

Bible-Believing Liberals

by Todd Wilken

When a thing grows weak and out of date, it is obviously soon going to disappear. That's also true of churches. If a church cannot change, it will eventually die.

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Clearly change in both liturgy and structure is inevitable, and this change will probably be radical, if not total. ...the forms the Church assumed in the past inevitably must die.

One of these statements comes from a famous Christian liberal, the other comes from a famous Christian conservative. Without peeking at the footnotes, which statement belongs to the conservative and which belongs to the liberal?

You can't tell, can you?

How can this be? One is against abortion, human cloning, embryonic stem-cell research and gay marriage and against removing the words "under God" from the Pledge of Allegiance and "In God We Trust" from the currency. The other is in favor of all these things. One calls himself "Bible-believing." The other thinks the Bible is a myth. Yet both say that the church must change or die.¹

Full-blown liberal Christians are easy to spot. They will tell you up front that they don't believe what the Bible says. *But what about liberals who think that they are conservative? What about the liberals who claim to be Bible-believing Christians?*

Many Christians today think of themselves as conservative. They are pro-life, pro-family. They listen to Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity. They watch FOX News. They vote traditional values. But can you be *politically, socially and morally* conservative without being *theologically* conservative? Oh, yes you can.

Meet the Bible-believing liberals. While they believe that the culture needs to return to its historic traditions, they think the Church needs to abandon hers. While maintaining that the Flag should be proudly displayed, they fear that a cross in Church might offend seekers. While they believe men and women have defined roles in marriage and family, they don't see why a woman can't replace a man in the pulpit. While outraged that our schools cater to the lowest-common denominator, they think our churches need to be geared toward the unchurched. They believe that public policy should be based on objective facts, but preaching should be based on felt needs. They want "under God" in Pledge of Allegiance, but omit the Apostles' Creed from the Sunday service. They want the Ten Commandments in the public square, but are unconcerned when those commandments are replaced with "principles for living" in the pulpit. To the Bible-believing liberal, the ceremonies of a Presidential inauguration are meaningful and inspiring, but the Sunday morning liturgy is boring. For the Bible-believing liberal, the differences between political parties are serious, but the differences

between Christian denominations are petty. While they insist on a strict literal interpretation of the US Constitution, they play fast and loose with the Bible and its theology, even while maintaining its inerrancy and inspiration. These are the Bible-believing liberals.

A Contradiction in Terms

Now, I know what you're thinking. "Bible-believing liberal" is an oxymoron, right? You can't be truly Bible-believing and be liberal at the same time.

THAT is the point.

You see, many Christians think of themselves as conservative Christians. But they have confused *cultural* conservatism with *theological* conservatism. Theologically these Bible-believing Christians have a lot in common with liberals.

I had been thinking about this for some months. Then, during a conversation with Gene Edward Veith, he said something that made it all clear. Dr. Veith was describing the old-line liberals in the 20th century:

In the churches there was a sense of panic, that "Oh people, the culture's changing! So if we're gonna survive, we've got to go along with the culture." And so you had a movement in the Christian church to change Christianity according to the dominant culture... And that's what liberalism is: changing your theology to fit whatever the culture is.²

I suddenly realized that Dr. Veith was also describing many Bible-believing Christians today. "That's what liberalism is: changing your theology to fit whatever the culture is." He was describing Bible-believing liberals.

William Tighe recently observed of old-line liberals:

Liberals do think, since in their view there is no divine revelation with specific, objective and if one wants to use the term, propositional content, since its all a matter of feeling, you can't cling to any definitions, any confessional formulas. And since they're always invoking the Holy Spirit, chasing the Holy Spirit... since everything for them is the revelation of the Holy Spirit in the world, they play the game of "here He is on the plain," "here He is on the mountain," and the only thing they have to go by are social trends, which for them is where God is at, and the Church has to keep up with it.³

But exactly the same thing could be said of many otherwise "conservative" Christians today. Yes, they still affirm the divine revelation of the Bible in principle. But theologically, they have adopted the liberal's way of thinking. John Armstrong has also noticed this:

At the end of the last century theological liberalism told us that we needed to make Christianity attractive, or acceptable, to its "cultured despisers." This type of concern was not new. The very tension of "being in the world" but "not of the world" has always been with the church. What was new was the way liberalism decided to advance the church before the world, namely by reinterpreting the message of the cross in the light of the world's understanding and belief system. ...One of the most blatant examples of the compromise which flows out of this can be seen in 1966 World

Council of Churches dictum: "The world must set the agenda for the church." I would suggest that this idea, formulated in the crucible of ecumenical dialogue between light and darkness, is not far from the "seeker sensitive" approach adopted through the Church Growth ideology of contemporary evangelicals.⁴

The fact that so many otherwise "conservative" Christians fail to see the similarity between themselves and liberals is remarkable. The fact that so many Bible-believing liberals fail to see the disparity between their cultural beliefs and their theological beliefs is astonishing. But there is a reason for it.

How "Bible-Believing" are They?

Bible believing liberals affirm Scripture's inspiration and inerrancy. That is the main reason they consider themselves conservative Christians. "After all," they think, "I can't be a liberal! Liberals deny Scripture."

But there is more than one way to deny Scripture. Mike Horton has written about "the practical denial" of Scripture.⁵

While evangelicals and other conservative Protestants hold to a high doctrine of Scripture in principle, the last two decades have especially seen a growing disregard for making their sermons expositions of Scripture; rather, it's often the case that the Bible is used as a sourcebook of quotations for what we really want to say.⁶

You see, you can affirm Scripture's authority in principle even while denying it in practice.⁷ Bible-believing liberals aren't liberal in what they say about the Bible, Bible-believing liberals are liberal in how they use the Bible. Here's an example.

About ten years ago, G. A. Pritchard wrote a landmark book on the most influential megachurch in America, Willow Creek Community Church. He wrote of the staff and people of Willow Creek:

It would not be accurate or fair to depict them as theologically liberal. Liberal Christianity denies central Christian truth claims. However, there is a lack of emphasis on Christian truth at Willow Creek.⁸

Nevertheless, in some cases, Willow Creek's "lack of emphasis" ends up looking a lot like denial—as in the case of Pastor Nancy Beach. About the time Pritchard was publishing his book, Nancy Beach became one of Willow Creek's teaching pastors.⁹

You ask, "How did Bible-believing Willow Creek end up with a woman pastor?" Here's how. Willow Creek had women elders since it's founding. But in the mid-1990s a debate began over the inclusion of women at all levels of leadership. Dr. Gilbert Bilezikian is a founding member of Willow Creek and its resident theologian. In his 1985 book, *Beyond Sex Roles*, Bilezikian argued (among other things) that women should be pastors. Bilezikian's method was to highlight the apparent contradictions in Paul's epistles. For example, He writes:

*...the juxtaposition of Paul's approval of women prophesying with this absolute command for women not to speak in church and to remain silent as a sign of their subordination constitutes a monumental contradiction that only a state of mental dislocation could explain...*¹⁰

In time, Bilezikian's view and his way of reading the Bible won acceptance at Willow Creek:

*In January 1996, John Ortberg, one of Willow Creek's teaching elders, taught a two-hour class to church ministry leaders, in which he said that staff needed to share the convictions of the church, or study until they shared those convictions; and they had a year to do so.*¹¹

The result of that study was a position paper. That paper is a classic example of how liberals read the Bible:

*The statement makes clear the church's belief that "when the Bible is interpreted comprehensively, it teaches the full equality of men and women in status, giftedness, and opportunity for ministry," despite "a few scriptural texts [that] appear to restrict the full ministry freedom of women."*¹²

Willow Creek affirms the authority of Scripture.¹³ But notice how they use Scripture. Paul's epistles only "appear" to restrict the pastoral office to men. But that appearance disappears "when the Bible is interpreted comprehensively." This is just another way of saying, "If we disregard the scriptural texts that say women can't be pastors, we discover that they *can* be pastors!"¹⁴

Bible-believing liberals don't deny the inerrancy or inspiration of Scripture. They just interpret the Bible "comprehensively" to make it say what they want. In the case of Willow Creek, interpreting the Bible "comprehensively" means explaining away Bible passages that forbid what you want to do. Bible-believing liberals are Bible-believing in principle, but liberal in practice.

In the 1970s liberal denominations used this reasoning to introduce the ordination of women. Today they are using the same reasoning to introduce the ordination of homosexuals. Will Bible-believing liberals follow suit?

The leaders of Willow Creek insist that these changes have nothing to do with the changing culture. But I ask, "Then why have you changed your view on women in the Church? Why have you departed from the historic interpretation of Paul's teaching on women? What changed?" The answer is, of course, the culture changed. The culture changes and Bible-believing liberals change to keep up with it. Remember Dr. Veith's words. "That's what liberalism is: changing your theology to fit whatever the culture is." Pritchard concludes:

*A serious critique of American culture from a Christian perspective is generally absent at Willow Creek. The fundamental reason for this failure is that Creekers do not think critically with the categories and content of Christian theology*¹⁵

Like it or not, many Bible-believing Christians are thinking and acting just like liberals. What else do many Bible-believing Christians have in common with liberals?

Doctrinal Minimalism and Meiderlin's Maxim

"In things essential, unity; in doubtful, liberty; in all things, charity." This is a truism for many Christians today. It is often attributed to Saint Augustine. But Augustine never said it. In truth, this saying's origins are more recent—in early German liberalism.

The real author of this sentiment was a 17th century Lutheran, Peter Meiderlin. Meiderlin's lived during a time of doctrinal compromise and unionism between Lutherans and the Reformed. Meiderlin was disturbed by the doctrinal debates taking place and thought that insistence on doctrinal purity was satanic. Meiderlin counseled a minimalist approach to doctrine: "In a word, were we to observe unity in essentials, liberty in incidentals, and in all things charity, our affairs would be certainly in a most happy situation."¹⁶

Liberal Christians have taken Meiderlin's maxim to heart. But so have many Bible-believing Christians. When it comes to doctrine, they don't sweat the details. And, just like liberals, when Bible-believing Christians talk about "unity in essentials" it isn't altogether clear what those "essentials" are.

Bishop T. D. Jakes was the keynote speaker for Willow Creek's August 2004 Leadership Summit. Jakes is a best selling author, a megachurch pastor and a popular televangelist. Willow Creek's bookstore, "Seeds," sells dozens of different books, tapes, CDs and DVDs by Jakes. The only problem is, Jakes denies the biblical doctrine of the Trinity.¹⁷

Is the Trinity "essential" or "incidental" at Willow Creek? To be sure, Willow Creek affirms the Trinity in its public statements.¹⁸ But remember, what Bible-believing liberals affirm in principle, they often deny in practice.

Meiderlin's maxim assumes that false teaching is benign. Instead, the real danger comes from those who point out doctrinal error. Rick Warren has said:

*Some of the most cantankerous Christians that I know are veritable storehouses of Bible knowledge, but they have not applied it. They can give you facts and quotes, and they can argue doctrine. But they're angry; they're very ugly people.*¹⁹

We've heard liberals say it for years; now we're hearing Bible-believing Christians say it: Doctrine divides. That is, insistence on doctrinal clarity and purity is divisive. On this subject, Warren echoes Meiderlin's maxim: "I'm not going to get into a debate over the non-essentials. I won't try to change other denominations. Why be divisive?"²⁰

Warren downplays "supposed theological conflicts" between Christians. He sees them as a product of our limited knowledge of God. He dismisses such differences by appealing to how "awesome" God is:

*On earth we "see though a glass darkly" so we all need a large dose of humility in dealing with our differences. God's ways are awesome and far beyond human mental capabilities. He has no problem reconciling the supposed theological conflicts that we debate when ideas don't fit neatly into our logical, rational systems.*²¹

This sounds broadminded but is really complete nonsense. Can God reconcile a theology that says man is totally depraved with one that says he isn't? Can God reconcile a theology that teaches faith alone with one that teaches faith and works? Warren's idea would fit right in at the World Council of Churches —one of their latest documents says essentially the same thing as Warren:

*...a more recent ecumenical vision includes the search for a new paradigm and image which could accommodate a diversity of truths under the same roof without diluting or annihilating any in the process of trying to bring them into convergence, for the sake of reaching one common and binding apostolic truth.*²²

We've heard liberals say it for years; now we're hearing Bible-believing Christians say it: Let's agree to disagree. A Willow Creek event demonstrated recently how far this idea can go. Shortly after the terrorist attacks of 2001, Bill Hybels invited a local Muslim imam, Fisal Hammouda, to speak at a weekend service. During the service the imam asserted, "We [Muslims] believe in Jesus, more than you do in fact." Hybels ventured to disagree, but the misimpression stuck. "I didn't know they believed in Jesus," church member Elizabeth Perez, 60, said after the service. "I thought it was interesting how much we have in common."²³

Don Matzat summed up the doctrinal minimalism of Bible-believing liberals well:

*Successful evangelical pastors like Bill Hybels and Robert Schuller are really no different than the successful modern liberal clergy, like Sloan Coffin and Harry Enwerson Fosdick. While Coffin and Fosdick built their congregations by appealing to human reason, Hybels and Schuller "grow a church" by appealing to the feelings and experience of people. While the classic liberal pastor questioned on the basis of reason the truth of traditional Christian doctrine, the postmodern pastor ignores doctrine and focuses on methods which produce success.*²⁴

The Mission Justifies the Means

In 2004 Pastor James Perry made an impassioned plea to his church:

*What would it be like if we had a moratorium on issues that divide us, and spent all our time and energy focusing on reaching out to those in our world who feel like outcasts, and share God's love with them? It is my hope that we will be more concerned about extending God's Grace than getting it right.*²⁵

Was Perry was arguing for more evangelism? Was Perry pleading for greater mission efforts? Not really. Perry was speaking at the 2004 General Conference of the United Methodist Church in Pittsburgh, arguing for the full inclusion of active homosexuals in the church. For Perry, discussing what the Bible says about homosexuality was getting in the way of "extending God's Grace."

We've heard liberals say it for years; now we're hearing Bible-believing Christians say it: the church is justified in using whatever means it deems necessary to carry out its mission. Again, Mike Horton describes this mindset well:

Increasingly, we hear that what unites us is mission, not theology. Doctrinal diversity is encouraged, as long as we can all agree on the mission and its methods. "Mission" and "evangelism" are in danger of being exploited as "get out of jail free" cards for any capitulation to the culture that we can imagine.²⁶

The ecumenical movement and liberal church bodies have been doing this for decades.²⁷ But today, it is common to hear the same "Mission justifies the means" argument from conservative Christians. Mark Mittelberg writes:

The redemptive mission of the church is simply too important to let fear and traditional strongholds keep us from examining everything in light of our biblical, God-directed vision.²⁸

Notice the phrase, "our biblical God-directed vision." Whatever happened to examining everything in light of the Bible itself? The mission blueprint has replaced the Bible; it must. For the Bible-believing liberal, the mission justifies the means.

Rick Warren is famous for saying, "never criticize what God is blessing"²⁹ Warren uses his congregation's mission success to justify the sloppy doctrine in his books:

I knew that by simplifying doctrine in a devotional format for the average person, I ran the risk of either understating or overstating some truths. I'm sure I have done that. ...But I decided when I planted Saddleback in 1980 that I'd rather reach large numbers of people for Christ than seek the approval of religious traditionalists. In the past eight years, we've baptized over 11,000 new adult believers at our church.³⁰

For the Bible-believing liberal, all means are neutral—even "understating or overstating some truths." The mission (and it's apparent success) justifies it. George Barna likewise urges the Church,

It is ...critical that we keep in mind a fundamental principal of Christian communication: the audience, not the message, is sovereign... our message has to be adapted to the needs of the audience.³¹

Therefore, Barna sees anything but the most pragmatic concerns as a waste of time:

...it behooves us to not waste time bickering about techniques and processes, but to study methods by which we can glorify our King and comply with the Great Commission.³²

And C. Peter Wagner, father of the church growth movement, agrees:

... we ought to see clearly that the end DOES justify the means. What else possible could justify the means? If the method I am using accomplishes the goal I am aiming at, it is for that reason a good method. If, on the other hand, my method is not accomplishing the goal, how can I be justified in continuing to use it?³³

Among Bible-believing liberals the "mission" not only justifies whatever approach seems to work, it also serves as a convenient way to discredit critics. Mark Mittelberg describes those who raise concerns about the means:

For a variety of reasons, some people will be unable to go along with you and the other leaders in your efforts to reach lost people... There are some people who profess to be Christians yet who don't care one whit about people outside God's family. They are typically self-centered people who think that the church revolves around them and exists solely to meet their needs, and everyone else can go to hell—literally.³⁴

The Bible-believing liberal says, "I am justified in using whatever means I deem necessary to carry out the church's mission. If you oppose my means, you are opposing the mission."

"God Loves You" —A gospel without Sin

John Shelby Spong, perhaps the most liberal Christian liberal alive today, writes:

*The language of original sin and atonement has emanated from Christian circles for so long that it has achieved the status of sacred mantra. ...In light of new circumstances, it is merely adjusted, never reconsidered. Yet, upon closer inspection, these sacred concepts involve us in a view of human life that is no longer operative.*³⁵

Joel Osteen, a "Bible-believing" Christian and pastor of the largest megachurch in America, says the same thing in simpler language:

*We've heard a lot about the judgment of God and what we can't do and what's going to keep us out of heaven. But it's time people start hearing about the goodness of God, about a God that loves them. A God that believes in them. A God that wants to help them.*³⁶

Spong wants to do away with the concept of sin altogether. Osteen simply wants to stop talking about it. Instead, Osteen wants to emphasize "the goodness of God":

*God wants us to have healthy, positive self-images, to see ourselves as priceless treasures. He wants us to feel good about ourselves. God knows we're not perfect, that we all have faults and weaknesses; that we all make mistakes. But the good news is, God loves us anyway.*³⁷

And why does the perfect and holy God love us with all our faults and weaknesses? Is it because Jesus lived a perfect life and died a perfect death in our place? No...

*His love for you is based on what you are, not on what you do. He created you as a unique individual —there has never been, nor will there ever be, another person exactly like you... Moreover, God sees you as a champion. He believes in you even more than you believe in yourself!*³⁸

Apparently for Joel Osteen, sin is simply not a problem for God, or for us. Bill Hybels, on the other hand, certainly believes that sin is a problem. But what Bible-believing liberals affirm in principle, they often deny in practice. When an internal survey of Willow Creek members revealed that "large percentages of singles (25 percent of singles, 38 percent of single parents, and 41 percent of divorced individuals) 'admitted having illicit sexual relations in the last six months,'" Hybels failed to focus on the seriousness of sin:

*Hybels did not call the congregation to repent for their rebellion against a holy God. Instead he emphasized God's compassionate love: "We are a love-starved people, with broken hearts that need the kind of repair that only he can give long-term. We need to bring our brokenness out into the light of his grace and truth."*³⁹

Yes, the members in the survey certainly might have been "loved-starved people, with broken hearts," but they were also *fornicators*. When Bible-believing liberals dilute the Bible's message of sin, they also dilute the Bible's message of salvation. The Gospel gets reduced to "God loves you." Hybels' gospel often sounds largely therapeutic:

God satisfies. He does something for us and in us that we can't do for ourselves. God meets inner needs. He quiets restlessness and turmoil. He ministers to longings. He soothes wounds. He calms fears. He satisfies our souls. ⁴⁰

All of this is true, of course, but it's not the whole truth. What's missing? In this gospel, we are presented as unsatisfied, unable, needy, restless, longing, wounded and fearful, *but not sinful*. This is a gospel without sin.

A gospel without sin satisfies sinners, but doesn't save them. A gospel without sin requires a God Who is merely good, not gracious and forgiving. A gospel without sin requires a Jesus who is merely sympathetic, not our substitute at the Cross. A gospel without sin is a gospel wherein Christ crucified is unnecessary. John Shelby Spong realizes this; he has done away the Cross. Maybe this is why Bible-believing liberals are doing away with it too.

The "God loves you" gospel is a gospel that any liberal could love. By contrast, here is what St. Paul says,

*God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in [Christ], and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.*⁴¹

One thing is for sure, Paul was no liberal, Bible-believing or otherwise.

"God loves you" isn't the Gospel. The world is full of unbelievers who firmly believe that God loves them. Pritchard writes in his study of Willow Creek, "all the seekers or weekend attenders I interviewed were convinced that God loves them. They held this belief before coming to Willow Creek."⁴²

"God loves you" will not do. What unbelievers need to know is how God loves them:

*This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.*⁴³

We've heard liberals say it for years: "The Church must change or die. The culture calls the shots. We must re-read the Bible to fit the culture. When it comes to doctrine, don't sweat the details. Our differences don't matter anyway. After all, doctrine divides; it's the mission that really unites us. And when it comes to that mission, we're justified in using whatever means we deem necessary. Remember, people just need to know that God loves them." Now we're hearing Bible-believing Christians saying the very same things.

The old-line liberals considered the Gospel irrational; Bible-believing liberals consider it irrelevant. The old-line liberals criticized the Gospel; Bible-believing liberals are trying to give it a makeover. The old-line liberals tried to deconstruct the Gospel; Bible-believing liberals are trying to reinvent it. Old-line liberals did their best to discredit the Gospel; Bible-believing liberals are doing their best to shift the focus away from the Cross.

Do Bible-believing liberals realize how liberal they really are? No. Are they well intentioned? Certainly! But the some of the old-line liberals were well intentioned too. St. Bernard of Clairvaux said, "Hell is full of good intentions."

When the Church follows the advice of liberals—Bible-believing or otherwise— the Gospel message suffers. When liberals —Bible-believing or otherwise— have their say and have their way, the Cross ends up obscured. When the Cross is obscured sinners go unsaved. This alone is reason enough to turn a deaf ear to the advice of these well-intentioned liberals —Bible-believing or otherwise.

Change or Die?

Bible-believing liberals say, "The Church must change or die." But they cannot tell you what the Church will be preaching 5, 10 or 20 years in the future. No one really knows, it all depends on how things change.

In fact, Bible-believing liberals cannot even say that the Church will be preaching in at all in the future; maybe it will be doing poetry slams, kabuki theater or walking the labyrinth. No one really knows, it all depends on how things change. Do you really want to entrust your children and grandchildren to this kind of a Church?

Bible believing liberals say, "The Church must change or die." But change can't insure the survival of the Church. The survival of the Church depends entirely on the One Who lived and died and lives again forever, the One Who does not change —"Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today and forever."⁴⁴

*Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
Earth's joys grow dim; its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see;
O Thou Who changest not, abide with me.
Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes;
Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies.
Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.*⁴⁵

¹ The first statement belongs to Rick Warren, perhaps the most influential conservative evangelical in the world today. Rick Warren, "First Person: Stifled by Structure," *Baptist Press* September 22, 2003. The second statement belongs to John Shelby Spong, perhaps the most notorious liberal in the world today. John Shelby Spong, *Why Christianity Must Change Or Die: A Bishop Speaks to Believers in Exile*, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998, pp. 198-199.

² Gene Edward Veith, *Issues, Etc.*, Sunday, March 28, 2004, hour 1.

³ William Tighe, *Issues, Etc.*, Monday, April 4, 2005, hour 2.

⁴ John Armstrong, "Trendier-Than-Thou: An Essay," *Premise*, vol. 2, no. 3, March 27, 1995.

⁵ Michael Horton, *A Better Way, Rediscovering the Drama of God-Centered Worship*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002, p. 218.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 214, emphasis mine.

⁷ The first openly gay bishop in the Episcopal Church USA, Gene Robinson, still claims to affirm Scripture's authority: "This is not about the authority of Scripture, this is about the interpretation of Scripture." "New Hampshire's Bishop Gene Robinson," *Fresh Air* radio interview, December 9, 2004.

⁸ G. A. Pritchard, *Willow Creek Seeker Services, Evaluating a New Way of Doing Church*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996, p. 276.

⁹ The Willow Creek web site says, "Nancy Beach's main responsibilities include overseeing the use of creative arts at Willow Creek's services and serving on the church's Management Team. She is also a gifted teacher and speaks at both weekend and New Community services." www.willowcreek.org/teaching_pastors.asp

¹⁰ Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sexual Roles: What the Bible Says About a Woman's Place in Church and Family*, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1985, p. 145, emphasis mine. Bilezikian asserts that women must be ordained for the church to be authentic: "There cannot be authentic community as described in the New Testament without the full inclusion of the constituency of members into the ministry, life, and leadership of the group." Susan Olasky, "Femme Fatale," *World Magazine*, March 29, 1997.

¹¹ Olasky, "Femme Fatale"

¹² *Ibid.*, emphasis mine. At Willow Creek, members are *required* to agree, "that they can joyfully sit under the teaching of women teachers" and "that they can joyfully submit to the leadership of women in various leadership positions." See also, Wayne Grudem, "Willow Creek Requires Egalitarian Position For Staff And New Members But is there a Biblical Basis?" *CBMW News* (now the *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*), vol. 2, no. 5, December 1997, and Roland Cap Ehlke, "A Woman's Place: The Evangelical Debate over the Role of Women in the Church," *Christian Research Journal*, vol. 22, no. 4.

¹³ The Willow Creek website states, "The sole basis of our belief is the Bible, which is uniquely God-inspired, without error, and the final authority on all matters on which it bears." www.willowcreek.org/what_we_believe.asp.

¹⁴ Bill Hybels, Willow Creek's head pastor, has signed, the document, "Men, Women and Biblical Equality" which advocates the ordination of women. Christians for Biblical Equality, "Men, Women and Biblical Equality," Minneapolis, Minnesota: 1989.

¹⁵ Pritchard, *Willow Creek Seeker Services*, p. 272.

¹⁶ Peter Meiderlin's tract was, "A Prayerful Admonition for Peace to the Theologians of the Augsburg Confession." See Hans Rollmann, "In Essentials Unity: The Pre-history of a Restoration Movement Slogan," *Restoration Quarterly*, vol. 39, no. 3, 1997. In the tract Meiderlin recounted a vision in which Satan claimed to be secretly directing the movement for doctrinal purity.

¹⁷ Jerry Buckner, "The Man, His Ministry, and His Movement: Concerns about the Teachings of T. D. Jakes," *Christian Research Journal*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1999. Jakes is also a proponent of the Word-Faith heresy. See also Chris Carmichael, "Willow Creek Bookstore Peddles Error: When Churches Promote Books Instead of The Book," christianunplugged.com/wcbooks.htm

- ¹⁸ "As the Bible teaches, there is one God, eternally existing in three persons — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — each possessing all the attributes of Deity." www.willowcreek.org/what_we_believe.asp
- ¹⁹ Rick, Warren, "Purpose-Driven Preaching: An Interview with Rick Warren," Michael Duduit, *Preaching*, September-October, 2001.
- ²⁰ "This Evangelist has a 'Purpose'," Cathy Grossman, *USA Today*, July 21, 2003.
- ²¹ "A Purpose Driven Phenomena, An Interview with Rick Warren," *Modern Reformation*, January/February 2004.
- ²² Emphasis mine. The document even entertains the argument that Christianity may be, "one of many truths found in various religions or in creation in general. ...in theory these other truths have a similar value and final goal..." WCC Conference on World Missions and Evangelism, *Come, Holy Spirit – Heal and Reconcile: Called in Christ to be Reconciling and Healing Communities*, Preparatory Paper 1, Athens, Greece, May 12-19, 2005, p. 13.
- ²³ Sean Hamill, "Pastor, Imam have Dialogue at Suburban Church," *Chicago Tribune*, October 12, 2001.
- ²⁴ Donald Matzat, "The New Liberals," *Issues Etc. Journal*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1998.
- ²⁵ *Proceedings of the 2004 General Conference of The United Methodist Church*, Tuesday Afternoon Proceedings, 2004 *Daily Edition* vol. 4 no. 6, p. 1770, Perry served as chairman of the Commission on the General Conference.
- ²⁶ Horton, *A Better Way*, p. 215.
- ²⁷ "The ecumenical movement has its origins in the missionary movement, for the contemporary search for the unity of the church was initiated within the framework of the mission endeavour." WCC Conference on World Missions and Evangelism, *Come, Holy Spirit – Heal and Reconcile: Called in Christ to be Reconciling and Healing Communities*, Preparatory Paper 1, Athens, Greece, May 12-19, 2005, p. 1.
- ²⁸ Mark Mittelberg, from *Building a Contagious Church, Revolutionizing the Way We View and Do Evangelism*, Grand rapids: Zondervan, 2000, p. 380.
- ²⁹ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church, Growth without Compromising Your Message & Mission*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995, p. 62.
- ³⁰ "A Purpose Driven Phenomena, An Interview with Rick Warren," *Modern Reformation*, January/February 2004.
- ³¹ George Barna, *Marketing the Church*, Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1988, p. 145.
- ³² *Ibid.*, p. 33.
- ³³ C. Peter Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow - Seven Vital Signs Of A Healthy Church*, Ventura, California: Regal Books, 1976, p. 137.
- ³⁴ Mittelberg, *Building a Contagious Church*, pp. 128-129.
- ³⁵ Spong, *Why Christianity Must Change Or Die*, p. 84.
- ³⁶ www.lakewood.cc/index.htm, emphasis mine.
- ³⁷ Joel Osteen, *Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential*, New York: Warner Faith, 2004, p. 57.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 58. Compare Osteen with Spong: "Religion, I believe, in its highest and purest form calls us to respect the innate dignity of every human being and help them become all that they can be.... I worship God by living, by loving and by being all that I can be." John Shelby Spong on *The O'Reilly Factor*, Wednesday, April 13, 2005.
- ³⁹ Pritchard, *Willow Creek Seeker Services*, p. 264.

⁴⁰ Bill Hybels, *Seven Wonders of the Spiritual World*, Dallas: Word, 1988, p. 137.

⁴¹ Colossians 1:19-22.

⁴² Pritchard, *Willow Creek Seeker Services*, pp. 263-264.

⁴³ 1 John 4:9-10.

⁴⁴ Hebrews 13:8.

⁴⁵ Henry Lyte, "Abide with Me," st. 2 & 8, 1847.