

“Truth without Love is too hard; Love without Truth is too soft”

Living Faith Church

Through

the

Maze

—www.BeyondMormonism.com—

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How to Survive the Culture Wars In a Flat World

I know that Old Fogies tend feel alienated from current culture; there really *is* an age gap. However, I don't think that accounts for the frustration many of us feel trying to survive in a culture that seems anti-Christian. Worse, I am convinced the Evangelical church I have loved since my conversion to Christ thirty years ago is on the ropes. The world, it seems, has pummeled the Church almost beyond recognition. A sophisticated, compromised Christianity threatens the Church of the Redeemed.

A couple of years ago, I wrote about a

new makeover of the Evangelical Church. Many Christian commentators are calling this new phenomenon “The Emerging Church.” In my March, 2009 newsletter I wrote of the Emerging Church in harsh terms, calling it:

“Pathetic & Blasphemous; Confused by Postmodernism, Intimidated by Political Correctness, Greedy for Church Growth, Bitter toward the Evangelical Church, and Hungry for Acceptance—The Emerging Church is simply one more Cult. (If you missed that article, write the word “Emerge” on the purple

card and I will send a copy to you).

In *this* article I want to speculate on at least some the sources of the Emerging (or Emergent) Church, and I want to suggest ways in which Evangelicals can resist this New Age manifestation. If we can't stop it at least I hope we can *survive* it.

* * *

When you buy an item at Walmart, the checker scans the barcode. When she does, an electronic signal orders a replacement for the product—probably

CHRISTIAN LIBERALS (also know as modernists) believe the world has changed so dramatically since the Enlightenment that biblical terminology and creeds are incomprehensible to people today. (See *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, Walter A. Elwell, ed., 1984) pp 631-32.*)

Liberals believe that theological questions cannot be resolved by an appeal to “authority alone.” No questions are closed or settled (such as the Christian response to homosexuality). Reason, experience and science, define truth as much as scripture does (such as Evolution). The “Essence of Christianity” replaces the authority of Scripture. (Ibid 632).

Liberals are “Humanistic Optimists”—they believe in the inherent goodness of man. They base this hopefulness in their conviction that God permeates every aspect of His Creation. They say human society is evolving into the Kingdom of God. (Ibid).

Surveying the Christian Landscape



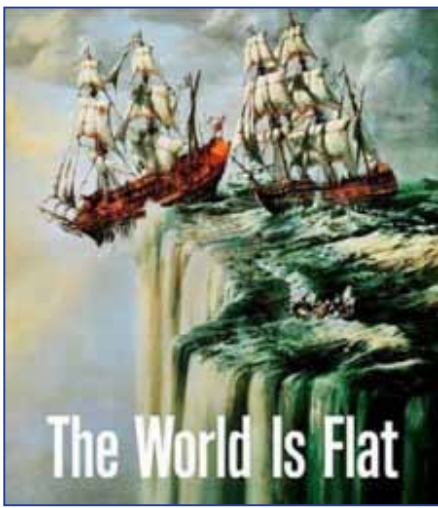
EVANGELICALS share with Fundamentalists a desire to preserve the essentials of Christian Faith from the encroachment of Liberal scientism. However, Evangelicals tend to view Fundamentalists as isolated from the world we are commissioned to evangelize.

FUNDAMENTALISM should be understood primarily as an attempt to protect the central doctrines of elements (fundamentals) of the Christian faith from the eroding effects of modern thought. (Such as the Virgin Birth and the bodily Resurrection of Christ).

Fundamentalism resist the encroachment of scientism into areas of faith. (For example, the theory of evolution.) Fundamentalism tends to be separatist. It tends to withdraw from the world in order to avoid contamination of biblical purity.

The late Jerry Falwell (probably the best known Fundamentalists) humorously defined a Fundamentalist as, “An Evangelical who is mad at something!”

The Article I wrote that seems to give Mormon scholars the most trouble is “The Disappointment of B. H. Roberts: Five Questions That Forced a Mormon General Authority to Abandon the Book of Mormon.” To get a copy, write “BH Roberts” on the purple card.



manufactured in China. Imagine a giant conveyor belt moving goods from around the world to Walmart warehouses where they are shuttled to your store to replace the one you purchased. In his book, *The World is Flat*, Thomas Friedman postulates that we live in a world characterized by instant communication and near-instant transportation. That means that ideas as well as products travel immediately throughout the world.

For example, when a customer pulls up to a McDonalds in Cape Girardeau, Missouri and orders a hamburger, he is talking to a person in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Once the order-taker is certain the order is correct, he flashes it to a screen back in Cape Girardeau where an employee bags the burger and hands it to the customer. McDonalds discovered that fewer mistakes are made and profits rise when they adopt this practice.

This shrinking of distances through global communication and transportation is what Friedman means by “the world is flat.” In his updated book (version 3.0) he argues that we are experiencing “direct-from-the-bottom creation of culture, knowledge, and innovation through blogging, podcasts, and open-source software.”

In other words, world culture is merging—flattening.

Look at what happened in Japan decades ago: after World War II, Japan adopted Western culture almost immediately. Likewise, today, China’s new market economy means that hip Chinese twenty-somethings are plugged into their cell phones the same as their counterparts throughout the world.

Of course, there are some very *good* things about this lightning spread of ideas. Think of the fact that Facebook postings were instrumental in toppling Egypt’s dictator, Hosni Mubarak. Obviously a force that helps replace dictatorships with democracy is a good thing.

However, there are downsides as well.

The rapid spread of ideas can institute changes that are not well thought out, tested, or correct. In such an environment, fads and trends can create culture. Bad ideas can become popular overnight. In the recent US financial crisis, a multiple-billion-dollar bailout package that initially sounded good is far less popular now that citizens and congress have had a chance to think it through.

The dire warnings about the rise of the Antichrist—in the Book of Revelation—seem to indicate that this person will ascend rapidly. Those who talk about One World Government are not all crackpots. The “buy and sell” warnings regarding the Mark of the Beast in the Book of Revelation have new relevancy as we see Europe adopting a common currency. No one can deny that the world financial system is so hardwired no nation is truly independent. Instant communication and transportation means that a man in a cave in Pakistan can manipulate men in airplanes in the US.

Likewise, the Church is now cross-pollinated more than ever before. Multiculturalism—as I understand the term—is an attempt to retain the best of all cultures as people struggle to form “*E pluribus Unum*—“out of many one.” But when it comes to Christian *doctrine* God is quite narrow. He is not soliciting opinions. Here is an important warning:

Do not confuse Unity in the Church with Unity of the Faith.

Christians love to talk about “unity.” But often they think that if wall met in the same building and sang the same hymns and choruses we would have unity. Biblical unity is not about looking alike, but about *believing* alike.

The Church was once very unified: under Rome, before the Protestant Reformation, there was no diversity in the Church. However, the Church at that time was full of corruption (That is not simply a Protestant’s idea. Remember, here was a reformation *within* the Catholic Church as well.)

It is fully possible that a unified Christianity could be antichrist to the core.

Never forget that the drift of Christian history has *always* been a drift towards humanism and away from the Gospel. Repeatedly, God has had to revive the dead, apostate church with outbreaks like the Reformation, the Great Awakening, the Second Great Awakening, and The Pentecostal Revival (and to a lesser, but still important, event, the Charismatic Renewal). Evangelicals need only look to the so-called Mainline churches to see that they are by-and-large humanistic and unbiblical.

I believe the same fate could befall the Evangelical movement. Evangelicalism flowed out of

the Fundamentalist Revival, essentially starting with Billy Graham in the early 1950s. Fundamentalism, in turn, was born at the dawn of the 20th Century as a reaction to the then new (so called) “higher criticism” of the Bible.

The Church Growth Movement as a Precursor to the Emergent Church

For two thousand years, the local church was—well—*local*. Fifty years ago ninety percent of all Christians attended churches within a few blocks of their homes and the congregations were small, normally 100 people or less. Today a church of 100 people is considered a failure. I once talked to a wonderful pastor who felt condemnation because he could not make his church grow. I tried to tell him that Growth is not always an indication of health. Some small churches are very healthy; some large ones are not.

Today people often drive tens of miles to attend large churches. They may choose their church for all the wrong reasons. Some of the most popular churches, in my opinion, are lightweight when it comes to creating true disciples of Christ.

Today many church leaders ask the question, “What will bring people to church?” Churches restructure themselves by polling their communities to find out what people want to see in a church. In my opinion, the minute they do that they have committed a grave sin. They should be asking “What is



God saying to us about the structure of our church?” They forget that Luke 6:26 shouts “Woe unto you when all men speak well of you.” They forget James 4:4 “Know you not that friendship of the world is enmity with God?” They forget Luke 6:22, “Blessed are ye when all men shall hate you...” They forget John 15: 18, “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.”

To those who think that the key to winning the world is by first befriending it, I quote of the words of the late G. K. Chesterton:

There is a notion abroad that to win a man you must agree with him. Actually, the opposite is true. Each generation has had to be converted by the man who contradicted it the most. The man who is going in a wrong direction will never

(Cont’ on last page)

Letters

Dear Jim,

After being a member of the LDS church for many years, (many of them inactive), several years ago, I achieved the privilege of a Temple recommend. I was shocked. I could not speak to anyone about the temple outside of the temple, but I knew it was wrong!!!!.

I am leaving the Church. I've been attending a full gospel, Pentecostal church which only teaches from the bible. It is carefully balanced and I received Jesus into my heart recently. Thank you for your website. It served to help me to find the Peace about the truth.

Have I made any oaths that are spiritually binding? I have asked my Heavenly Fathers forgiveness and have moved on. I'm not sure whether to have my name removed from the Church records or just leave it all behind?

Regards,

████████████████████

Dear Jim:

I have been anxiously receiving your newsletter and sending donations for several years now. As I started to send you money today, I realized how much I would miss your newsletters if you weren't able to continue your work. I hope you will accept my donation today as my "tithing", as you are my church right now.

I grew up around Mormons in southern Idaho. I married a nice Mormon man and became a good Mormon wife, raising six children and being active in the church. As any thinking person would, I began to question the beliefs and the conflicting teachings within Mormonism. I gradually stopped attending church and began attending other churches, searching for a Christian family.

As you can imagine, it has created a huge chasm in my relationship with my husband, not to mention the feelings of condemnation from him, his family, and many members of the church. I have held to my beliefs, however, finding strength in your books and newsletter, as well as many other books that have been written about the Mormon church.

My husband refused to consider divorce, and we have found a way to remain together with our very separate belief systems. Five of our six children have found their way out of Mormonism and are an added strength to me as we strive to live our lives as our Savior would want us to.

I want to thank you for your newsletters,

your books, and especially for the strength you have given me to continue my search for the truth.

Your friend in Jesus Christ,

████████████████████

message:

Dear brothers in Christ, I just want to thank you for your book, beyond mormonism. I read the book, I just finished it tonight. I have been a christian for many years now, I know people that are mormons, I have a business in Cape Verde Islands, and there are many mormons, they have building all over the islands. I have learned alot now from you book, my eyes have opened to their teaching and I love to minister to them about the love of God. Again pastor Spencer thank you and God bless you and your family and ministry so much.

In His Love,

Tony DePina

message:

>I got a postcard today asking for a donation.
>I have donated in the past, but hesitate to do
>so after reading about your ridiculous plan to
>ride a four-wheeler through the desert by
yourself. Come to your senses! You are
>entirely too valuable to do such a dangerous
>thing. I am already on your mailing list.

████████████████████

Dear _____

Whether or not we agree on my adventure, it is very kind for you to be worried about me. Thank you for your concern. It may be somewhat dangerous, but not nearly as dangerous as doing a seminar on Mormonism in Utah!

Jim,

Your Through the Maze "How Could They Get It So Totally Backwards?" was a classic. We've shared it with many.

Keep up the good work.

Dan and Mimi Macdonald

Pocatello

be set right by the affable religionist who falls into step beside him and goes the same way. Someone must place himself across the path and insist that the straying man turn around and go in the right direction.

Church leaders may respond by saying, "But how will we convert them if we can't get them in church?" I say the church was never meant to be the primary place of evangelism. The church was the place for the saved to gather, worship, and learn. The church (the people) then left the church (the building) and evangelized the world. After people were converted they were "added to the church." ("And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." Acts 2:47)

We must preach the Gospel in its fullness, regardless of who likes it. The idea that we can draw people into our churches with an inoffensive message may be true, but if the Offensive Gospel (the term "Inoffensive Gospel" is an oxymoron) is not preached, we wind up with a church full of the unconverted. How hard is this concept to understand? (I will not take the time to try to explain that I agree we should not be offensive in our presentation of the Gospel.)

Earlier this month I sent a newsletter to all those who donate to *Through the Maze*. That newsletter contained eight killer quotes on "Grace." (If you want it, write "Grace" on the purple card.) One of those quotes was this:

The only Hope of Christianity is in the rehabilitating of the Pauline theology. It is back, back, back, to an incarnate Christ and the atoning blood, or it is on, on, on, to atheism and despair.—Francis L. Patton, Former President of Princeton University

* * *

Surviving in the new Flat World which constantly pressures us towards an inoffensive relativism and political correctness is difficult. The Evangelical church is being unduly influenced by the global culture. How, then, can we Christians announce a Gospel where sin is only paid for with blood? A Gospel which is an enemy of the world's thinking?

It isn't easy, but I think it is possible.

How to survive in a flat world in which the Hallmark is Confusion

1. Don't panic—Go back to basics

Remember that your conversion to Christ was not something you orchestrated. Like the Apostle Paul, you were the recipient of God's gracious revelation, "When it pleased

God to reveal His Son in me." (Gal 1: 15-17) He who has called you is able to "keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy." (Jude 1:24)

2. Be Skeptical but Unafraid

One of my pastor friends said to me, "Jim, you are one of the most skeptical Christians I know." Then he added, "But you are not cynical." The Bible says, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (I Pet. 5:8) But it also says "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." (Phil. 3:13)

3. Don't Worry About Being Understood, Don't Do Violence or Lose Your Sense of Humor.

If you want to be popular, you are going to have a hard time being a Christian. John Wayne never worried about what the bad guys thought of him. ☺

If you are called to battle the New Age forces aligned against the church, do so with dignity and peace. Don't do what Peter did when he smote off the ear of one of those who came to arrest Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. He just created more work for Jesus who had to heal the ear. ☺

4. Don't Get Weird

I don't think Christians ought to be found on the fringes of sanity and good taste. Avoid conspiracy theories or excessive political zeal. (I did not say one should not be active politically). But remember what one former Christian political activist said, "I learned that when you mix religion and politics, you get politics! Yes, we should be good citizens but the solution the world needs is not first political, it is spiritual.

5. Stand Patiently and Declare The Goodness of God

Galatians is one of my favorite books. My favorite scripture is Galatians 5:1:

Stand fast therefore in the liberty where-with Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. (KJV)

Or, from the NIV:

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Pressures come at us from a thousand different directions. The Christian life is the discovery that no matter what comes our way; God will take us through it.

The Preacher (the writer of Ecclesiastes) said that most of human activity was fruitless, striving against the wind. This was

Solomon, the wisest of the wise. His final word to those believers who are buffeted by the rude forces of this world was stated more than once in the Book of Ecclesiastes. Basically he said we should eat our bread and drink our wine with joy, and take joy in the companionship of family and friends. There is no more to life than that.

In fact, he says quite pointedly: in Ecc. 12:13:

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter; Fear God and keep His commandments; for this is the whole duty of man.

The Prophet Isaiah describes the earth as reeling like a drunkard. (Is. 24:20) Our job is to hang on and enjoy the ride. It is about standing firm and faithfully trusting God. We used to sing:

*When we walk with the Lord in the light of His Word,
What a glory He sheds on our way!
While we do His good will, He abides with us still,
And with all who will trust and obey.*

Refrain:

*Trust and obey, for there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.*

*Not a shadow can rise, not a cloud in the skies,
But His smile quickly drives it away;
Not a doubt or a fear, not a sigh or a tear,
Can abide while we trust and obey.*

*Not a burden we bear, not a sorrow we share,
But our toil He doth richly repay;
Not a grief or a loss, not a frown or a cross,
But is blessed if we trust and obey.*



Did you know that if you make a donation to *Through the Maze*, you will automatically receive twice as many newsletters each year? (And we really need your help!)