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# DISCERNMENT NEWSLETTER

“...how is it that ye do not discern this time?” Luke 12:56

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## God's Word – The Positive Message

By Jewel Grewe

Recently an interesting new book was written by Jane Jacobs: *Dark Age Ahead* that needs to be heeded by our society as a whole. Below are selected excerpts from a recent review appearing in the *Toronto Globe and Mail*:

### ***DARK AGE AHEAD: CAUTION (2005)***

Jane Jacobs has dedicated her career to bolstering the cities of North America. Now, however, Michael Valpy finds the world's leading urban philosopher distressed by 'ominous signs of decay.' At first glance, her new book, *Dark Age Ahead: Caution*, reads like a doomsday prophecy.

Less than a decade ago, Jane Jacobs, likely the world's most profound and prescient urban philosopher, was bubbling enthusiastically about the future of the human race, and only four years ago she told an interviewer: "I think I'm living in a marvelous age."

Today big black thunderclouds hover over her head. Her latest book, to appear next Saturday ... reads a lot like a doomsday prophecy for North American culture.

For chapter after chapter, an aroused Ms. Jacobs smacks her pointer against the five pillars that she says North American society depends on "to stand firm" but are now "in the process of becoming irrelevant."

These pillars are community and family, higher education, the effective practice of science and technology, self-policing by the professions and the application of taxes and other government powers to a society's needs and possibilities. And all are showing "ominous signs of decay," she warns.

"A culture is unsalvageable if stabilizing forces themselves become ruined.... I have written this cautionary book in hopeful expectations that time remains for corrective actions."

The nuclear family, Ms. Jacobs writes, has been rigged to fail by public policies that, unintentionally, force both parents to work to meet financial needs for themselves and their children. Families, she says, are forced into car-dependent suburbs, stripped of public supports through reduced services and provided fewer and fewer opportunities to get together and build a sense of community.

Universities now serve employers and act as colleges of heraldry, giving graduates a coat of arms to distinguish them from the underclass, but not educating them. They're credential factories, Ms. Jacobs says -- stripping the music, poetry, ethics, idealism and notion of the public good out of education....

Jane Jacobs has just turned 88. She was born on May 4, 1916, in Scranton, Pa. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* was published in 1961, now considered perhaps the most influential book about cities of the 20th century.

### **Discernment's Commentary**

Most thinking people would agree that these are indeed ominous signs in our society. We take so much for granted and yet what we have is as fragile as life itself. In a moment it can disappear.

Our burden has been for the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is only as alive and well as it remains faithful to that which has been laid out in the Word of God. In an effort to be "relevant" to the society, the emphasis has changed. Just as the prophets in the Old Testament delivered a message that was "negative" – they were speaking the truth. As a result they never found themselves popular in the society in which they lived. Yet, God used them as instruments of His everlasting mercy to call His people to repentance. Hebrews 11:35-38 gives a vivid picture of the life of the Old Testament prophets.

*And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.*

Obviously the people did not want to hear what the prophets had to say. Their desire was to go their own way, make their own decisions and forsake the covenant they had made with their God and break His commandments.

In the last century we have had warnings from "prophets" of God. These warnings are for the Church today also.

### ***THE STATE OF THE CHURCH (1911)***

Andrew Murray in his book *The State of the Church* (a challenging treatise on revitalizing the church for its ministry of intercession and completing the Great Commission grew out of the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh, Scotland in 1911), quotes from different authors and also laments what he observes in the church already in his time.

On page 40 Andrew Murray quotes from Dr. J. P. Forsyth in his book *The Cruciality of the Cross*. "...The grace of God cannot return to our preaching, or to our faith, until we recover from what has almost gone from our general, familiar and current religion, what liberalism has quite lost – I mean a genuine sense of the holiness of God. This holiness of God is the real foundation; it is certainly the ruling interest of the Christian religion. Have our churches lost that seal: Are we producing reform, social or theological, faster than we are producing faith? We are not seeking first the kingdom of God and His holiness, but only carrying on – with very expensive and noisy machinery – a "kingdom-of-God industry." We are merely running the kingdom and running it without the cross. We have the old trademark, but what does that matter in a dry and thirsty land where no water is, if the artesian well on our premises is growing dry?"

Page 52. "... The state of the church, its ignorance and its neglect and its rejection of the cross – does it not move you? Its lack of the sense of holiness and crucifixion to the world, its neglect of the blessed truth of the Holy Spirit – does it not move you? Its lack of loyalty to the Lord Jesus, its terrible weakness in prayer – do these not give some of us a burden that we cannot bear? ...Oh that God would raise up men who could, as with a trumpet voice, sound out this last word of Christ, "Ye shall receive power when the Holy Spirit is come upon you!" The church needs to be led to return to the cross, with its crucifixion to the world, and to yield itself to the glorious task of carrying the cross in triumph to the ends of the earth. ...[T]he revival we need is the revival of holiness, in which the consecration of the whole being is to the service of Christ. For this there will be needed a new style of preaching – in which the promises of God to dwell in His people, and to sanctify them for Himself, will take a place which they do not now have."

#### **Discernment's Commentary:**

While doing some research on the biblical concept of sanctification, Sarah Leslie recently re-discovered some significant comments by the late Dr. Francis Schaeffer. Dr. Schaeffer had a penetrating insight into the modern-day church. First, he had an excellent understanding of church history, and the rise of the modern western culture from the time of the Reformation onward. It was his unique ability to position the church in the context of the cultural upheavals

of the past 500 years that gave him wisdom about the crises facing the present age. Often Dr. Schaeffer's comments proved to be prophetic, as he predicted, based upon his knowledge of history and philosophy, what might happen to the church in the ensuing years. The reader may be startled by the surprising current relevance of these 30+ year-old quotes dating back to the early 1970s.

### ***TRUE SPIRITUALITY (1971)***

On true sanctification -- which biblical simplicity stands in stark contrast to the covenants and formulas, inventories and profiles, running amok in the new style churches:

"Whatever may be the mark of sin in me at any point, whenever I find these marks upon me in any situation, I am not at a dead end. The blood of Jesus Christ can cleanse me from all true guilt, not just once, but as many times as I need. There is always the possibility of a truly new start within a totally rational framework. Thank God that there is always this possibility, upon the basis of the infinite value of the blood of Jesus Christ shed on Calvary's cross." (p. 334)

On true shepherding— as Dr. Schaeffer observed the rise of the shepherding movement from its earliest days:

"The church is not to be a place of chaos; it is to be a place of order. We read in 1 Peter 5:1-3: "The elders who are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight of it, not by constraint but willingly; not for filthy lucre but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock." Here we see in the relationship of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ that there is relationship of office; but in the midst of this Peter pleads with the elders to keep the personal relationship alive and real. ...[B]oth the preaching elders and the ruling elders are "ministers," and the word "minister" denotes a personal relationship; it does not speak of dominance." (p. 348)

### ***THE NEW SUPER-SPIRITUALITY (1972)***

On the "New Bourgeois" -- which could also define business guru Peter Drucker's "Knowledge Workers" – an elite group who are being targeted by the mega-church growth movement:

"What, then, was the result of the failure of the two 1960 sociological movements, ideological drug-taking and the New Left? What is the result through the 1970s and into the 1980s? There is the rise of a New Bourgeois. This bourgeois has a life-style different from the old bourgeois. The New Bourgeois may take drugs on the weekends, be hedonistic and promiscuous in sexual matters; but the essential nature of the old and new bourgeois values is the same. Both the

new and the old bourgeois uphold the two cardinal values of personal peace and affluence. The curious thing is that the younger generation has come around in a hard, tight circle, from hating the plastic culture and hating the older generation's values of personal peace and affluence to an adoption of those same characteristics, but often one notch lower." (p. 385)

On the rise of mysticism, and death of reason – which is a defining characteristic of the New Evangelicalism:

"The death of drug optimism and the decline of the New Left at the end of the 1960s has given rise to another crucial factor. A transcendental mysticism (which took many forms) came to the fore. Basically, what unites the various forms of transcendental mysticism is a down-playing or denial of reason." (p. 387)

What was right about the Old Pentecostalism – keen observations by Dr. Schaeffer:

"As a movement, it was born in the early part of this century and has since been growing. I think it has tended to make a mistake in emphasizing external signs and manifestations as *tests of spirituality* [emphasis in original]. One was often considered a second-class Christian if he or she did not have the accepted external marks. But a very strong positive thing is that the old Pentecostals taught a great deal of basic Christian doctrinal content. Content was their prime test for fellowship and acceptance; you had to hold the right doctrine, or you were not accepted in the church or allowed to be a pastor. The old Pentecostals placed a tremendously strong emphasis on the content of Scripture, and that became a dynamic source of evangelism..." (p. 390)

On the New Pentecostalism—the new Gnostic definitions of what it means to be "spiritual":

"With the rise of the new Pentecostalism, we have something different. Often the new Pentecostals put their emphasis on the external signs themselves instead of on content, and they make these external signs the *test for fellowship and acceptance* [emphasis in original]." (p. 390)

Why modern-day ecumenism is so easy – a key observation by Dr. Schaeffer:

"One can also see a parallel between some of the new Pentecostals and the liberals. The liberal theologians don't believe in content or religious truth. They are really existentialists using theological, Christian terminology. Consequently, not believing in truth, they can enter into fellowship with any other experience-oriented group using religious language." (p. 390)

On the dangerous lack of biblical content in New Pentecostalism:

"As we look to the people caught up in the new Pentecostalism, we certainly cannot say that many of them are not Christians. I am completely sure that many of them are, but we are impressed with the fact that many have very little content to their faith; everything is experience—emotion (or emotionalism) is the base....But when we come to those who are caught up in this kind of Christian Pentecostalism, we find that as we talk to them and ask them how they know that they are Christians, so very often they speak solely about their own experiences and their own emotions and not about truth." (p. 391)

An early warning about the concept of "Spiritual Direction":

"Churches today tend to not have enough (and proper) discipline. ...In contrast to this, other groups have started which have too much discipline. The idea is that you can make people spiritual if you just make the walls high enough to deny contact with the people round about. ...In... extreme groups the elders must approve all marriages.... In other places it is less dramatic, but there is a tendency to place each person directly under the spiritual direction of another individual. I'm sure this is helpful in some instances, but the danger of too much discipline is present. This, of course, was the old Roman Catholic system, with each person having a confessor. And in all such cases, the danger is that the individual is cut off from the direct direction of the Lord." (p. 392-3)

On the dangers of over-reaction to existential Christianity by treating Christianity as a mere "system" – which we see in the rapid rise of systems-based Christianity (Purpose-Driven and faith-based movements):

"I'm desperately afraid of over-reaction, overstressing the intellect, overstressing the cultural emphasis, treating Christianity as if it were only a system. Christianity is a system, but it isn't only a system. God is there, and we must be in a living relationship to Him. Consequently, as we see the new super-spirituality, the danger is that we will overreact and underemphasize the work of the Holy Spirit." (p. 399)

### **Discernment's Commentary**

What is the most frightening is that when truth is rejected, hearts become hardened. The opposite of truth is "a lie". The 400 prophets in I Kings 22 all had a "lying spirit" and only prophesied good. They told the kings what they wanted to hear. When King Ahab sent a messenger to get Micaiah, the messenger told him to be like the other prophets and only prophecy good. Because Micaiah gave the truth, he was put in prison and fed the bread of affliction. Yet, what he said

came to past. Jude vs 11-13 describes the false prophets: *“Woe unto them! ...These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.”*

Departure from truth is a downward spiral. There are those today who only want to hear a “positive” message – even if that message is a lie. It is frightening to read about them in Romans 1:28-32 *“And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; fully of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.”*

Church, return to the Gospel of Jesus Christ! Only the truth can set you free. Not men’s wisdom which is borrowed from the world system. *“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”* Philippians 2:5-8.

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## The Old Cross and the New

[Below are selected excerpts from A. W. Tozer, *The Best of A.W. Tozer – Book one*. Compiled by Warren W. Wiersbe.]

All unannounced and mostly undetected there has come in modern times a new cross into popular evangelical circles. It is like the old cross, but different: the likenesses are superficial; the differences, fundamental.

From this new cross has sprung a new philosophy of Christian life, and from that new philosophy has come a new evangelical technique—a new type of meeting and a new kind of preaching. This new evangelism employs the same language as the old, but its content is not the same and its emphasis not as before.

The old cross would have no truck with the world. For Adam’s proud flesh it meant the end of the journey. It carried into effect the sentence imposed by the law of Sinai. The new cross is not opposed to the human race; rather, it is a friendly pal and, if understood aright, it is the source of oceans of good clean fun and innocent enjoyment. It lets Adam live without interference. His life motivation is unchanged; he still lives for his own pleasure, only now he takes delight in singing choruses and watching religious movies instead of singing bawdy songs and drinking hard liquor. The accent is still on enjoyment, though the fun is now on a higher plane morally if not intellectually.

The new cross encourages a new and entirely different evangelistic approach. The evangelist does not demand abnegation of the old life before a new life can be received. He preaches not contrasts but similarities. He seeks to key into public interest by showing that Christianity makes no unpleasant demands; rather, it offers the same thing the world does, only on a higher level. Whatever the sin-mad world happens to be clamoring after at the moment is cleverly shown to be the very thing the gospel offers, only the religious product is better.

The new cross does not slay the sinner, it redirects him. It gears him into a cleaner and jollier way of living and saves his self-respect. To the self-assertive it says, “Come and assert yourself for Christ.” To the egotist it says, “Come and do your boasting in the Lord.” To the thrill-seeker it says, “Come and enjoy the thrill of Christian fellowship.” The Christian message is slanted in the direction of the current vogue in order to make it acceptable to the public.

The philosophy back of this kind of thing may be sincere but its sincerity does not save it from being false. It is false because it is blind. It misses completely the whole meaning of the cross.

The old cross is a symbol of death. It stands for the abrupt, violent end of a human being. The man in Roman times who took up his cross and started down the road had already said good-bye to his friends. He was not coming back. He was going out to have it ended. The cross made no compromise, modified nothing, spared nothing; it slew all of man, completely and for good. It did not try to keep on good terms with its victim. It struck cruel and hard, and when it had finished its work, the man was no more.

The race of Adam is under death sentence. There is no commutation and no escape. God cannot approve any of the fruits of sin, however innocent they may appear or beautiful to the eyes of men. God salvages the individual by liquidating him and then raising him again to newness of life.

That evangelism which draws friendly parallels between the ways of God and the ways of men is false to the Bible and cruel to the souls of its hearers. The faith of Christ does not parallel the world, it intersect it. In coming to Christ we do not bring our old life up to a higher plane; we leave it on the cross. The corn of wheat must fall into the ground and die.

We who preach the gospel must not think of ourselves as public relations agents sent to establish good will between Christ and the world. We must not imagine ourselves commissioned to make Christ acceptable to big business, the press, the world of sports or modern education. We are not diplomats but prophets, and our message is not a compromise but an ultimatum.

God offers life, but not an improved old life. The life He offers is a life of death. It stands always on the far side of the cross. Whoever would possess it must pass under the rod. He must repudiate himself and concur in God's just sentence against him.

What does this mean to the individual, the condemned man who would find life in Christ Jesus? How can this theology be translated into life? Simply, he must repent and believe. He must forsake his sins and then go on to forsake himself. Let him cover nothing, defend nothing, excuse nothing. Let him not seek to make terms with God, but let him bow his head before the stroke of God's stern displeasure and acknowledge himself worthy to die.

Having done this let him gaze with simple trust upon the risen Saviour, and from Him will come life and rebirth and cleansing power. The cross that ended the earthly life of Jesus now puts an end to the sinner; and the power that raised Christ from the dead now raises him to a new life along with Christ.

To any who may object to this or count it merely a narrow and private view of truth, let me say God has set His hallmark of approval upon the message from Paul's day to the present. Whether stated in these exact words or not, this has been the content of all preaching that has brought life and power to the world through the centuries....Let us preach the old cross and we will know the old power.

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## **Please Entertain Us!**

By Anton Bosch

*"So it happened, when their hearts were merry, that they said, "Call for Samson, that he may perform for us." So they called for Samson from the prison, and he performed for them. And they stationed him between the pillars." (Judges 16:25, NKJV)*

From the earliest times the world has looked at men of God as a form of entertainment. No doubt Noah had become a local curiosity as people came by to see this crazy man building a huge ship on dry land, and it is likely that his messages of righteousness provided entertainment to those who came heckle this godly man. The Philistines also found blind Samson very entertaining as they led him about to perform circus-type acts for their amusement. But both these men were not there to amuse the world, but were instruments of God's glorious purposes. Many flocked to see John the Baptist in his eccentric clothing and hear his "different" message. Jesus challenged them as to what they expected to see. *"What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments?" (Luke 7:24-26, NKJV)* Many traveled some distance to see this eccentric man, but once again, he was not there for their amusement but had a powerful and crucial message.

Jesus was openly challenged to perform miracles – mostly for their entertainment value. But already during His temptation He refused to jump from the temple in order to build His work on the spectacular. To the Pharisees He says: *"A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah." And He left them and departed.*" (Matthew 16:4, NKJV). Paul found himself under the same pressure to perform signs and display his wisdom in order to amuse the people. He likewise refused and preached the cross which was attractive only to those who would be saved, but objectionable to the rest.

Today, however, it seems that entertainment has become the very essence of what church is all about. Over and over we hear the gurus of church-growth preach the mantra that we must entertain people if we are to attract them and keep them in the church. And so preachers fall over themselves to find some form of edge that will attract more people to their church. Multimedia shows, plays, professional musical performances, dancing girls and an exciting environment which appeals to all the senses are but a few of the gimmicks that are used to draw and keep people. The "sermon" has to be short, entertaining and affirming – if there is to be one at all. And of course it works – very few can resist a free meal, an excellent show, unchallenging environment and large crowds where everyone is loved and accepted.

This entertainment bias is clearly evident in the architecture of modern churches. Pews have made way for theatre seating, complete with cup holders – not for the Lord's cup but for coffee. A stage and stage lighting has replaced the pulpit and in stead of a cross we now have multimedia screens. In the more "conservative" congregations the lectern it is made of Plexiglas in order to afford an uninterrupted view of the orator in place of a simple wooden pulpit behind which the preacher used to hide his shaking

knees as he stood in the awesome position of having to speak the Word of God.

Churches are no longer amateurs at the entertainment business. They are able to compete with the best of the malls, theme parks and theatres. Multi-million dollar facilities, professional and full-time “technical directors”, “music and arts directors” and the best coffee in town don’t fail to impress even the most world-weary techno junkies. I, myself, sometimes visit some of these buildings as a curiosity and they never fail to amaze me with their opulence and technical sophistication.

Preachers also rate amongst the best entertainers in the world. Sometimes when surfing the channels on the TV, I find some preacher who is able to hold my attention for a bit longer than most secular shows. I find them entertaining, not as ministers of God’s holy Word, but purely as entertainers. The choreography of their every move, the power of their oratory, the way they work the audience and the spectacular auditoriums make for far better viewing than many other shows. If only it were not so sad! Is this what the church has become – a freak show and a circus? What would Jesus do if He had to step into one of these environments? I think He would make himself a whip out of the optic fiber and coax cables and drive the actors far from His house, or would He? Maybe not. No, He is simply standing outside the church, knocking quietly and calling people to come out to identify with the One who was despised and rejected of men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

If you find yourself in such a place, then get out of there as soon as you can before you are bitten by the bug which demands ever more sensual stimulation and less of the true Word of God. If you think your church is boring but the leaders preach and teach the Word and uphold Christ and Him crucified don’t complain when things get boring. Sometimes sound doctrine has to be endured (2 Tim 4:3) and even Paul had folk fall asleep during his messages. Be grateful that you have leaders who still preach the Bible and pray for them that they will have courage to speak the truth and to speak it forcefully and clearly.

If you are in a leadership position, don’t be pressurized to pander to the whims and fleshly desires of people who do not really mean business with the Lord. Don’t feel you have to spice up your messages with gimmicks or cut them short to allow for the many forms of entertainment that have become not only customary, but expected in churches today. Preach the crucified and resurrected Christ. Preach the full council of God with conviction and anointing. Don’t be tempted to repackage the message in order to make it more acceptable. Be whom God has gifted you to be and not what people want you to be.

All this of course does not mean we should be objectionable and crude. We must present the message as clearly as possible and if technology can help without becoming the focus of attention and without draining the financial resources, then let’s use the tools at our disposal. But we need more than amplifiers and projectors, we need men who know their God, are full of the Holy Spirit and have the courage to walk the narrow way of the cross. Without this, we may as well join the entertainment business!

*“As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these would compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ... but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”* (Galatians 6:12-14, NKJV)

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### **Discernment’s new website:**

A very hearty thanks to Steve Muse of Eastern Regional Watch Ministries, who now has recently set up a new and improved website for Discernment Ministries. All of our back newsletters are being posted one at a time. Soon we will have a full archive of back issues, which contain important history on the modern signs & wonders movement, the rise of false prophets, Gnosticism, and the church growth movement.

Put a bookmark in your web browser for:  
<http://www.discernment-ministries.org>

A full catalog of Discernment publications and materials is now posted on this website.

### **Discernment’s new office:**

We have moved to West Lafayette, Indiana. You can now contact the Discernment Ministries office by telephone at: **765-583-4799.**

*The Library is still accepting books and research materials. Any material you want to donate to the library please send to: Pinebrook Assembly of God, c/o Vic Huntley, 116 City Hill, Naugatuck, CT 06770.*

**DISCERNMENT SEMINAR to be held July 1 and 2 in Lafayette, Indiana. The March-April newsletter will have full details Speakers will include: Sandy Simpson (Hawaii); Sarah & Lynn Leslie and Jewel Grewe.**

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**January/February 2005**

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