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MEN WITH A MISSION **An Overview of Promise Keepers**

by Jewel van der Merwe

Watching the evening news is quite a staggering experience. Imagine nerve gas being released on a crowded Japanese subway! It is like a tragedy out of an eerie movie conjured from someone's vivid imagination. Even more fascinating is the revelation of a large cult in Japan capable of storing massive quantities of lethal chemicals. Intelligent people are involved in this cult and there are thousands more adherents in Russia, and even representation in the United States.

Hardly has that shock wave died down and we are galvanized by the bombing in Oklahoma City. This tragedy also seems to be a result of reasoning that has turned toward violence. It has brought home the stark reality that indeed, such deeds can happen anywhere in this world as long as there are those that are obsessed by a cause. The heart of man is desperately wicked!

One of the first and most obvious signs of thinking going awry is resistance to having ideologies or positions questioned. There is an increasing tendency among some to resist or resent being questioned in order to define their position. (Principles based on truth can stand the test of inquiry, question and even cross-examination.)

Among many who profess a relationship within Christianity there is emerging, more and more, a resistance and often overt reaction against having their position questioned. Why? Do they not base their position on Truth? The emergent philosophy among many today seems not to be Truth according to the fact and reality of God's expressed position (Holy Scripture), but rather the evidence of results being obtained through their position. In other words, "if it draws large crowds, it must be right."

Let us examine the very large (and growing) movement known as Promise Keepers. It is without second thought that one would desire to probe into the mechanics of such a widely recognized and accepted group. What is their success based on? How is it that this group seemingly, 'overnight' has burst on the scene in not only Christian, but secular circles as well? Christian movements generally do not gain recognition beyond the Christian camp, and even then it is some time before the public even glances their way.

Promise Keepers is a parachurch structure that unites men from every denomination for the purpose of inter-accountability, beyond what the local church may accomplish. It does not seek to exclude pastoral leadership, but desires that pastors become part of its framework. Often, the pastor's contact with Promise Keepers is initiated when a bright-eyed, fired-up recruit (newly changed from a Promise Keeper rally) says, "Pastor, I'm praying for you. I want to be supportive in any way possible." What pastor would not be touched when hearing this from a member of his congregation!

Indeed, it is an awesome experience to be part of thousands of men lifting their voices in one accord, as in the Promise Keepers rallies. Men are suddenly becoming not only supportive of their pastors and churches, but are working to become the leaders of their homes as well. Many testify of changed lives as a result of their contact with Promise Keepers. If the Gospel is preached, and even one soul is truly saved, then the efforts are worthwhile. Should we not, then, examine Promise Keepers to understand its success? It is drawing very large crowds. Men are looking beyond their own limited spheres to something much more vast in scope. Just what is Promise Keepers? What makes it work? Where did it start?

From the large rallies that are filling stadiums across the country, men migrate into small, intimate groups of 4 or 5. In these groups, men find that they begin to gain control of their lives by establishing bonds of accountability with other men. Approved Promise Keeper literature, videos and study guides assist men in seeing themselves more clearly through the eyes of others. They find other men who understand them. They see their struggles and responsibilities as not merely personal burdens to be borne alone, but as common experiences among men. Sharing and discussion moves a man from feeling that he is 'all alone' to identification with other men as a group.

The impact Promise Keepers is making is apparently a good one. But, aren't appearances often deceiving? What is the end to be accomplished? It is as hard to answer this as it is to define the doctrinal position of the group. Discussions relating to doctrine are carefully and markedly avoided, and only a positive image is to be projected.

The NEW AGE JOURNAL, April 1995 ran an article favorable to Promise Keepers:

“Writer Jeff Wagenheim noted the odd combination of New Age men's movement ideology (Robert Bly's pantheism) combined with the political evangelicalism of Pat Robertson:

...despite the group's assertions to the contrary, Promise Keepers is an organization with vast political influence. The fact that hundreds of thousands of men are being actively encouraged to adhere to a highly conservative set of values and to work to instill those values in their communities and nation should not just be a matter of theological interest.”

An historical precedent for a political/religious movement such as Promise Keepers can be found in Germany during the 30's. According to author Richard Terrell in his provocative book, RESURRECTING THE THIRD REICH (Huntington House, 1994), orthodox Christianity was supplanted by the German Volkish faith:

“What was to take possession of the German consciousness was a militant romanticism ...According to this way of thinking, the Divine Spirit is manifested in the people, in their collective genius and total culture or Volkgeist...Germany developed a kind of communal mysticism which contained its own Teutonic concept of a chosen people, called to redeem civilization from its decadence.” (p. 44)

Terrell describes the advent of this full-blown religion:

"...rallies were glorious pageants that stirred the emotions, which depended not on any revelation of Scripture, but on pure feeling... The Volkish concept of the social organism was effectively symbolized in mass meetings that expressed a sense of eternity, awe, and mystery, effects stimulated by a cathedral of light nighttime mass meetings in which anti-aircraft lights sent brilliant shafts of illumination in the darkened sky.” (p. 59)

"Is Promise Keepers creating a new “folk” religion? The large mass rallies, the exaltation of emotion over reason, the lack of doctrinal integrity, the taking of oaths (the 7 promises), the focus on fatherland and fatherhood, and the ecumenical inclusion of aberrant esoteric doctrines bears a disconcerting similarity to an era which gave rise to one of the most dreadful armies in history. The infiltration of Manifest Sons of God doctrines into Promise Keepers (via Vineyard) combined with New Age ideologies (via Robert Bly and Robert Hicks) appears to create a new American folk theology: pantheism, the idolatry of self, the belief in a divine mandate to take the land, the superiority of a group, and the necessity of group hysteria.

While many in the church are jumping wholeheartedly into the Laughing Phenomenon and Promise Keepers, it behooves the rest of the Church to take a sober, steady look at the historical, theological and philosophical underpinnings of these popular movements of our times.” (CHRISTIAN CONSCIENCE, Iowa Research Group, Inc. PO Box 17346, Des Moines, Iowa 50317-0346, April, 1995).

Yes, it all appears so "right" -- but didn't even the folk movement in Germany "feel good" to the masses that gathered under the banner of "a great cause"... What better cause than "family" for men to rally to?

The Promise Keepers are dedicated to uniting men through vital relationships.

"Biblical unity spawns vital relationships: life changing, interdependent, living dynamic, face-to-face covenant relationship. Through vital relationships we can embrace one another's pains and triumphs. By this we express our honor for one another as equals while respecting our diverse heritages. We believe that vital relationships among men are the foundation for helping one another become promise keepers. We contend that this is best accomplished when a small group of men agree to pursue God face-to-face, shoulder-to-shoulder, and back-to-back and establish

covenant relationships with one another to affirm, to be available for, and to pray for each other, to be honest with, to preserve confidentiality with, and to be accountable to each other.

In context of covenant relationships, a man willingly grants other men the right to inquire about his relationship with God, his commitment to his family, his sexuality, his financial deals. Together they form a team that is committed to advance God's kingdom." (THE PROMISE KEEPERS Ambassador Training Manual).

It is imperative to look at the foundation and structure of the Promise Keepers. An honest appraisal is warranted, in lieu of a "follow the crowd" mindset.

The Foundation

The Vineyard and Kansas City Connection. Several years ago, emerging on the national charismatic scene were a group of men referred to as the "Kansas City Prophets". This group became part of the Vineyard Fellowship (Anaheim, CA). Their emphasis was on visions and revelations with particular attention given to personal prophecy and prophetic "words from the Lord". There were prophecies given at this time regarding the fact that stadiums would be filled with people worshipping God. It was also prophesied that the evening news would have reports on these tremendous events.

One of the "prophets", Paul Cain, said in 1989 that God was raising a new standard and the understanding of Christianity would be radically changed in our generation. He believed that God had invited him to have a role in establishing this New Order of Christianity. He believed that God was offering something to this generation that he had never offered before.

"The 'prophets' promoted at that time a NEW THING that would soon happen. This NEW THING would be based on signs, wonders and miracles. A very clear warning went out to 'beware the Old Order Brethren'. The ones considered to be Old Order were obviously not part of the flow. Signs and wonders were to be seen as 'God's endorsement of the right message and the light Messenger' ". (Paul Cain, School for Prophecy, 1989).

James Ryle, Bill McCartney's pastor from the Boulder, Colorado Vineyard was, and is, part of the "prophetic" scene. (Bill McCartney is the founder of Promise Keepers.) Ryle ministers in "Dreams and Visions" conferences. One of his dreams involved the Beatles. Ryle interpreted it as the Beatles having the anointing for a "new music". His interpretation of this dream was this:

“The Lord spoke to me and said, 'What you saw in the Beatles - the gifting and that sound they had - was from me...It was my purpose to bring forth through music a world-wide revival that would usher in the move of my spirit in bringing men and women to Christ.' And I want to tell you those four lads aborted something. They took what did not belong to them and used it in a way that was not intended by God to be used, it did bring a revival of music - but it brought it on the other side of the fence...And the Lord spoke to me and He said, 'In 1970 I lifted that anointing off of them. And it has been held in my hand ever since: And the Lord said, 'The reason you saw it in the equipment room in that church [part of his dream] is because that anointing belongs to the church...Now I'm looking for those who I can place that anointing back upon. And as surely as I place it upon them, they will come forth with

a sound that is distinctive...that will turn the hearts of men and women and capture their heart.”

James Ryle believes that God is going to raise up a new music again, and when people hear this new sound they will fall on their faces. [For more information on dreams and visions see "Hearing God's Voice in the Night" by James Ryle, CHARISMA, May 1995].

In listening to a tape by James Ryle I found the simplicity of his style of ministry enjoyable and very effective. At the end of the message he prayed, "Lord, help us to graduate in our self-esteem." (emphasis added)

Here, in our area, on Woodward Avenue there is a SELF-ESTEEM book store. The store gives one the sense that it's a "cross-over", pulling together psychology and the New Age. On the shelf for Men's Movements, two books were together: "MASCULINE JOURNEY" (used by the Promise Keepers) and "A CIRCLE OF MEN: The Original Manual for Men's Support Groups" by Bill Kaught (co- founder of THE NEW WARRIOR TRAINING ADVENTURE). It was interesting to note the similarity of the two books; only one was dressed up with scriptural references to make it palatable for Christians. Robert Bly, the New Age guru for the men's movement, is referenced throughout both books and both books speak of small "accountability" groups set up on an encounter group format.

The thought of Joel's Army came to mind when reading the following:

"Therefore, the only true warrior for God is the Messiah - El Gibbor, or the mighty warrior God. This waging of war by Christ is as redemptive as His dying on the cross. The warrior must be willing to shed blood, either his own or another's, in order to accomplish anything worthy of redemption...God the Father' and Christ are examples of what it is to be a warrior. We must embrace the latent or rejected warrior within ourselves, not only for our own development, but also for the sake of our society and the church" (MASCULINE JOURNEY, study guide pg. 40). (emphasis added)

"Prophets" also teach that Joel's Army is being raised up today. They base this army on a "spiritualizing" of Joel chapter 2. This is why James Ryle could answer in the affirmative that Promise Keepers was indeed "Joel's Army" that God was raising up. It is also important to note how often the term "warrior" is used in their materials.

The underpinnings to this mighty conquering army can be found in Kingdom Now/Dominion theology. Those who hold to Kingdom Now teachings believe that true revival is a Christian Parallel society. They believe we should have a political system totally controlled by Christians as the government is to be on His shoulders (the Church).

There seems to be a concerted effort on the parts of many "parachurch" ministries to swallow up all churches and denominations. "Discipleship Training" is part of a larger strategy. When all of the local groups are linked together they will form a very large mobilizable spiritual army ready to die for a cause.

Shepherding/Discipleship Connection. Bill McCartney didn't just "happen" into a Vineyard church in Boulder, Colorado. He came from the Catholic Charismatic Word of God community in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Much has been written about this group and as early as

1972 outside observers were alarmed at the degree of control that was being exercised over individuals. In spite of many excesses, Pope Paul VI endorsed this renewal movement during a massive rally in Rome in 1975.

The leaders in the Ann Arbor community believed that their "system" of training would radically reshape the follower's lives. Training manuals were developed to...

"...train a Christian guerrilla force to combat four movements the Word of God considered mortal enemies of Christianity: feminism, Marxism, secular humanism, and Islam. The course ended with a special secret oath that graduates were never supposed to reveal. 'we pledge our loyalty to all wh~ fight with us. We are ready for every sacrifice, even death... we will be loyal to our commanders...we will keep our plans and movements hidden from the enemy and his agent'". (DETROIT FREE PRESS, September 20, 1992).

There occurred a tremendous growth, within the community as well as a growing list of teachings. The levels of authority kept increasing. It mushroomed out of Ann Arbor to sweep around the world. Two things, though, remained constant: the same handful of men remained on top, and hundreds of married women were relegated to the bottom rung.

"The doctrine of wifely submission was no brief experiment; it was the bedrock of the community's way of life for nearly two decades." (Ibid.)

There was radical reform in 1992. Many lives of those involved were devastated and trying to find their way out of the community. Interesting enough, the Kansas City Prophets visited Ann Arbor and were conference speakers. The "prophet", Paul Cain, was acclaimed at this conference by those eager for the latest word from God.

Now we find that in the Promise Keepers, men are strongly urged to get into accountability groups. "All of our success here is contingent upon men taking part in small groups when they return home." CHRISTIANITY TODAY, February 6, 1995, pg. 28.

What is a model of this group? Four or five men come together as equals. They are to build up trust relationships. In other words, every aspect of your life must be laid bare, whether it is your marriage, personal finances, business activities and sexual matters (past or present). Nothing is off-limits. Your family does not even have a right to family privacy. They can not object to what you divulge as they are "submitted" to you. If this submission is inculcated within the family, then there are five families in one group submitted to the Promise Keepers.

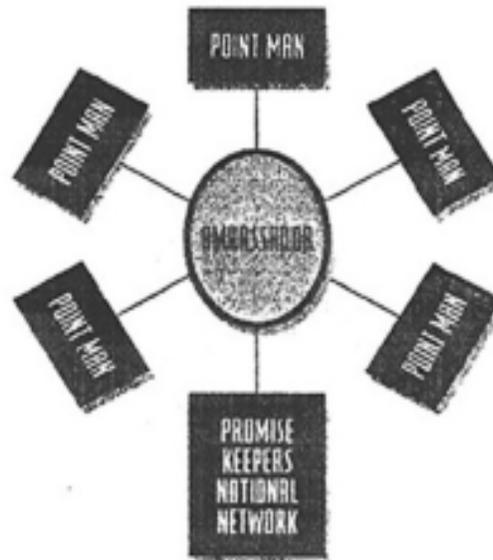
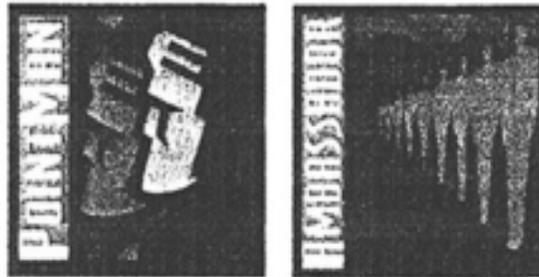
Yes, submitted to PROMISE KEEPERS. This small group of four or five is submitted to a POINT MAN. The POINT MAN links his church with the Promise Keepers.

It is important to note that while this network may be ill the local church it is "networked" from without. In this way it runs parallel to the vision and purpose of the local church (in spite of what you may be told). It is parallel because the men are encouraged not to address doctrinal issues. According to their manual, "we expect you to be committed to your denominational heritage, but this is not the time to proudly wear your colors."

Notably the mission is to unify men. Yet the Promise Keepers will swallow up men's ministries first in the local church, then within the regional structures, then ultimately on a national level.

According to the order in which the NETWORK works, all decisions would be made in Colorado (Promise Keepers headquarters) then relayed to the AMBASSADORS which in turn relay them to the POINT MEN.

MEN FORM OUR FOUNDATION



The foundation for Promise Keepers is firmly in place. Big names lend their support. Some of these already are involved with political action groups. If a pastor does not support the Promise Keepers there are several methods taught to win that support. Promise Keepers are admonished to be "positive" in order to draw in others. It all looks and feels good. Your family will be restored. The commonality is the sharing of ecstatic emotional experiences that actually leaves one "feeling drained" at the end of a rally. Remember, however, the rallies are to psyche you up as a good pep rally does before that big game.

Psychologists who have their own following have found a new venue to sell their wares promoting a new bland of popular spirituality. There are good men who do preach the gospel but they are also lending their names. All caution seems to have been thrown to the wind. Across denominational lines, men are marching in step.

Those with "political" motivations will not be far behind in setting up their strategies using this broad base of support. Already, James Dobson of FOCUS ON THE FAMILY fame has been one of the staunchest supporters of Promise Keepers. It is certainly no secret that he heads up a strong political action group vis-à-vis the Community Impact Committees which are active in over 1,000 churches in Michigan alone!

Promise Keepers is working towards taking a million men to Washington D.C. in 1997. One junior legislator at a press conference recently regaling the CONTRACT WITH AMERICA, made note of the fact that he was a Promise Keeper. Contract! Promises! To say Promise Keepers is not political is as naive as sending your teenagers to a co-ed slumber party.

If these tremendous rallies were preaching repentance from sin, trusting in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and faith toward God ALONE – AMEN! Men would go back to their church and be "discipled" by the leadership God has raised up in the local church. They would get into the Word and become a light in their community. It would be tremendous to hear messages from these meetings where the GOSPEL truly is preached. However, there seems to be something else at work here, a leaven that will eventually effect the whole loaf if there is not a warning (to the pastors, especially). Mind the flock which the Lord has set you over!

“Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned into fables.”

The following is continued from the March/April 1995 issue.

SPIRITUAL DECEPTION

Travers van der Merwe

"I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at this appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure Sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."

II Timothy 4:1-4

The interpretation is quite simple. The emphasis is on the Word of God as the exclusive gospel. The Word is the absolute Voice of Authority. It is the only Source of Divine Knowledge and the sole prescription for spiritual completeness. Whenever an opportunity presents itself, the Word should be preached.

This text intimates that in the last days selfish desires on the Part of Christians will produce a new breed of professional preachers or theologians who will especially pander to carnal lusts. Damnable heresies based on myth (mystical experience) will cause many to wander off to hear error.

We are now witnessing a prophetic fulfillment in every sphere of Christianity. The result is a stigma on the reputation of Christianity as a whole. The Holy Scriptures clearly indicate that the spiritual scene of the last days will not be one of great spiritual "revival", but rather one of almost universal apostasy. The spiritual deception will be so subtle that the very elect, if that were possible, will be deceived. In fact, Christianity will virtually fade from the public scene. *"When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on earth?"* Luke 18:8. Perversions within and without the Church will be of such magnitude that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for this generation.

It seems to be too difficult to live simply by faith alone in Jesus Christ. Even now the Church is experiencing a paradigm shift. The emphasis is no longer on orthodox doctrines. Doctrine is being swept under the carpet and rather an emphasis is on the individual's intuition, feelings and experiences. The preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ, faith, repentance, judgment and hell is distasteful. The "manna" (Word of God) the Church has subsisted on all these years is now suddenly stale. The strong outcry that is going out is: *"But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes."* Numbers 11:6. The demand is for palatable delicacies such as fish, cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic which they enjoyed in Egypt even though they were in slavery.

"Many people see themselves as living in a pretty meaningless world, and there is a profound cry for meaning. We've seen that tendency in churches, because the way religion is presented traditionally has spoken to our inner selves less and less. People want a living, feeling experience of spirituality. They yearn to get in touch with the soul."¹

Unfortunately "professional" preachers become heretics of the first order in response to carnal Christians wanting to experiment with pleasure and mystic ideas. They are taking full advantage of the present trends by marketing religion in much the same way corporations set up their structures. Every conceivable modern technique and idea is then dressed in theological terms to give the listeners a self-centered experience and to fit in with today's entertainment seduced population. This method controls the hearers' purse and mind. Christians, wake up and repent. The whole end-time trend is causing Christianity to play right into the hands of the enemy.

Yes, Christianity is suffering violence as theologians wrest the Holy Scriptures, subtract and then add. They reject the inerrancy and infallibility of the Word of God in support of their anti-Christ views. In the process, the Christian faith is rudely being subjected to New Age paganistic influences.

"Neo-orthodox and liberal wings of Protestantism deny final authority to scripture as inerrant and infallible, substituting some internal authority such as feelings, conscience, experience, 'Christ speaking through the Holy Spirit, etc.'"²

Along the way the Church has been seduced from the everlasting Word of God through subtle perversions. Satan, through his prophets, will never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord. This is his goal. We are not to be ignorant.

Yes, the very Word of God is being used as a tool to draw Christians into a mystical frame of mind, away from a literal spiritual mind based on the literal meaning of the Word of God. A major problem in Christianity today and a real cause for Christians turning to mysticism, away from a natural sanctified spiritual life, is Christianity's departure from the true method of Bible interpretation, i.e.:

"Take the Bible literally whenever it is at all possible. When the language cannot be taken literally, then we know it is figurative. Then get the literal truth conveyed by the figurative language as if it were expressed in literal language without the use of figures."³

Jesus Christ rejected all the traditions and interpretations of his day and instead accepted the plain literal written Word of God as the only truth.

"Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye." Mark 7:13.

The only protection we have against straying into mysticism and error is in following the literal interpretation of Scripture. Anything besides or beyond this method is bound to end in heresy. The moment the Bible is seen purely as a symbol or allegory, imagination then becomes the criteria for spiritual truth. When any other method is followed other than the literal method, man is free to choose his own meaning of scripture, which is never the meaning written. The literal interpretation is accepted by faith, while all other interpretations are perceived mystically and experientially.

"The early Church Fathers, instead of following the plain literal meaning of Scriptures as did Christ and the apostles, followed more or less the Jewish method of interpretation. The literal sense of Scripture was overlaid with the allegorical, moral, and spiritual interpretations. Origin gave a three-fold meaning to all Scripture corresponding to the body (literal), the soul (moral), and the spirit (spiritual or mystical). He greatly influenced others in the church for many centuries. The literal and historical meaning was almost completely done away with and the spiritual and mystical meaning took the place of the literal.

This method of interpretation continued to the Reformation. Since then the Scriptures have been more or less freed from the early traditions of men who began to study the Bible in a more literal sense. In spite of this new freedom of Scripture from much of the former spiritualizing tendencies and magical meanings, there are many ministers today who have gone back to the unintelligent methods of the past. We should reject and utterly avoid all such foolishness. The habit of these men is to disregard the common significance of words, the grammatical construction, and the literal intention of God in Scripture. They force into Scripture any meaning their fancy chooses, and they make the interpreter equal to God and his interpretations even better than the plain Word of God."⁴

"Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." II Peter 1:20, 21

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof; for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." II Timothy 3:16, 17

Rejection of the infallibility of the Word of God and its divine origin thrust the early Church into a state of apostasy and corruption. The Roman Church brushed the Bible aside and religious mysticism was revived. With it came the dawning of the Dark Ages. At the advent of the Protestant Reformation, the Bible was rediscovered. Paganism and mysticism was recognized and contained. "The just shall live by faith" became the theme of the Reformation Gospel. Since then to the present time the Word of God has generally received pre-eminence in the Protestant church. However, in these last days we are seeing a complete turnabout. Widespread disregard for the Bible in preference for New Age mysticism is an end time reality and disaster. A staggering percentage of the clergy are using every conceivable argument to undermine the Divine Authority and inerrancy of the Word of God.

Some prominent televangelists teach that the Bible is not the only source of divine knowledge. They maintain that if you accept the exclusive authority of the Word, you have gotten yourself, "in bondage to the written Word of God...into prison", and "Idolatry".

On the question of the infallibility and inerrancy of the Word of God, a strong rift of dissension and division is dividing the evangelical/fundamental movement. There is a call for unity which is interpreted as a great "revival", a renaissance and a precursor to ushering in the Kingdom of God.

Rejection of the Holy Scriptures as the only foundation of divine truth leaves one in a self-centered world of speculation, imagination, experimentation, deception and mysticism. Doubting the infallibility and inerrancy of the scripture reduces the reality of faith to a mere token of a "form of godliness". The slightest doubt on the part of a Christian toward the inspiration of the scriptures distances the Word of God from his heart and mind. It makes him less and less dependent on the Word of God and more dependent on human rationale, experience and mysticism for his spiritual growth. When the Word of God is not duly revered and held in pre-eminence there are no qualms in twisting and misinterpreting the Holy Scriptures. It is this scenario that accounts for many of the heresies in the Church today.

The New Age admits to arriving at its knowledge mystically, while the church is very noticeably acquiring a good measure of its knowledge by the same means. Rather than admit it, or even recognize the fact, the Church will instead chime out. "It is the Holy Spirit". Whether the Church cares to admit it or not, their indifference to the Word of God as the only infallible source of divine knowledge, immediately and automatically equates it to New Age philosophy.

"The 9-2 million United Methodists traditionally have welcomed a relatively broad range of opinion on the Church. That guiding principle, called the quadrilateral, says that God speaks to the Church through personal experience, common sense and tradition as well as the Bible."5

The unorthodox position taken by liberals on issues such as: The Word of God, doctrine and interpretation is basically in accord with New Age philosophy. The parallels between New Age teachings and liberal theologians are apparent. Although they don't necessarily use the same terms or language, the fact is they belong to the same school of thought in practice.

The New Age contends that. "The soul is knowing substance", by that they mean that the answers to life and the way to knowledge is through a subjective mystical experience, independent of any doctrine or Holy Scriptures.

The liberal theologian imagines he knows spiritual knowledge and how it is attained over and above the Word of God.

"Mystical states", said William James, "seem to those who experience them to be a state of knowledge. They are insights into depths of truth unplumbed by the discoverer's intellect."

The liberal theologian feels he is perceiving a depth of spiritual truth unbeknown to the literal sense of the scriptures.

"Mystical experience reveals phenomena that are usually silent and inexplicable. This expanded consciousness, this whole knowing transcends our limited powers of description. Sensation, perception, and intuition seem to create something (unnatural) that is none of these." (Ibid.)

The liberal theologian is a mystic. He feels a real affinity with thought beyond doctrine and dogma.

"The radical Center of spiritual experience seems to be knowing without doctrine...the teacher does not impart knowledge but technique. This is the 'transmission of knowledge by direct experience.' Doctrine on the other hand, is second-hand knowledge, a danger. 'Stand above, pass on, and be free' is the advice of Ranzai, the same sage who advised the seeker to kill the patriarchs or the Buddha if he should encounter them. 'Do not get entangled in any teaching.'⁶

David Hunt addresses this philosophy very poignantly:

"To speak of 'knowing God' or 'thirsting for God' immediately raises several important questions: What does it mean to know God, how does one get to know Him in contrast to merely knowing about Him, and how is this universal thirst to be quenched? It is becoming increasingly popular today, not only in the East but now also in the West, to seek for God in mystical experiences. Unfortunately, this growing trend in the secular world has influenced the thinking of some Christian leaders, and, through their teaching, is impacting the church. Before seeking for experiences of God or communion with God through the practice of certain guaranteed techniques, however, we ought to give our attention first of all to the written Word of God that He has gone to such lengths to provide for all of mankind. Jeremiah's attitude toward God's Word should be our own:

'Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart!'
(Jeremiah 15:16).⁷

-- Concluded next issue --

1 Time Magazine, New York Cities Open Centre, Ralph White, December 7, 1987, page 69.

2 Ungers Bible Hand Book. by Meril F. Unger, Moody Press, 1969, page 6.

3 God's Plan for Man. by Rev. Finis Jennings Dake, Published by Dake Bible Sales, Inc. Lawrenceville, Georgia, page 41.

4 Ibid.

5 The Detroit Free Press. David Crum, "Methodists to Reconsider Bible's Role", April 26, 1988

6 The Aguarian Consmracx. Marilyn Ferguson, Pages 371, 377.

7 BeVgIm Seduction. David Hunt, Harvest House Pubtishers, 1985.