—a man who couldn't distinguish between truth and lies—and eventually even convinced his own son that his lies about his life didn't matter as long as they expressed “emotional truth.”

## Postmodernist Thinking Invades The Church

*Big Fish* is worth seeing as a discussion topic about the dangers of postmodernist thought, and how it has impacted our culture—and even the Church. In 1994, Gene Veith expressed concern in *Postmodern Times* that the Church was undergoing a postmodernist transformation away from preaching God's Word and sound doctrine to an emphasis on story telling and emotionalism. His predictions have come true.

A recent example of this invasion of postmodern relativism into the Church is clearly evident in Brian McLaren's book, *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey*. McLaren's attack on biblical truth and sound Bible doctrine are critiqued by Apologist Douglas Groothuis in a Christian Research Institute review, “A New Kind of Postmodernist.”<sup>2</sup>

Groothuis writes that McLaren's book is “an unabashed apologetic for importing postmodernism into evangelical Christianity. A hardy emphasis on objective truth and apologetic engagement are two of the book's main targets.” Groothuis calls McLaren's postmodernist book “dangerous,” “unorthodox,” and filled with a mixture of truth and error—just enough truth to make the errors seem “more attractive.”<sup>3</sup>

McLaren has done for Christianity what *Big Fish* does to secular audiences: Teaches viewers and readers to reject objective truth in favor of story telling and subjective feelings.

If McLaren's ideas are widely accepted within evangelicalism, we will see a continued weakening of the Church as it conforms to the world—instead of the Church working to bring the truths of Scripture to a dying culture. 

\*A blog is basically a journal that is available on the web. Blogs are typically updated daily. Postings on a blog are almost always arranged in chronological order with the most recent additions featured most prominently.

**Frank York** is a freelance writer living in Nashville, Tennessee. He is author of *Protecting Your Child in an X-Rated World* and *When the Wicked Seize a City*. York is a writer on contemporary issues and his work has been published by WorldNetDaily, Focus on the Family, Family Research Council, Concerned Women for America, and the Traditional Values Coalition.

### ENDNOTES:

1. (no author given), “Tim Burton's ‘Big Fish’ Tackles Big Issues,” *Evangelical Press News* article, (undated) posted on the *Everything Christian.org* web site.
2. This online book review first appeared in *Christian Research Journal*, Volume 25, Number 3 (2003). First quote was on page 1 of the online review. Second reference was on page 4 of the online review.
3. *Ibid.*

## — “Passion” Continued From Page 5

elites to the *daily* onslaught of terrorist murders of Jewish people in Israel and elsewhere around the world. What hypocrisy! Islam is continually asserted to be a “peaceful” religion; it is Christians and Christianity that is to be feared. Amazing!

Julie Gorin, writing for *National Review Online*, thinks there is a calculated reason why the media have jumped on the anti-Semitic bandwagon:

**There's a reason the controversy got as big as it did. The liberal media, acting like they care whether someone is anti-Semitic or not, is not only insulting but insidious as well. The plan is to keep *The Passion ...* ruckus they raised in their pocket for fuel in countering accusations of anti-Semitism the next time they diminish terrorism against Israelis, the next time they misrepresent Israeli raids of terror camps as massacres, and the next time they demonize Israelis for building a wall to stay alive. All they'll have to say is: “We can't be anti-Semites. Just look at the hell we gave Mel!” The very fact that the notoriously anti-Semitic and anti-Israel *New York Times* took the lead a year ago in condemning Gibson's film and family should be telling.**<sup>16</sup>

We are very concerned about the rise in anti-Semitism worldwide, but we do not believe it is Christians who are fomenting that evil. And, we do not buy for a minute that it is the supposed anti-Semitism in the Bible that enrages the liberals. What infuriates them is the assertion in the Bible that all persons (Jews, Gentiles, Blacks Whites, Israelis and Arabs, Conservatives, and Liberals) are moral failures in need of a Savior. And not just any Savior; the Bible states that there is only *one* Savior (Acts 4:12), and that no one can come to the Father except through HIM (John 14:6). This is a slap in the face to both the liberal social “gospel” and cultural relativism.

## The Bottom Line Of *The Passion* Controversy

Is the film ultimately good or bad for the furtherance of the Gospel? In light of the controversy the film has sparked, the culture, in general, is talking about what it all means; and that is an open invitation for prepared believers to explain the true Gospel and give meaning to the events described in the moving film. Will it help to spur believers to become more committed to the proclamation of the Gospel to their unsaved friends and loved ones? Only if believers know and can articulate what the Gospel is. Taking your non-Christian friend to the movie is not going to do it.

Michael Makidon in the March/April 2004 issue of *Grace in Focus*, writes:

**While the film's Catholic influence cannot be ignored, it does indeed offer great opportunity for us as Christians. Most assuredly, in reaction to unavoidable criticism that *The Passion ...* will receive, many will quote Paul's words: “What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice” (Philippians 1:18). Yet, may we always remember that the bridge this film builds between here and eternity leaves the viewer one step short of glory. While the film does quote John 14:6, nowhere else can the Good News of Christ be found—that Christ justifies all who simply believe in Him. The film upholds the cross, the means of our justification, yet never explains how one may be justified. While this film will afford us**

— Continued on Page 11



# Your MONEY



# . . . or Your Kids

By Mike Mahurin

**I** am a part-time pastor at a very small country church in what many might think is the middle of nowhere. It is not likely that I will ever have much influence or notoriety, but I do take my pastoral responsibilities seriously when it comes to protecting my small flock from harmful teachings. I am especially concerned about those well-known Bible teachers and ministry leaders who regularly misuse the Scriptures in their teachings, and who gain a large following.

Like many pastors, I have gotten questions about Bill Gothard and his teachings from church members. In the process of evaluating Bill Gothard and his teachings through his organization, the Institute in Basic Life Principles (IBLP), I have spent a lot of time and effort examining Gothard's method of handling Scripture as he seeks to use it to support his claims. Sadly, what I have found is a persistent pattern of Scripture twisting and manipulation. It is so prevalent, that I cannot ignore it.

Some of the examples of Scripture twisting I have encountered in IBLP publications could be considered trivial—such as pulling a passage from Isaiah to support the idea of using only whole-grain bread. But there are other examples with much more serious ramifications, and this article concerns one such example.

IBLP has published a series of booklets, from its "Medical Training Institute of America," concerning various health-care issues. *Basic Care Bulletin #9* is titled: *How to Understand the Causes and the Management of Miscarriages*. In the introduction, we read:

**The purpose of this Bulletin is to provide couples with as much information as possible on how to avoid miscarriages. If a miscarriage does occur, it is our purpose to provide practical steps in viewing the miscarriage from God's perspective and wisely dealing with the resulting physical, emotional, and spiritual needs.<sup>1</sup>**

The booklet discusses several possible causes of miscarriage and gives advice on how to avoid them. Scriptural proof-texts are sprinkled liberally throughout the booklet, as is common in IBLP publications. Some of those possible causes of miscarriage listed in the booklet may or may not have some validity, and while this aspect of the booklet is not my focus in this article, I am concerned with the use of Scripture throughout these sections. However, in

this article I want to focus on one specific aspect of the booklet—that is, its claims concerning the connection between miscarriage and what it calls "robbing God."

The introduction of the booklet cites Hosea 9:14 to support the claim that God judges both nations and individuals that do not follow God's law. According to the booklet, miscarriage is one of those judgments.<sup>2</sup> With the seventh and last possible cause of miscarriage listed in this booklet, we finally arrive at a supposed "scriptural" cause of miscarriage—"robbing God."<sup>3</sup> This section is titled: "HOW ROBBING GOD CAN BE RELATED TO MISCARRIAGES." It goes directly to Malachi 3, the well-known "tithing" passage that condemned the Israelites for failure to pay their tithes, and it uses this passage as a basis for suggesting, strongly, that those who "fail to give tithes" just might be in danger of having God punish them with a miscarriage.

The meaning of "tithing" used in this argument is the typical meaning found in many denominations and churches today—that God requires, as a matter of biblical command, that Christians pay ten percent of their income to God's work. Many of those teaching this doctrine insist that this "tithe" must be paid at the local church of which one is a member. This idea is known as "storehouse tithing," because it is supposedly based on Malachi 3, which says, "*Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, ...*". Malachi 3 has been used repeatedly to reinforce this teaching, because Malachi condemns failure to pay required tithes, and pronounces a curse on those committing this failure. In fact, Malachi pronounces a curse on the entire nation of Israel for this failure to obey a precept of the law.

I do not believe that this definition of "tithing" fits the biblical evidence. In the Bible, "tithing" was not giving ten percent of one's income to the Lord; it was the payment of twenty to twenty-five percent of one's farm produce and animals at the temple. The purpose of those payments was to fund the sacrificial system. As with so many of the precepts from the Law of Moses, many Christians have dragged this one way out of its context and misapplied it to us today. This IBLP/MTIA booklet is not alone in using this passage in Malachi as a hammer with which to intimidate Christians who desire to obey and please God in the matter of giving, but it does take the issue a giant step further into condemnation; and that is what prompts my reaction.

Here is the passage in Malachi 3, which is addressed to the nation of Israel. I will quote from the King James Version, as this is the version used in the booklet:

**MALACHI 3:8-11:**

**8 Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.**

**9 Ye [are] cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, [even] this whole nation.**

**10 Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that [there shall] not [be room] enough [to receive it.]**

**11 And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts.**

Please notice the word “*curse*” in verse nine. That “*curse*” is yet another in a long line of such “*curses*” pronounced upon the nation of Israel because of its disobedience to God and to the covenant of the Law. Moses had promised the nation, just before they entered the Promised Land, that if they would obey the Law God had given them through Moses, then God would bless them; but if they disobeyed that Law, they would be subject to ever-increasing “*curses*” (see Deuteronomy 11 and 28-30).

Malachi’s “*curse*” is tied directly to the warnings given by Moses back in Deuteronomy 28-30. One of the “*curses*” warned about was crop failure. Moses warned that the olive plant would “*cast [his fruit]*”—that is, it would lose its fruit before ripening, and the fruit would be worthless. Another curse was that God would allow insects to eat up the crops. If the Israelites would obey, God would not allow the insect—“*the devourer*”—to eat the crops; if they disobeyed, he would not protect the crops from the plague of locusts (grasshoppers) eating all the crops before they could be harvested.

**DEUT. 28:38-40:**

**38 Thou shalt carry much seed out into the field, and shalt gather [but] little in; for the locust shall consume it.**

**39 Thou shalt plant vineyards, and dress [them], but shalt neither drink of the wine, nor gather [the grapes]; for the worms shall eat them.**

**40 Thou shalt have olive trees throughout all thy coasts, but thou shalt not anoint [thyself] with the oil; for thine olive shall cast [his fruit].**

Notice—locusts eating the crops, worms eating the grapes, and olive trees casting their fruit. Now look again at that passage in Malachi 3. It mentions a “*curse*,” it mentions the “*vine cast her fruit*,” and it mentions “*the devourer*.” Malachi is clearly connecting his “*curse*” with the warnings of Moses back there in Deuteronomy.

These “*curses*” deal with the people, their animals, their land, their plants, and even their armies. All of these “*curses*” were pronounced upon that one nation that had that special covenant relationship with God. Are we Christians subject to these curses? No, we are not! The New Testament clearly tells us, “*Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law ...*” (Galatians 3:13). Later in that same chapter of Galatians, Paul tells his readers that we are not under the authority of that law anymore, now that we have come to faith in Christ (Gal. 3:24-25). And Romans 8:1 tells us that “[*There is*] therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus ...” The curse of Malachi does not apply to us, because we have been redeemed from the curse of the law, regardless of whether or not we believe in “*tithing*.”

But my purpose in this article is not to make the case against the tithing doctrine; it is to highlight the extreme that Bill Gothard goes to in his use of Old Testament passages like this. Many people who preach “*tithing*” emphasize the promised “*blessing*” given in Malachi, but they skirt the issue of the “*curse*” that is also pronounced in the same passage. Bill Gothard doesn't skirt that issue at all; he takes it head-on and uses it to frighten Christians into “*paying up*” in order to avoid being attacked by Satan.

What I mean by that is this: Gothard claims that the word “*devourer*” in verse 11 refers, not just to the insects that ate the crops in Old Testament Israel but, in a broader sense, to Satan, who devours things we hold precious. I heard Gothard say, many times, during the Basic Seminars he conducted in the 1970s, that Satan is the devourer, and if we don't pay our required tithes, God gives Satan the right to “*devour*” our substance, according to this passage.

In IBLP's *Advanced Seminar Textbook*, we read:

**Are my resources being devoured because I have not faithfully tithed? Satan is the devourer of our money, possessions, family, and health. His means to bring about these losses are accidents, fires, natural disasters, excessive taxation, disease, or loss of employment. God promises to rebuke the devourer when we tithe.<sup>4</sup>**

So—how does Gothard use Malachi 3 to prove that “*fail[ure] to give tithes*” can lead to “*miscarriage?*” In the miscarriage booklet, in the middle of the quotation from Malachi 3, one section is set in **bold**, and is underlined. Here is the way it looks in the booklet, on page 13:

And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; **neither shall your vine cast her fruit...**

The booklet makes the claim that the Hebrew word used here for “*cast her fruit*” is the same word that means “*miscarriage*.” From this it extrapolates that those who fail to “*tithe*” could be endangering their unborn baby.

Let's examine the word used in this argument. The Hebrew word is *shakol*. Looking at its overall use in the Old Testament, we find the following:

- It is used 25 times. Of those usages:
- \*The majority of them do not refer to miscarriage at all; they mean “*being deprived of one's child*”—even if that “*child*” is an adult. It is used, for example, in several passages referring to the killing of soldiers. For examples of this meaning, see: Gen. 27:45; 42:36; 43:14; Lev. 26:22; 1 Sam. 15:33; Isa. 49:21; Jer. 15:7; Lam. 1:20; Eze. 5:17; 36:12.
- \*Sure enough, there are a few uses of the word that do mean “*miscarriage*.” I have found five of them. They refer to miscarriages in humans, in animals, and even for plants. The King James Version renders this as “*cast her fruit*” or “*cast their young*.” The idea is that the woman, or the animal, gives birth prematurely to a dead offspring, or to one that dies soon thereafter, or that the plant loses its fruit prematurely, so that it is wasted.

We will look at all five examples of this usage. Since the booklet uses the King James Version, I will show only that translation:

**1.) GENESIS 31:38: This twenty years [have] I [been] with thee; thy ewes and thy she goats have not cast their young, and the rams of thy flock have I not eaten.**

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This passage records Jacob's defense against his father-in-law Laban. The usage here clearly refers to animals miscarrying.

2.) **EXODUS 23:26: *There shall nothing cast their young, nor be barren, in thy land: the number of thy days I will fulfill.***

This is another passage, like the ones I have mentioned in Deuteronomy, that promises blessing for obedience to the Law of Sinai. This reference is not specific; it could refer to human miscarriage, animal miscarriage, plants “casting their fruit,” or any combination of the three.

The whole phrase “*cast their young*”/“*cast their fruit*” is a translation of that single Hebrew word *shakol*, and there is nothing in this particular context to help us pick out which form of “miscarriage” this is about. Since the Scripture speaks of “barrenness” in connection with both humans and the land, that word from the passage wouldn't help us decide here, either. For now, we would have to say that it *could* refer to humans, but not necessarily.

3.) **JOB 21:10: *Their bull gendereth, and faileth not; their cow calveth, and casteth not her calf.***

This obviously refers to animals.

4.) **HOSEA 9:14: *Give them, O LORD: what wilt thou give? give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts.***

This is the only passage in the Bible that clearly uses that word *shakol* to refer to human miscarriage. We know this because it mentions dried-up breasts, and it also uses the word for “womb.” In other words, the context gives it away. This is the passage used in the introduction of the IBLP miscarriage booklet to support the statement that disobedience to God's law would cause God to judge nations and individuals with miscarriages.

5.) **MALACHI 3:11: *And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts.***

This passage, the one the booklet is discussing, clearly refers to plants; it says “*neither shall your vine cast her fruit.*” The reason “fruit” is used instead of “young” is because of that word “vine.” That provides the context for understanding this to refer to plants losing their fruit.

Various translations say “*cast their fruit*,” “*cast its grapes*,” “*drop its fruit*,” “*fail to bear*,” “*keep from producing*,” “*fail to bear fruit*,” etc. All of them make it clear that this refers to plants and not to humans. The inclusion of the word “*vine*” makes this obvious.

Let's draw some preliminary conclusions from our examination of these passages:

- Of the 25 uses of the word *shakol* in the Old Testament—only FIVE of them clearly mean “miscarriage.” And only ONE out of those five clearly refers to HUMAN miscarriage: Hosea 9:14. That passage is a judgment pronounced on Israel for failure to obey the Covenant of Sinai.
- “Miscarriage” is not the only meaning of the word, nor is it the most common meaning. Even in the context of the above passage, Hosea 9:12 uses the word in its more common meaning of “being bereaved of a live child.”
- ONE of the five passages that do refer to “miscarriage” is not specific enough for us to conclude if it is referring

to humans, animals, plants, or any combination of the three: Exodus 23:26.

- TWO of the five clearly refer to animals, and not to humans: Gen. 31:38 and Job 21:10.
- ONE of the five clearly refers to plants, and not humans: Mal. 3:11.

It is at this point that the IBLP medical booklet on miscarriage takes unwarranted liberties with the text of Scripture. After quoting the passage and highlighting the phrase “**cast her fruit**,” it says:

The above verses are extremely significant when viewed in light of Psalm 128:3: “***Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine ...***” (The italics and the bold are both in the booklet).<sup>5</sup>

It is clear that the writer is attempting to say that, since Scripture compares the “wife” to a “vine” in one passage, we are warranted in *equating* a wife with a vine in another one. That is—since Psalm 128 compares the wife to a vine, we can take the statement in Malachi 3, which clearly refers to a plant, and make it refer to a wife. But wait a minute. What about that *ellipsis* there? Look, again, at that quotation above. There is an ellipsis at the end. Whenever I see any IBLP publication resorting to ellipses in its quotations from Scripture, I get very suspicious. So I looked up that entire verse, and here is what I found (missing parts underlined):

***Psalm 128:3: Thy wife [shall be] as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table.***

Does this mean that we should go through the Bible, find passages that refer to olives or olive trees, and apply those passages to our *children*?! Is this really how we should be treating Scripture? If you think this is ridiculous, I agree, and ask: What would be the difference between doing this and equating a wife with a vine, based on the same interpretive method?

Remember—Hosea 9:14 does warn that miscarriages could be part of God's judgment against Israel for disobeying the Law of Moses. But since we are not under the authority of the Law of Moses, and since Christ “**redeemed us from the curse of the law**,” what we should be preaching is our *freedom* from these curses, not our susceptibility to them. Instead, the miscarriage booklet goes on to say:

**When a couple does not render to the Lord the percentage due Him—a simple token that all they possess belongs to Him—He warns that the “devourer” will be permitted to take from them things that they may hold very dear.<sup>6</sup>**

Let's face the issue squarely:

1) The passage in Malachi 3 is being misapplied to Christians. It is not about Christian “tithing” or Christian giving; it is about Old Covenant Jewish tax-paying. It has no direct application to Christians.

2) The “curse of the law” is being misapplied to Christians. We have been redeemed from that curse, and set free from the jurisdiction of that law.

3) “Vine” is erroneously equated with “pregnant wife.” This kind of “hermeneutic” twists the Scriptures like a pretzel.

4) The “devourer”—the locust that ate the crops in ancient Israel—is erroneously equated with Satan.

5) The clear meaning of this type of “application” is that if Christians don't “pay up” on their supposed required “tithes,” then God gives Satan, the devourer, permission to kill the unborn babies of those Christians as punishment because they “**fail to give tithes.**”

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great opportunity to share the Good News, we must not assume that the movie alone will convey what one must believe in order to be eternally saved.<sup>17</sup>

More than ever, Christians need to be able to articulate WHY Jesus willingly came to earth as one of us, and why He willingly went to the cross for us. He or she must be equipped to then answer the same question asked of Paul by the Philippian jailer, “... *what must I do to be saved?*” (Acts 16:30). 

All Bible quotes are from the Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV) unless noted otherwise.

ENDNOTES

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2. <http://imdb.com/StudioBrief/#3>
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13. Richard Cohen, “Faith and Violence,” (Tuesday, March 2, 2004), pA21; <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A21153-2004Mar1.html>
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15. Don Feder, “More Power to Mel,” *FrontPageMagazine.com*, (February 10,2004); <http://www.frontpagemag.com/Articles/ReadArticle.asp?ID=12115>
16. Julie Gorin, “The Jews Who Cried Wolf,” *National Review Online*, (March 5, 2004); <http://www.nationalreview.com/comment/gorin200403050933.asp>
17. Michael Makidon, “DOES MEL GIBSON’S PASSION FALL SHORT?,” *Grace in Focus*, (March/April 2004), pp1,3.

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6) This clearly leads to a horrifying conclusion: We Christians *are* under the curse of the law after all. All the curses pronounced on the Jews for disobedience to that law are pronounced upon Christians who fail to “tithe.” Forget Gal. 3:13 (“*Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law ...*”); forget Rom. 8:1 (“... *no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus ...*”). We are still under that curse, and we better not forget it, or God just might let Satan kill our unborn babies.

The import of this is enormous! Considering how many people are influenced by Bill Gothard and his teachings, the potential for bondage and condemnation among those who believe this teaching is enormous. When I showed this information to some friends, one responded by saying, “**What horrible levels of false guilt and recrimination people must feel to actually believe these things!**”

This cannot be allowed to stand unchallenged! Was miscarriage a possible judgment under that law? Yes, it was (Hosea 9:14). Was miscarriage warned about in that tithing passage in Mal. 3? No, it wasn’t. What was warned about in that passage was insects eating the crops and plants casting their fruit. Are Christian women in any danger of miscarriage today because they “**fail to give tithes?**” Of course not. There is no such thing as “failure to tithe” for the Christian, and we are not under the curses of that old law, anyway.

Instead of placing such condemnation on Christians, we need to be explaining to them their glorious freedom in Christ. We need to show them that they need not fear curses or condemnation from the God who chose them, redeemed them, blesses them with every spiritual blessing, and keeps them by His power. We need to make sure they understand that they are not in any danger whatsoever if they “**fail to give tithes.**” We need to help them learn to enjoy giving to God from a heart of love and sacrifice and gratefulness, rather than “paying up” to avoid having their unborn babies killed as punishment.

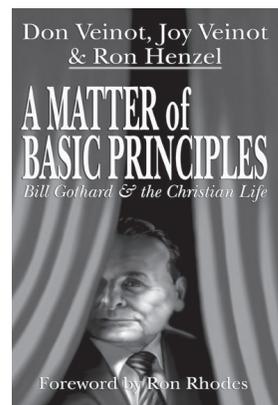
I have no interest in judging the motives of the people who wrote this IBLP booklet on miscarriage. I am sure they wanted to help Christian women deal with miscarriage. But I have a responsibility to speak out when I see what is actually being

taught, no matter what the motives of the teachers are. And those who teach these kinds of extreme, legalistic, condemning ideas should be marked out and warned against. The sadness I feel as I see this kind of teaching is sometimes almost overwhelming. 

**Mike Mahurin** is a former college and high school teacher who now tutors home schoolers in a variety of subjects, including Latin, logic, writing, and history. He also pastors a small church part-time. He and his wife have three children, and they live in Texas.

ENDNOTES:

1. [MTIA], *Basic Care Bulletin #9: How to Understand the Causes and Management of Miscarriages*. Medical Training Institute of America; Oak Brook, IL, 1990; p2.
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For more information related to this topic you can order a copy of:

***A MATTER of BASIC PRINCIPLES: Bill Gothard & the Christian Life***

by Don Veinot, Joy Veinot and Ron Henzel

# A FAMILY AFFAIR

By Keith Gibson

**Y**ou may have seen them in the mall in front of the local toy store or J.C. Penney's. Friendly people, dressed as clowns, tying balloons, and telling dramatic stories of their missionary work around the world, complete with pictures and, of course, accepting donations to help with the on-going ministry. You may have volunteered alongside them at the Red Cross. Businesses in your community may be making large donations to them or one of their front organizations. Hotel chains allow them to stay for free. They may even have performed in a local church under the guise of being independent Christian missionaries raising support to get out on the field. Yet, these happy, smiling people are part of a destructive, sexually perverse, and theologically bankrupt religious group formerly known as the Children of God, who now simply call themselves The Family.

## A Brief History

The Children of God, founded by David Brandt Berg, are an outgrowth of the 60's counter-culture. Berg had deep roots in Christianity with both his mother and grandfather being traveling evangelists.<sup>1</sup> Berg began his own ministry as an evangelist with the Christian and Missionary Alliance from which he was expelled in 1950. He migrated to youth ministry and became the leader of a Teen Challenge Chapter in 1967 (an Assembly of God ministry). A pivotal event occurred in 1968 when Berg broke from the national organization and founded his own ministry called "Light Club." Very early in the formation of this new organization, Berg began to receive revelations supposedly from God. In 1969, he moved the group out of California in response to a revelation he received regarding a severe earthquake that was about to hit the area causing part of the state to slip into the ocean.<sup>2</sup> The earthquake never materialized, but this didn't stop the momentum of the new religious movement which took on the name Children of God. The group became communal in nature very early. This remains one of its most visible peculiarities to the present.

It was also during this time that Berg received his "**Old Church, New Church**" revelation.<sup>3</sup> In this revelation, the word "church" contained a double meaning. Not only was God rejecting the established Church in favor of Berg's movement, but Berg and others were free to reject their wives and take new ones. Berg did not divorce his current wife of over 30 years (Jane—aka Mama Eve), but he did make public an on-going affair and began a common-law relationship with Karen Zerby—aka Maria, aka Mama—the current leader of the movement.

Part of the appeal of the movement, both now and in the past, is the call to a radical discipleship—forsaking all to follow Christ. However, as in most cults of this nature, the group began to practice extreme forms of control. Members were rarely permitted to be alone. Members were to sever all ties with parents

and other family members. Various forms of mind control were also employed though the group vehemently denies this. Names were changed making efforts to track children difficult. (This was the first issue that began to gain the movement significant negative attention.)

The situation in the Children of God continued to deteriorate through the 1970's. It was during this time that Berg changed his name to Moses David believing himself to be the fulfillment of Deuteronomy 18:15 and began to issue the now infamous *MO Letters*—direct revelations from God. Typical of many doomsday cults, Berg prophesied the return of Christ. According to Berg, Jesus was to return in 1993.<sup>4</sup> In 1973, he prophesied that the Kohoutek Comet would hit the United States and destroy it.<sup>5</sup> The group fled the country. Once again, Berg proved to be a false prophet, but the gullible remained and grew. At this time, Berg made contact with a spirit guide named Abraham. He would later receive more revelations from the dead, a practice that continues within The Family to this day.

In 1976, Moses began to issue some of his most controversial declarations which involved the practice of "**flirty fishing or FFing**." This amounted to female members meeting and seducing men in order to demonstrate the love of Christ to them. (If the logic of this escapes you, praise God, you're normal.) Later, the women would also receive money for services rendered, becoming full-fledged, sacred prostitutes. An account of this activity can be found in the book *Heaven's Harlot*—the testimony of Miriam Williams—aka Jeshanah.<sup>6</sup> God began to be described as a sexy god, and Heaven as a place of orgiastic activity. The Holy Spirit was believed to be female. MO letters began to contain pornographically explicit drawings.

A purge of Children of God leadership occurred in 1977, and the group reconstituted under the name "The Family of Love," which has now been shortened to "The Family."

Sexual practices in The Family continued to become more and more extreme until the end of Berg's life (1994), ultimately involving sexual sharing within The Family, lesbianism, teen sex, and even pedophilia, and incest. Today, the Family vehemently denies that pedophilia and incest were ever condoned, but the literature and the testimony of hundreds of witnesses speaks for itself.<sup>7</sup> Ironically, male homosexuality was, and continues to be, forbidden, though Berg vacillated even here.<sup>8</sup> As can be anticipated, all of these abuses led to a rampant outbreak of venereal disease among members, numbers of babies born out of wedlock (called "**Jesus babies**" by the cult), close governmental scrutiny including expulsion from some nations, and occasional prosecution for child abuse. "**Flirty fishing**" was discontinued in 1987, officially in order to give more time to other forms of evangelism, but it is certain that much of the decision was due to negative media coverage, venereal disease, and court cases.

However, sources very close to The Family have informed the author that “**FFing**” is rumored to have begun again in Europe and is involves minors. Also in 1987, incest was specifically banned.

## Life After Berg

Berg died in 1994 at the age of approximately 75 and his common law wife, Karen Zerby (aka Maria), assumed leadership over the movement. Her new lover, Stephen Douglas Kelly (aka Peter Amsterdam, aka King Peter), is second in command and heir apparent to the throne. Under Maria, some token reforms have taken place. Sex with outsiders or those who have been in The Family for less than six months is forbidden. Sexual activity among teens must wait until 18 years of age, and then it is allowable only with those no more than seven years older than themselves until the age of 21—at which time all restraint is off.

Despite these efforts to clean up their soiled image, the root perversions persist. The communal nature of the group is still reinforced by sexual sharing among members. In fact, the blasphemous nature of the organization is worse than ever. The most disgusting is a recent series of *Maria Letters* entitled the *Loving Jesus* series. Common decency forbids the direct citation of this material in a newsletter such as this. However, the essence of this teaching is that believers can minister to the needs of Jesus by having sex with Him. This is accomplished by masturbation done while envisioning a sexual encounter with Christ. Men are encouraged to envision themselves as possessing a vagina in order to accomplish this activity. Words cannot describe the absolute horror and revulsion one feels when encountering this material. To see the sinless, spotless, Holy Son of God described as He is in this literature makes one sick.

## Why This Article?

The basic point of this article is not to titillate or to disgust. The necessity of this article is due to the fact that *many Christians are unwittingly supporting and funding these bizarre and blasphemous activities*. The tactics The Family uses to accomplish this objective, as well as the rationale supporting these activities, will occupy the remainder of this article.

## Deceptive By Design

One of the issues that makes dealing with The Family so difficult is the deceptive way information is disseminated to those outside the group. Literature from The Family comes in multiple layers. “**GP**” material is that which is deemed suitable for the general public. These materials hide or mask the group’s true beliefs. In general, this material deals with benign subjects such as prayer. The cult’s web site contains a statement of faith subtle enough, sadly, to slip by many Christians. Item number 12 briefly discusses receiving revelations from departed saints—a euphemism for necromancy, but it does so in the context of Saul’s encounter with Samuel during his visit with the witch at Endor and Jesus’ visit with Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration.<sup>9</sup> Considering the current cultural climate, one seriously wonders if many Christians would even find this alarming. Too many wouldn’t bother to read that far, and the vast majority of those who donate probably never check out the group at all.

The next level is “**DO**” (disciple only) material which is meant to be available only to those who have joined the group.

Here is where the true doctrines of the group are taught. Here the convert finds out about the “**Law of Love**,” the female nature of the Holy Spirit, communication with the dead (the group receives revelations from such “saints” as Marilyn Monroe and Elvis Presley<sup>10</sup>), and a host of other perversions.

Beyond even the DO is the “**LO**” (leader only) material which is to be read by the shepherds of the commune with parts being relayed verbally to the underlings. The final level being what is referred to as “**BAR**” (burn after reading) material which contains information the cult considers so potentially destructive, it is necessary to destroy the evidence.

The deception is carried out further in the way the cult represents itself. Rarely do members state outright that they are members of “The Family.” Solicitation in malls and in front of toy stores is carried out by members dressed as clowns. Businesses are approached over the phone and in person for contributions to help the underprivileged. Home owners and property owners of vacant structures are asked to allow the group to stay there in return for maintaining and improving the property. In each case, this work is accomplished by representatives who describe themselves as “**independent Christian missionaries**.” (See [www.thefamily.org](http://www.thefamily.org)) Additionally, a host of front organizations and pseudonyms have been established, as well as businesses owned by or affiliated with the cult. These include but are not limited to:<sup>11</sup>

- *Activated* magazine
- Aurora Productions
- World Services
- New Teens for Christ
- Helping Hand - Mexico
- Cheer Up Missions, USA
- Calico Charities, USA
- Family Missions
- Family Project Hope
- Lifeline Ministries
- Brookside Farm
- KidzVids International
- Family Care Foundation
- Sunny Side Up Entertainment
- Martinelli

The Family has produced multiple series’ of award-winning videos aimed at children. The most famous of these are *Treasure Attic* and *Cherub Wings*. These videos have been widely acclaimed and well-received, at times in the past even selling at Wal-Mart. Today, most of these videos are peddled by cult members directly to local Christian bookstores. The doctrinal content of these videos, though minor, is directly from the *MO Letters*. Parents purchasing these materials have no idea that much of the proceeds are used to support the cult.

## Church Invasion

Another tactic that should cause Christians not only to rage at the audacity of the cult but weep at the lack of discernment in the pulpit is “**church invasion**.” In this activity, the cultists call local churches—focusing particularly on Pentecostal and charismatic, “Spirit-led” churches. The independent Christian missionaries introduce themselves by stating that they are traveling locally to raise support to enter the mission field in a particular country. They ask the pastor if he would be willing to meet with them and

— Continued on Page 14

## — “Affair” Continued From Page 13

consider allowing them to “minister” in a service for a love offering. If the pastor accepts the meeting, the cultists visit his office scrubbed and shined. They are masters at Christian-speak and frequently are able to disarm the pastor who allows them to sing and bring the message in an evening service without ever checking references or doctrinal positions. In this way, the group is afforded the opportunity not only to raise significant funds, but they also encounter spiritually weak members of the church to whom they can continue to “minister” through “Bible studies” on an on-going basis. Instructions for carrying out this work can be found in some of the group’s undated writings like *How to Invade Churches!*”

It might be interesting to note how The Family really views the Church. In *The Fruitful But Dangerous Ministry of “Invading the Churches!”* the anonymous author states:

**“THE LORD HAS ACTUALLY GIVEN US A TRUE LOVE for many of these “mentally handicapped Christians.”** (emphasis in the original)

Another publication of The Family, written by Maria in December of 1985, contains this warning:

**Beware of Church Christians!**<sup>12</sup>

Of course, all of this lying has to be justified somehow. The key text employed is “... *as deceivers, and [yet] true*” (2 Corinthians 6:8). When the full text is studied, it becomes obvious that Paul is dealing with accusations and sufferings that have come upon him for the cause of Christ, not with his methodology in dealing with society at large. But groups like The Family never let an insignificant thing like context stop them.

## The Law of Love

It is impossible to understand the past and current activities of The Family without understanding their most foundational belief (second only to the prophet status of Berg and now Maria), the “**Law of Love.**” This belief is a perversion of Jesus’ teaching regarding the second great commandment—to “*love your neighbor as yourself*”—coupled with an extreme antinomianism. Roughly stated, The Family believes and teaches nothing done in “love” can be sin.

This gets translated into a cover for a variety of aberrant practices within The Family. The distorted logic that follows is that to really love your neighbor as yourself is to meet their “needs”. Intercourse is determined to be a “need,” not a desire. Therefore, members of the cult are commanded to share sexually with one another in order to meet each others “needs.” Of course, one must never consider that one might be harming a brother or sister by enticing and assisting them to sin. Sin is impossible in “love” and besides, we are no longer under law but under grace, so those old requirements for such silly issues as sexual purity are gone with the temple and the animal sacrifices. Admonitions against fornication and adultery found within the epistles are dismissed as The Apostles still having “**legalistic hang-ups.**”

Naturally, this escape from all law doesn’t apply to issues like murder, theft, or even homosexuality. But one struggles in vain to find any rationale for how a member of The Family can determine right from wrong without reference to the *MO Letters* or *Maria Letters*. When asked, members of the cult will state that these activities are wrong because the Bible forbids them. When asked about the Biblical prohibitions on fornication and adultery, these same cultists will state that they are too busy doing the critical

work of evangelism to banter over petty issues such as doctrine. They will simply ask you to agree to disagree. The same can be said for their belief in communication with the dead.

## Adding Up the Numbers

The Family proudly touts its accomplishments in the face of the “**do nothing**” Church and professional clergy. The group’s web site, for instance, proclaims:

**The Family sees its prime task as that of bringing the message of God’s love to all. How successful have we been at this? As of yet we have personally shared the Gospel message with over 237 million individuals, while billions have heard our message through the mass media. As a result, over 23.3 million people have personally prayed with our members to receive God’s love, forgiveness and salvation. We have distributed over 850 million pieces of Gospel literature in 61 languages. A total of over 1.4 million videos and eight million audio tapes in more than 20 languages have also been distributed.**<sup>13</sup>

In spite of this apparent evangelistic success, The Family only claims 12,000 members. One simply must ask where the rest of the 23.3-million people who “**have personally prayed ... to receive God’s love, forgiveness and salvation**” have gone. It needs to be understood that The Family maintains an extreme form of easy believism. In order to be saved, one simply needs to repeat the words of a prayer. It is not even essential that a person have any foundational understanding of who Jesus is. No commitment to follow Christ is necessary. Biblical doctrines such as repentance are absent in the literature used for witnessing. Jesus is presented as the cure for loneliness, longing, depression, etc. Additionally, according to Miriam Williams, many of these converts prayed the “sinner’s prayer” while lying next to a cult prostitute presumably in order to be able to move on with other business or to encourage future encounters of a similar nature.

But in Scripture, Christ commands the Church to “**make disciples**” not converts. Biblical salvation requires a commitment to Christ, not merely the recitation of a prayer, and certainly not one made under such dubious circumstances.

## The Eclectic Cult

In addition to all of the aforementioned issues, the cult has become, over the years, a repository of a variety of other heretical doctrines. This occurred because Berg developed few unique doctrines outside of the sexual arena but simply borrowed from other cult groups—particularly Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses (JWs).

For instance, like JWs, The Family believes that Jesus was the first creation of God. Berg further felt that Witnesses were very nearly right in their eschatology and felt that blood transfusions were forbidden in the prohibitions against drinking blood. Mormons have been an even bigger influence. Berg, like Mormons, taught that God has plural wives, marriage continues in eternity, the Incarnation was the result of sexual intercourse between God the Father and Mary (on another occasion, Berg taught that Gabriel impregnated Mary), Jesus had intercourse with Mary and Martha (Berg adds that Jesus was probably infected with V.D.), and salvation can occur after death.<sup>14</sup>

Mixed in with all of this is a healthy dose of New Age teaching. Berg had numerous spirit guides. The group believes that speaking in tongues is the result of a departed spirit helper speaking an ancient language (channeling). Members of the group

regularly receive direct words from deceased individuals.

Does anyone have a map for all of this???

## The Call for Discernment

Like many other cults, The Family finds fertile recruiting soil among those who have become disillusioned with the modern Church. The Family points at the Church's seeming obsession with lavish buildings and ministers who receive excessive salaries as examples of the Church's departure from the sacrifice and commitment to which Christ has called believers in order to reach the lost. They accuse the average church member of being inactive in vital ministry. Sadly, in many cases, the church has made itself an easy target. Christians must, once again, *take seriously the call of Christ upon their lives*. We must live with mission and purpose.

Additionally, Christians who find that they are being solicited for funds must learn to ask probing questions. The fact that a person claims to be a Christian missionary proves nothing. As with any cult, one must scale the language barrier. What Jesus are we speaking about? Is Jesus the Holy, Eternal Son of God, possessing all the attributes of Deity, the Second Person of the Trinity born of the Virgin Mary in His Incarnation; or is He the first creation of God, needy, sinful, disease ridden, and the product of a physical cohabitation? The answer is critical. The Jesus of The Family cannot save. Believers must be careful to know that their dollars are not supporting those who pervert the name of Christ and preach a powerless gospel. ☉

### ENDNOTES:

1. "The Family" Children of God/Family of Love Vital Information. Internet article by Ed Priebe. Sword of the Lord Ministries. [www.swordofthelord.officehiway.com/vital.html](http://www.swordofthelord.officehiway.com/vital.html)
2. Children of God-Family of Love-The Family. Internet article which is, on the whole, positive toward The Family. [www.religioustolerance.org/fam\\_love.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/fam_love.htm)
3. *The Old Church and the New Church*, David Berg. August 26, 1969. Published in London, England.
4. *70 years prophecy of the end!* written by David Berg, March 1, 1972 MO #156.
5. A series of writings were published including, *The Great Comet: Warning! 40 Days! And Ninevah shall be Destroyed, Kohoutek! What will the Christmas Monster Bring?* and *The 3rd Letter of Moses on the Comet!* All of these were written by David Berg in the month of November 1973.
6. There are too many The Family publications on this activity to site them all. Examples would include, *God's Whores?* DO #560, *God's Love Slave!* DO #537 and *The Ministry of Love!* DO #538. All written by David Berg. Current leadership of The Family both acknowledges and defends this practice. An extensive article entitled *Women in The Family* contains information on this practice and can be found at [www.thefamily.org/dossier/statements/women.htm](http://www.thefamily.org/dossier/statements/women.htm)
7. The now infamous "Davidito" material is widely available on the internet and was the basis for the Justice Ward decision that clearly found The Family endorsed the practice of pedophilia. Another example is a deeply disturbing undated publication entitled *The Little Girl Dream* which boldly states: "**Of course, as there are no longer any such thing as Man's legalistic laws against incest in the loving kingdom of God.**"
8. *Homos! A Question of Sodomy* MO-DO #719, July 1978, by David Berg. This article endorses mutual masturbation and fellatio between men.
9. "Our Statement of Faith" which can be found at [www.thefamily.org/dossier/statements/faith.htm](http://www.thefamily.org/dossier/statements/faith.htm)
10. One example, a World Services newsletter, *Good News!* dated August 1996, written by WS staff contains a column entitled, "Sex in Heaven! By Marilyn Monroe." A statement in parenthesis underneath the titles says: "**This message from beyond was received through Valerie Bright.**"
11. A much more complete list can be found at [www.exfamily.org/list/pseudonyms.shtml](http://www.exfamily.org/list/pseudonyms.shtml). This site is maintained by former members of the cult.
12. *Beware of Church Christians!* by Maria, 12/85. Maria Letter 69.
13. Found at The Family web site, [www.thefamily.org/about/history.php](http://www.thefamily.org/about/history.php)
14. A complete discussion of this subject can be found in an excellent article by former member, Ed Priebe, in an article entitled *Hodgepodge of Heresy* at [www.swordofthelord.officehiway.com/ed/heresy.htm](http://www.swordofthelord.officehiway.com/ed/heresy.htm)

## SPEAKING SCHEDULE

### May 23

Community Fellowship Church  
Carol Stream, IL  
*Gay Rites: Right or Wrong?*  
(Sunday School hour)

### May 30-31

Mesa Baptist Church  
Mesa, AZ  
*Multiple Topics*

### June 6

Community Fellowship Church  
Carol Stream, IL  
*Islam - Peaceful?*  
(Sunday School hour)

### July 11, 18, 25

Calvary Memorial Church  
Oak Park, IL  
*Reaching Your Muslim Neighbor*  
(Sunday School Hour)

### September 12, 19

New Song Community Lutheran Church  
Aurora, IL  
*World Religions*  
(Sunday School Hour)

### September 25-26

Word of Life Community Church  
Grandview, MO  
*Multiple Topics*

### October 3-6

Memorial Baptist Church  
Beckley, WV  
*Multiple Topics*

### October 8-9

*Young Defenders Boot Camp*  
Calvary Chapel South Denver  
Denver, CO

### October 22-24

*Witnesses Now For Jesus Convention*  
New Ringgold, PA

Contact MCOI for further information and/or registration details on any of the above events.

Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc.

# Journal

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