

***Eclectic Thoughts  
of a  
Rational Mind***



A College Paper Collection

By

Dr. Gordon E. Necemer



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# Preface

Since graduating from Semiahmoo Senior Secondary School in White Rock, British Columbia in 1969, I have been blessed to procure seventeen years of academic study at secular and religious colleges and seminaries. In 2015 I was blessed to receive my Doctor of Ministry degree from Providence Theological Seminary in Otterburne, Manitoba.

Although I immensely enjoyed completing my studies at all levels, I found it cumbersome and stressful to write the hundreds of essays, book reports, reflective journals and essays that were demanded. Because of God's goodness, strength and enlightenment – especially when doing research – I successfully completed all the assignments on time, and with a high grade.

For years the papers have "sat idle" in two or three of my filing cabinets being of no further value to me, or anyone else. One day, as I was looking for an article on leadership, I decided others may be blessed by reading some of the papers stored here. Because of this "illumination," I have selected a number of my "better papers" and assembled this compendium by which I desire and trust other believers will be blessed.

To provide "fluency of reading the articles," I have placed the endnotes and bibliographies of all the chapters at the end of the book.



Some of the citations – especially the journal entries – are incomplete. The explanation for this is I didn't keep all the documents I early photocopied, and some of the citations cannot be found on the internet. I ask you to kindly and graciously overlook the few errors you might find throughout this work – if there are any –and enjoy what I present. If you have any concern about the opinions expressed within this work, please email me at [Necemer@aol.com](mailto:Necemer@aol.com). I also encourage you to check out our website at <http://www.harvestoutreach.ca>

God richly bless you. My hope is that you will be edified in the Lord by what you read.



**Chapter 1**  
**Factors That**  
**Influenced My Theological**  
**Convictions**

I have been a born-again Christian for over 68 years. Because of the many, God ordained, influences on my life I believe I have enjoyed a strong, unwavering and mature “faith walk” with God.

## **My Parents**

I was born on December 10th, 1947 in Powell River, British Columbia. At my birth the family consisted of nine children – seven boys and two girls. In 1961, when my mother died of cancer, the family consisted of sixteen children - eight boys and eight girls. I am the middle child among the siblings.

My dad escaped from Yugoslavia in 1939. During his early adult years, while living in Belgrade, he trained as a Roman Catholic Priest. For a short time – about 3 years – he did parish ministry under a Bishop in Belgrade. He escaped from Yugoslavia in 1940, with five other young men, to avoid fighting in World War 2. On arriving in Canada, he came to a personal faith in Christ as Lord after reading and meditating on the scripture, “And call no man your father on the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven” (Matt 22:9).

Throughout my childhood my dad worked as a tree faller for MacMillan-Bloedel in several logging camps on Vancouver Island.

Because he was away from home for lengthy periods of time, his influence on my life was limited. However, whenever he was home, he reminded me of the need to be “connected with God” in the same trust relationship he possessed.

As I reflect on his influence on my faith, I recognize he had impacts on it. First, he encouraged me to “seek and honour the Lord constantly, regardless how I felt, or what I faced. Second, he admonished me to be ready and to willingly answer and follow God’s call on my life regardless what vocations others might suggest I follow because, “obedience is better than sacrifice” (1 Sam 15:22). I was deeply moved when my dad, in August 1968, recognized God’s call on my life for gospel ministry, and encouraged me to attend Bible College instead of apprenticing as an automotive mechanic with MacMillan-Bloedel, Port Hardy Division, where we worked.

At that time I was concerned I would not have adequate finances to cover my tuition for the upcoming September enrollment at Western Pentecostal Bible College in North Vancouver, so I asked him if he could lend me the money I desperately needed. In responding to my request, he reminded me of my need to trust God to supply the need stating, “Go ask your Heavenly Father to intervene. If He wants you to attend college, He will supply the funds you need on time.” His encouragement to seek God fixed within me the confidence that God hears and answers prayer when we ask with a pure and upright heart according to His will.

My mother was born in Roblin, Manitoba. Between my dad and mother, my mother provided me with the stronger theological influence. As a child she had attended the Romanian Orthodox Church in Roblin. Because of this, she had gained a deep faith in God and the teachings of the Church which she enthusiastically transferred to her children. Throughout my earliest childhood she taught the family the need of honouring God in everything we did, obeying His word, and submitting to His will as we prayed, read scripture and fellowshiped with fellow believers. To empower us to develop this worldview, she encouraged us to pray and read scripture daily, to trust God for our daily needs, to regularly attend church, and to be willing to share our faith whenever opportunity arose. Regardless what difficulty arose, she would constantly remind us we were beloved children of the living God, and if we honoured Him above everything else, He would adequately provide our physical and spiritual needs. Mother lovingly reminded us of the need to be born-again so we could know forgiveness of sins, become God’s children, and enjoy the abundant

life – spiritually – He provides for those who trust Him moment by moment. By her daily, godly example and witness I discovered the joy she possessed in knowing God as savior, and I longed for it too. Therefore, in May, 1961 I accepted Christ as Savior, Lord and Redeemer Friend. Since then, I have never been disappointed.

After I was saved, mother instilled within me the need to be ready, always, to share with others the gift of salvation Christ offers to those who would call on Him in repentance. After all, she would say, Jesus gave His very best for us. Because of this, witnessing for Him should not be a burdensome task for those who are one of His children.

To encourage and empower me to share my faith, she often took the family to Vancouver's East Side Skid Road where we handed out gospel tracts, sang hymns, and gave sandwiches and soup to the needy. Announcing Christ's love to others was an opportunity, not an option according to mother. She taught us to take every opportunity that came our way, even if it meant saying nothing more than, "I thank the Lord for saving and keeping me." This early training in evangelism could well be the reason I am proactive today in sharing my faith with others.

Living for Christ as Lord and Savior was a significant teaching mother also instilled within me. Regardless of where we went or what I did, she reminded me I was God's child, and my actions should clearly reflect His character so others would never have cause to speak unbecoming of God and His salvific work in my life. According to her I should live different from the ungodly – not peculiarly or strangely – because God had changed our focus on life. Instead of pleasing ourselves by embracing the philosophy and lifestyle of this world, I should love and please God.

Because of this wholesome teaching, I was not ashamed to carry my Bible with my textbooks, I was not ashamed to ask my grade eleven high schoolteacher to allow me to read portions of the Bible for credit in English 30 instead of reading secular books, and I was not ashamed to attend the Interschool Christian Fellowship meetings, instead of participating in many of the school sports activities for which I was qualified.

So significant was my mother's desire that I live for Christ, regardless what I faced, the last comment she said to me before dying was, "Whatever you do, Gordon, don't forget to continue living for Christ; you'll never be disappointed!"

## **Foster Parents**

Within a week after my mother's death on August 31st, 1961, a younger sister and I were placed in the first of three foster homes. Mr. & Mrs. Williams were a middle-aged couple who were devoted Christians and who displayed godly compassion to us during this grieving period. It was from them that I discovered God's unshakable love, compassion and sustaining grace during the darkest moment of the soul.

Mr. & Mrs. Williams accepted us as their son and daughter. Within minutes of arriving at their home they explained to us they were devoted Christians, and they respected us as their children. Daily they treated us with the highest esteem physically and mentally. For our spiritual edification and encouragement, they regularly read scripture and prayed with us. Whenever we would become concerned about our mother's passing, or being separate from our brothers and sisters, they lovingly ensured us God had everything under control, and He would carry us through the difficult time of sorrow if we rested in His faithfulness.

We lived with this family for two weeks, and then moved on to a second home where the foster father was an abusive alcoholic. If we had not received the encouragement and the teaching the Williams provided for us, I am sure I would have had a difficult time remaining faithful to the call of God on my life. But, because I understood God's loving care, His sustaining grace, and His promise, "He will never leave me nor forsake me" (Heb 13:5), I was empowered to accept my mother's death, and gain comfort all was well with me because God was walking with me constantly. Every time I drive by the Williams' home located at 1244 State Road, White Rock, BC. I rejoice in God's goodness for allowing me to live with these godly and caring people.

## **Influence of Pastors**

Throughout my 'faith walk' the influence and teaching of my pastors has been extremely valuable. Although each pastor had his

special ministry focus, they all imparted within me evangelical theological principles that I value immensely today.

**Frank Dyck**  
**Pastor at Cloverdale Pentecostal Church, 1953**  
**1961**

Pastor Dyck was an elderly pastor who began his ministry during the depression years. He, during his youth, had gone through the “waters of testing” many times. Despite being tempted often to abandon God and the faith, he remained faithful to his call, and was “marked a faithful, devoted and directed servant of God.”

From his ministry I gained appreciation of the following biblical teachings:

First, God’s love towards His people is for both their immediate and eternal good. Second, Christ’s church is a welcoming community of faith that loves the brotherhood. Because of this it readily invites others to know God through Christ as Savior so they, too, can be part of this great, loving and caring community. Third, Christ church is comprised of talented and gifted individuals who are welcome to use their gifts for the edification of the church as they are empowered by the Holy Spirit, and endorsed by the leaders of a local fellowship (Rom 12:1-8; 1 Cor 12 & 14).

Regardless of what gift a brother or sister possessed, Reverend Dyck readily invited them to use it. He, for example, encouraged me, as a teenager, to usher during the morning services because he recognized I enjoyed welcoming people to church. And I also recall that he invited an older brother to play in the orchestra because he owned a steel guitar.

Fourth, Christ’s church is a caring community of faith touching the marginalized, the poor, and the sick. Whereas other churches within the community held a midweek Bible Study and Prayer meeting, Pastor Dyck encouraged the congregation to weekly visit the patients at the Scenic View Senior’s Home, and sing and share scripture with the shut ins. As I took part in these services, I quickly learned God’s love is always welcomed and appreciated by believers, regardless how aged or sick they become. Going to this care centre was one of the best learning experiences of my youth. I thank God for the opportunity to have ministered there.

Fifth, Christ’s people are to be steward managers of the things they possess. Therefore, they should prudently guard them from



wanton waste so they could be invested liberally in God's work as He directs them (1 Cor 16:2). This teaching was clearly reinforced in 1956 when the board decided the congregation needed additional space in the church, and should build a new fellowship annex.

At this time the congregation possessed a small cash reserve to lay the foundation, but it did not have adequate finances to complete the project. Despite this, in faith that the money needed could and would be provided, the project was started in the spring of 1957. When the funds ran out, Pastor Dyck asked everyone – including the children – to enable the completion of the project by contributing twenty-five cents – or multiples thereof – each Sunday, for the purchase of bricks. As the congregants began to understand the joy of sacrificial, stewardship giving, within three months all the bricks were purchased. Within eight months, construction of the annex was completed, and in use.

### **Art Bell Pastor at Cloverdale Pentecostal Church, 1961 to 1964**

Reverend Bell, like Pastor Dyck, was an older man who had also experienced difficult times during his early years of ministry. But he had seen God do several miracles for his family, and affirmed to the congregant God could and should be trusted regardless how difficult life may look. Through his ministry I learned the following valued principles.

First, God is sovereign, and can be trusted to bring His children to a promised good end if they trust and obey Him wholeheartedly and unreservedly. Pastor Bell was totally convinced that God, and not man, had brought him to pastor our congregation even though he often faced difficult and discouraging times. When hard times arose, he would remind me of God's provisional, sovereign call stating, "I don't have to know why I'm here, or for how long I'm here. All I need to know," he would continue, "is who has brought me here, and remain faithful to the call regardless of the cost." He faithfully pastored the church until June 14th, 1964 when he had a heart attack during a morning service, and died a week later because of a second, major heart attack.

Second, church membership is important because it signals believers are committed to a local church as part of the family that made ministry goals, plans and decisions together. Before his arrival in Cloverdale, the congregation was comprised of adherents who allowed

the board to decide about the church's ministry. On arriving at Cloverdale, Pastor Bell immediately encouraged church membership because, "the local church is comprised God's people who gather as fellow citizens of the commonwealth of grace (Eph 2:10-14), as brothers and sisters in the Lord (Jn 17; Acts 2), and as co-workers with one another and with God (2 Cor 6:1). Within a year that church membership was established, the congregation became closely knit together as family, and the church grew in love and care one for the other.

Third, God cares about His people (Matt 6:20-33), and His people should mirror Him by lovingly and excitedly caring for one another. This principle was demonstrated by him clearly one day when I was distressed by problems I was facing at school. Although I didn't want to distress anyone with the problems, Pastor Art was sensitive about how I was feeling, and invited me to his home for fellowship so I could share with him my problems. What was very noteworthy during our discussion was this, as I talked with him he showed a sincere interest in what I was saying. As I left his home I was confident he possessed a deep, loving concern for me and my future.

Fourth, as a Christian I needed to be sensitive to the "gifts of the Spirit" (1 Cor 14), and willingly submit to His counsel and leading. His eagerness for me to understand this became apparent when he invited me to attend with him a special meeting with Nicholas Bengu, the Billy Graham of South Africa, which was held at the Cloverdale Legion. During this service, Pastor Bell was convinced God desired to give me the "gift of evangelism." Despite my hesitancy to allow special prayer to be made over me, Pastor Art arranged for him and Nicholas to pray for me. By the time the service ended, because I heard and accepted his counsel to submit to the Holy Spirit, I received the "gift," and my life, forever, was radically changed. Whereas prior to this service I was shy, backward, and lacked confidence in sharing my faith, afterward I knew that "I would never be ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation." (Rom 1:16). My ministry of evangelism over the past sixty years would not have been as exciting, and as profitable as it has been had Art Bell ignored obeying the "leading of the Spirit" that day.

**Ross Wightman**  
**Pastor at Cloverdale Pentecostal Church, 1965 to**  
**1971**

**Chapter 2**  
**Abortion:**  
**A Woman's Right?**



I'm a rather conservative person, who is willing to go "with the flow" rather than exasperating a situation by strongly, and openly opposing it.<sup>1</sup> There are, however, one or two social issues which agitate me, which I will protest vigorously regardless of the results. One of these is abortion. In this paper I will contend that abortion is a reprehensible act because it unjustly deprives the fetus from being born, and realizing its full creative potential as an integral part of a family and society.

### **Definition of Abortion**

Abortion may be defined "as the termination of a pregnancy by any spontaneous or induced method."<sup>2</sup> Miscarriage is most commonly recognized as the only "non-induced" abortion.

## **Types of Abortions**

Medically, there are six types of “induced abortions.” First, the “morning after pill” which, when taken, inhibits the fetus from attaching itself to the uterus, thus dying;<sup>3</sup> second, vacuum suction technique, whereby the fetus is dismembered and sucked out of the uterus; third, the saline infusion procedure, whereby a saline solution, called ‘protogleden’, is injected through the abdomen direct into the amniotic fluid cavity within the uterus, causing the fetus to be expelled within twelve hours after the injection;<sup>4</sup> fourth, partial birth abortion where the fetus is aborted just before full birth; fifth, the live birth abortion whereby labour is induced and the baby it is left to die<sup>5</sup> and sixth, therapeutic abortion, whereby the pregnancy is ended because of maternal medical complications by doing a dilatation curettage.<sup>6</sup> or scraping of the uterine cavity which removes the fetus from the womb.

Besides the aforementioned types of abortion, there also exists “back alley abortions.” These usually are performed by untrained and unskilled individual who employ unsafe methods to induce labour, and terminate the pregnancy. Since 1980 “back alley abortions” have reduced because of the availability of abortions being performed in hospitals and funded through Canada’s Medicare.

Regardless which method of abortion is used, the primary purpose is to destroy the fetus, terminating the pregnancy.

## **The History of Abortion in Canada**

Before 1960 abortions, in Canada, were forbidden under the threat of imprisonment. However, in 1960, Pierre Trudeau, Canada’s then Justice Minister, liberalized Canada’s position on this issue by allowing women to apply for special permission for an abortion, “from a Therapeutic Abortion Committee of three doctors at a hospital, who would judge whether her health or life was in danger.”<sup>7</sup> Permission to get a therapeutic abortion could be granted if “the abortion were performed by a qualified medical practitioner in an accredited hospital, after approval by a majority of that hospital’s therapeutic abortion committee which must certify that continuation of the pregnancy would probably endanger the life and health of the mother.”<sup>8</sup>

Through this legislation, opportunity for obtaining an abortion was increased. Doctors, however, if they could not justify the abortion

for medical reasons, could still be imprisoned. Therefore, most Therapeutic Abortion Committees refused to accept applications for abortions.

In 1967 Dr. Henry Morgentaler, a family physician from Quebec lobbied the federal government for further changes in the 1960 abortion law. His reason: women have a basic right to an abortion and the decision in this matter should be left to the individual's conscience. In his letter to Pope John Paul II in March of 1966 he writes:

Like the assassination of Prime Minister Rabine, violence against medical workers who perform abortions implicates the violent language in which some religious leaders condemn them. You speak of abortions 'as murder, crimes which no human law can claim to legitimize, careless destroying . . . the killing of an innocent and defenseless human being, etc.' Continuous exhortations in such terms inevitably incite unbalanced and impressionable minds. Spurred on by religious leaders, among whom you are the foremost, these people direct their hatred and violence against people like me who not only provide abortion services to women, but also believe abortion to be woman's right. I would like to point out to you that many people, including liberal-minded Catholic theologians and other Christians, believe that abortion is a difficult moral dilemma and the decision whether to abort should be left to the individual conscience. When such a decision has been made, it should be, in my opinion, the duty of the state to honour it and the duty of the medical profession to provide it under the best conditions to ensure safety and dignity for women.<sup>9</sup>

Morgentaler expected the Federal Government, once again, to immediately enact changes in the Canadian Criminal Code and remove abortion as a criminal offense. When the government did not promptly comply with Morgentaler's demands, in 1970 he opened his first abortion clinic in Montreal. Within the first year of operation he performed over eleven thousand unlawful abortions.

Morgentaler was arrested and charged under the Criminal Code of Canada, Section 251. But before he could be brought to trial, Pierre Trudeau was reelected as Prime Minister. Within a year of his reelection, parliament enacted changes to Section 251 whereby homosexuality and abortions were no longer regarded as criminal offenses.

In Quebec, however, abortion remained a crime. When, in 1974, Morgentaler brought TV cameras into the abortion clinic and televised abortions he was arrested one more time. However after being arrested and found guilty by the lower Quebec Court, Morgentaler appealed his conviction to the Supreme Court of Canada. At that trial he was found guilty and sent to a minimum security nursing home for a short incarceration.<sup>10</sup>

Public sympathy towards Morgentaler and his cause increased after each arrest and trial. Within a short time thousands of women, who believed that abortion is a personal choice and a personal right, marched on Parliament Hill lobbying Trudeau to extend the right of abortion to women “no strings attached.”<sup>11</sup> By 1975 the Supreme Courts of Quebec and Canada jointly had given up trying Morgentaler on charges that had been laid. During the period of 1980-1989 Morgentaler opened three abortion clinics and performed over 350,000 abortions, with no criminal charges laid against him from the Federal Government.

In 1988 Pierre Trudeau resigned as Prime Minister. Much to his discredit no legislation had been introduced or enacted about the legality of abortion in Canada. In 1991 Canada’s Justice System, by not upholding and enforcing the law of 1969, opened the door to freelance abortion. That which was regarded earlier as criminal offence is now considered to be legal and right. Today, Canada has no legislation forbidding abortion. Therefore, hundreds of thousands of abortions are done yearly in hospitals and abortion clinics throughout Canada.

## **The Case for Abortion**

Supporting or opposing abortions is a dilemma which has become complex and controversial in light of recent relaxed legislation and ethics in Canada. There are two militant “schools of thought” about abortion, these being pro-choice and ‘pro-life. A woman’s decision to have or to bypass an abortion rests on two major issues, these being a woman’s rights as carrier of the fetus, and the ontology of the fetus.

Proponents of ‘pro-choice’ may agree with the ‘pro-life’ movement that God is the creator and sustainer of life. But, they do not agree that every occasion for reproducing life is of God. Therefore they strongly contend that in circumstances such as rape and unplanned or unwanted pregnancies, women should not be “saddled”

with the obligation of bringing the pregnancy to completion. Rather, they should have the recourse of terminating the pregnancy by having an abortion should it be their desire. With this, proponents of pro-choice also argue that in situations where there are large families and an additional child might be a psychological and financial burden to the family, abortion is the most reasonable and compassionate alternative available.

And then they ask, “What about women living in the slums, who suffer from acute mental illness, social deprivation or who lack education. Because of these conditions they may not adequately protect themselves from getting pregnant. “Is it right, fair, or godly,” they strongly argue, to force them to “carry the pregnancy to completion?” And then they continue to ask, “Would any compassionate human demand that these incapacitated women have another child when they are already strained beyond capacity to look after themselves?” The obvious answer is, “no”. Charles Hartshorne comments:

I share something of the disgust of hard-core opponents of abortion that contraceptives, combined with the availability of abortion, may deprive sexual intercourse of spiritual meaning. For me the sacramental view of marriage has always had appeal, and my life has been lived accordingly. Abortion is indeed a nasty thing, but unfortunately there are, in our society many even nastier things, like some children are growing up unwanted. This, for my conscience, is a great deal nastier, and truly horrible. An overcrowded world is also nasty, and could in a few decades become truly catastrophic.<sup>12</sup>

So now the argument is based on pragmatics instead of the value of life. What will work best for protecting the woman from an unwanted child and the uncontrolled circumstances of life? In its simplest form abortion has become a form of contraception by which not the unneeded, but the unwanted are mercilessly, yet conveniently disposed of. As a rebuttal to Hartshorne’s position Francis Schaeffer writes:

At first we hear much talk of compassion for the unwanted. The discussion moves on to ‘rights’, then to ‘my rights’, and soon to pure ‘economics’. The discussion of life must be brought back to where it belongs, - not emotional extreme



examples, not to expedience, and certainly not to economics. This matter should be discussed in terms of right and wrong.”<sup>13</sup>

What is mysterious is that most requests for abortions do not come from women with oversized families, or from those suffering from socioeconomic privation. Rather, they come from middle class professionals who feel that a pregnancy may be an infringement on their freedom, and future career development. Such being the case, abortion is the most feasible alternative.<sup>14</sup>

## **The Case against Abortion**

In response to these concerns, pro-life proponents respond with the following claims:

First, several forms of contraceptive pills and devices are available free to women of all socioeconomic levels, and should be used regularly by women who are not ready, or willing to carry a pregnancy to completion. There is a-priori responsibility on those who are sexually active to safeguard themselves against pregnancies, and if no protection is used, the responsibility for carrying the pregnancy to completion stands as being reasonable.

Second, bringing a child into an unhealthy economic situation may “be nasty”, but is there anything nastier than a woman, willfully, knowingly and purposely dispensing with a life for convenience and self-gain? No, for in so doing this degrades herself to being barbarous, or she elevates herself to being God as she assumes what will or will not be on the morrow. Both, the author feels, are dangerous conjectures by which one might live.

Third, pregnancies, wanted or unwanted, “planned or unplanned,” are a temporary situation in a woman’s life. The choice to allow the pregnancy to complete is a choice with lifelong effects, and responsibilities that should not be taken lightly, but so is the decision to abort.

Although aborting the fetus may bring instant and gratifying relief to the carrier, it can also ignite “post abortion syndrome”<sup>15</sup> which can be manifested by feelings of guilt, shame, despair, and mistrust.<sup>16</sup> With this, “post abortion syndrome”, abortions may create physical complications such as breast, cervix, ovarian and liver cancer. Elizabeth Liston comments:

I have met the ‘super confident, cool, everything’s under ‘control’ type, the ‘hard, blank faced, leave me alone’ type, the ‘quiet, retiring, timid, that’s just my lot in life’ type, as well as the “blasé, couldn’t care less” type. Appearances differ, but I have found that many are experiencing or have experienced suffering, pain, bitterness, anger and unresolved grief following an abortion.<sup>17</sup>

Fourth, although rape is ugly, terrifying, and demoralizing, conception in rape still is a gift of God, for, as born-again disciples of Christ, we believe that all life is a gift from God, “who is the Creator, and Sustainer of all things” (Col 1:16). The shameful condition in which the pregnancy might have occurred does not necessarily degrade the mother or the fetus’s worth. Dignity can be regained by the mother if she becomes surrounded by a community of loving people who will compassionately care for her during, and after the pregnancy.

Even as drugs, smoking, and emotional stress can cause the mother and fetus distress during a pregnancy<sup>18</sup> a caring and loving community can influence them to good health. Women, turning to abortion as a solution to psychological apprehension because of trauma during pregnancy, need to avail themselves of helpful, clinical and remedial care so they will not make an abrupt, and irrational decision by destroying the fetus in the womb.

Fifth, regardless of what the woman’s opinion is of her pregnancy, more than just her welfare needs to be considered when considering having an abortion. According to pro-life proponents, she is unjust in her decision if she does not also consider the welfare of the fetus. If she is anxious and fretful about socioeconomic crisis that might befall her with the birth of the child, she could make provision for it to be adopted by a loving and caring family who will raise it with great love and dignity. By taking this alternative – instead of aborting the fetus - good for the woman and the fetus can be guaranteed.

The second matter of dispute between the pro-choice and the pro-life groups is the question whether the fetus possesses personhood. Both groups agree the fetus is a living entity composed of cells with a non-duplicable, gene pool, regardless of what it is called. Whereas ‘pro-life’ advocates are willing to regard the fetus as a human being with personhood because “they have both a human mother and father,”<sup>19</sup> ‘pro-choice’ supporters are not willing to go that far. They suggest the fetus is nothing more than a collection of genes in the

becoming of personhood which will be fully realized after birth, when the collection of billions of cells is uniformly compacted into one whole identifiable human construct. Charles Hartshorne clarifies the point:

The fertilized egg is an individual egg, but not an individual human being. For such a being is in its body a multicellular organism - a metazoan - to use the scientific Greek, and the egg is a single cell. The first thing the cell does is to begin to divide into many cells. For some weeks the fetus is not a single individual cell at all, but a colony of cells. During the first weeks there seems to be no grounds for about the fetus as an individual animal. Only in possible or probable destiny is it an individual. A possible individual is one thing; a person is another thing.<sup>20</sup>

In response to Hartshorne, the 'pro-life' group suggests personhood is exactly what he is describing because even after birth, the individual is nothing more than a "collection of cells" interlocked as one entity allowing the person to live with integrity, identity, meaning, value and purpose. Grobstein, an embryologist and Professor Emeritus at the University of California, San Diego, also denies personhood to the fetus. He writes:

Extending full personhood to an individual cell that is barely visible makes no more sense than declaring acorns to be an oak tree and selling them as oak trees. At conception only genetic individuality, a set of hereditary properties that define an individual is present. But there are still five other essential aspects of individuality to come: developmental, functional, behavioral and social.<sup>21</sup>

Grobstein cannot see the fetus having personhood until it has fully developed and possesses total independence from the mother. Responding to Grobstein, the 'pro-life' group remarks that he is correct when he concludes the fetus is not an independent entity, but he is wrong to suggest it is person afterbirth because it has independence functionally, socially, and behaviorally. Jean Garton responds to Grobstein stating:

The unborn child, of course, is not the same as the child sleeping in the crib or playing in the sandbox. Yet, if someone were to say he or she had at home an infant and an adolescent, we surely would not wonder if that person was referring to different kinds of pets or plants. Infant and adolescent are terms that describe human beings at different stages of development. That is all the word “fetus” does. It tells us where a child is on the life spectrum. Is the adolescent less human than an adult? Is the infant less human than the adolescent? Is the fetus less human than the infant? They are different only in terms of development and dependence.<sup>22</sup>

All infant children remain dependent on their mother for some time afterbirth; they are fed, dressed, bathed, carried, and nursed sometimes up to the age of two. And, occasionally, individuals at age twenty-five, because of illness or mental disabilities, are still dependent up parents or others; Grobstein would need to deny these, even as he does the fetus, personhood.

In response to Grobstein’s suggestion that the fetus is only a representation of what is becoming, and therefore cannot be granted personhood, pro-life groups respond that he has missed the point. Before his thesis was published, it was an idea “barely visible”, yet he considered it of value, otherwise he would never have published it.

Likewise, with the fetus, even though it does not have visible and measurable value, it has worth - worth we call personhood. Professor Judith Thompson agrees with the pro-life movement the fetus is a human being with personhood, and possesses an inalienable right to life. But according to her, “this does not mean that a woman must be forced to use her bodily organs to sustain its life.”<sup>23</sup>

The welfare of the fetus, despite the mother’s desire to carry it to maturity, remains the right to be born, the right to be known, the right to know life and develop into the person it is intended by God to be. Even the unwanted fetus can be nurtured to birth, and given opportunity to develop as a valued part of humanity as time and opportunity is afforded it.

In response to her statement, three replies are necessary.

First, her suggestion the value of a fetus as human life decreases when interdependence is added to the equation is laughable. Every day in every way individuals, afterbirth, are interdependent for

## **Chapter 7**

# Age Integrated Church Worship: Instilling “Family Connectedness” Within Christ’s Church



## **Introduction**

Ask most Christians what the local church represents and they would likely respond, “It is the coming together of the elect of God as the family of God for worship.” From a quick assessment of the definition, one would agree with the conclusion. The church, from its start on the Day of Pentecost, consisted of believers who assembled in unity for fellowship, for instruction in the apostle’s doctrine, for breaking of bread, and for prayers (Acts 2:42). This should not be considered strange when one remembers those who composed the “early church” understood the need for unity, for Christ encouraged this despite their varied ages, occupations, personalities, and skills. That the gathering of God’s people should be regarded as an “integrated, intergenerational, unified family” is congruent with biblical teaching found in both the Old and New Testaments. Although numerous examples could be appealed to, our examples from the Old Testament are provided to support this claim.

## Age Integration throughout Scripture

First, God's call to Moses to speak to Israel during its first Jubilee, after its successful, God directed escape from Egypt. In providing Moses instruction, He tells him to, "Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and the stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the LORD your God, and observe to do all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 31:12-13). Second, the occasion of Ezra's prayer as he made confession for Israel's transgression of marrying foreign women. During this event, he assembled with him "out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children: for the people wept very sore" (Ezra 10:1-5). Third, the time when Ezra reads the Law to Israel (Nehemiah 8:1-3), facing the water gate on the first day of the seventh month. For this event Ezra ensures the men, women and children were present as a collective audience and all the "ears of those present were attentive to the book of the law." Fourth, when Moses provides Hebrew parents direction about teaching them in the law. Moses delegates the event as an intergenerational practice by telling them to teach the Word of God "to their children, speaking of them when they sit in their house, and when they walked by the way, when they lied down, and when they woke up" (Deuteronomy 11:19).

From Christ's teaching in the New Testament, one also discovers this principle being advocated in the following examples. First, Jesus suggests those who are regenerated through the "new birth" have been brought into the family of God with Jehovah being their "Father." Because of this "family connectedness," they are to pray, "Our Father who art in heaven" (Matthew 6:11), knowing, with unshakable confidence, He will hear and respond to their petitions. Second, while speaking to a large crowd near Jerusalem, Jesus discovered that some of His followers had promoted themselves above others as teachers following the pattern of the Pharisees. Quickly, He reproves them for their arrogance, reminding them of their family status stating, "But do not call yourself Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all you are brethren" (Matthew 23:8). Third Jesus offers a commendation to children as an integral part of His following by placing them on his lap and blessing them. The disciples were disgusted with the children's interruption, so they implored Christ to send them away. Jesus, trying to teach the disciples the need of an age-

integrated community of worship, responds to their requests, “Allow the little children to be part of my gathering for such are also included in the Kingdom of heaven” (Mark 10:14).

Worthy of notice here is the disciple’s lack of response to Christ’s rebuke, which might signal their remorse for excluding children as valued members of the kingdom. Fourth Christ willingly accepted and blessed the two loaves and five fishes a lad brought for his lunch (Matthew 14:16-21). Christ did not send him away, even though he was young, and he had a small gift, because He recognized the significance of this boy’s contribution that could be used for the good of others.

If these examples are not sufficient to confirm the claim that Christ desired His people to be an integrated, intergenerational community of fellowship, the author offers this example. As Christ fed the five thousand by Galilee, which consisted of men, women and children of all ages, He directed His disciples to sit the crowd in mixed groups of fifty. If He approved of age discrimination, He would have told them to separate the children into groups of fifty, those under the age of thirty into groups of fifty, those in middle age into groups of fifty and those in their senior years into groups of fifty. But He did not, because He valued the inclusive nature of worship and learning for those gathered.

Paul also contends the church should be an “intergenerational integrated family” throughout the Pauline Epistles. In Galatians 4, he reminds the Christians that before the “new birth” they were slaves, alienated from God and from one another. On stating this, he further reminds them that through repentance and regeneration, they were adopted as the “sons of God” (Gal 4:1-7, cf. John 1:12 & 13; Rom 8:14-17; 1 Peter 1:14-17), and were made one with Christ, and with those who were regenerated through faith. In other passages, Paul affirms believers being a unified family by using terms, “brethren (Philippians 3:17; Colossians 4:5; 1 Thess 1:4), and “sisters” (1 Timothy 5:2), as descriptors of the close, inseparable spiritual, and “family” connectedness members have because salvation. Because of this unique, God endowed relationship; Paul cautions them against all segregation or isolation of believers from each other. His reason, everyone in the “spiritual body” is essential for the progressive health, edification, and endorsement of the others, even as every part of the physical body is needed for its health (Rom 12:3-11). Paul encourages unity because this will preserve brotherly love within the church, and safeguard it against disruption of the fellowship it enjoys. This is what



the church should be as a coming together of the family of God as a unified host of saints loving and edifying one another to grow in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

From Paul's letters to the Ephesians and to the Colossians, it is clear men, women and children met regularly together for worship. Notable in Ephesians 6:1-4, and Colossians 3:16 is Paul's instruction about wholesome, godly relationships between husbands and wives, fathers and children, and masters and slaves. If the members cited were to hear the counsel offered, it is likely they were all present in an unsegregated gathering. Paul reinforces age integrated gatherings when he counsels Timothy how to "treat an older man," "older women" and "younger men" all in the same context. Howard Vanderwell adds:

From what we discover in the New Testament Church, "it seems that in the early New Testament-era believer lived with the assumption, that of course, each generations needed each other. This was an urgent concern among their relatives in the Old Testament era, and we could expect it to carry over to the new generations. So when Paul says to the Colossians, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in wisdom" we can assume he pictures young and old in relationship with one another, for later, in the chapter, we find him specifically referring to wives and husbands, children and parents, and slaves and masters.<sup>1</sup>

## **Problems Age Segregation in the Church**

Unfortunately, in the 22<sup>nd</sup> century, most local churches are not following the New Testament pattern of intergenerational worship. Instead of reflecting biblical member integrated worship, they have embraced an isolated philosophy in which parishioners are set aside into specialized ministry groups, such as Children's, Youth, College and Career, and Seniors Ministries. Rarely do these groups have interactive, intergenerational worship together. Even though these groups are regarded as "essential parts of the church in name," there often is little or no connectedness between the groups spiritually or socially except during "collective family events" such as Sunday school picnics, Christmas banquets, mission conferences



**Chapter 11**  
**Francis of Assisi**  
**A Directed and Devoted**  
**Disciple**



## **Introduction**

Mention the name Francis of Assisi in most settings and the immediate association with the name most likely will be with the well-known and often recited Francis of Assisi, “Peace Prayer”. But association with Francis of Assisi should extend beyond being known as the author of the “Peace Prayer,” he is also regarded as the “mirror of Christ.”<sup>1</sup> This title has been bestowed on him because, through self-emptying and unwavering devotion and servitude to Christ, he brought about reform within the Catholic Church that motivated thousands to become poor materially, so they could become rich spiritually as they increased their knowledge of Christ as Lord. Before a discussion about how Francis “mirrored Christ,” a history of Assisi is in order.

## **Background**

Francis was born in 1181 or 1182<sup>2</sup> in Assisi, Italy to Pietro Bernardino.<sup>3</sup> He was a wealthy clothing merchant in the city who strongly desired his son to be active in the Catholic Church. At birth Francis was given the name Giovanni.<sup>4</sup> However, while his father was

on a trip purchasing clothing for the business, his mother Picca<sup>5</sup> had him baptized as Francesco – which meant “little Frenchman.” This she did in honour of her French heritage, and because Francis’ father avidly traded with France<sup>6</sup>. This name stayed with him until his death on October 13, 1226.

During his childhood, Francis was a happy, well-adjusted boy who received a good education, and often helped his father in the clothing business. It was his father’s hope that after Francis had received adequate religious training as a Friar he would take on the responsibilities of the business. Francis, however, had other aspirations for life. Instead of loving business and profit, he preferred the life of partying and enjoying the “good life” with his friends.

Around eighteen or nineteen Francis became enamored with the troubadours<sup>7</sup> who often went to battle in nearby countries. As soon as it was possible he enrolled in the military, “for to Francis the military was the best place to gain prestige, and it was prestige that he longed for.”<sup>8</sup> Shortly thereafter, Francis went to battle in one of the petty wars between Perugia – a neighbouring city – and Assisi. His military life, however, was short lived. Within a month of enlisting, he was injured and taken captive by the Perugian Army.<sup>9</sup> After a year of imprisonment he was released. It is presume this happened because a large ransom may have been paid by his father.<sup>10</sup>

After his release, Francis returned home to recover from an illness with which he had been inflicted while in prison. During a year of recuperation he rested, worked in his father’s store, and contemplated the true meaning and value of life. Because he was still smitten with the glory of the military, on the request of the Duke of Apulia<sup>11</sup> he re-enlisted in the army. As he travelled to join the battalion, Francis encountered a radical, life changing experience which would later be referred to as the beginning of his conversion. This, unlike the conversion of the Apostle Paul, “would be a gradual learning process by which he would gain an understanding of Christ’s grace which he would mirror throughout his life.” Regarding this dramatic conversion, Kenneth S. Latourette comments:

The conversion of Francis to the life of religion was not a sudden dedication, but came as the result of a spiritual pilgrimage of many months which began in his adolescence. It was partly induced by illness and disappointments and was

influenced by painful and intense struggles of the spirit and in its earlier stages by relapses in the former way of living.<sup>11</sup>

## **Conversion**

Francis' conversion was to be as unique and as varied as his life-style. One night, while waiting for commissioning for battle, he had a vision of a "fair and great palace, and an array of war implements that were marked with a cross." Being completely stunned, he yelled out, "To whom do these things belong?" The answer was immediate and simple – "To you and your soldiers"<sup>12</sup> Immediately Francis accepted the vision as a confirmation God would enable his brigade to win the next upcoming battle. The next day, with full confidence of a victory, Francis once again headed out to battle. After continuing for only a short distance, he heard the same voice speak to him a second time saying, "Return home, for that which you have seen means something will be accomplished spiritually. This is to be fulfilled in you, not by human counsel, but by the Divine."<sup>13</sup>

As Francis considered the messages he had received, he became consumed with the need to discover their meanings. Within a few days he returned to Assisi, and found some abandoned caves in which he lived as a hermit while he waited for God to show him his true calling and purpose for life.

## **The Triune Calling**

For almost a year (1201-1202), Francis' life was an endless adventure of seeking God's direction for spiritual fulfillment. Hours were spent reading and meditating on scripture. When he was not meditating, Francis rode his horse throughout the nearby countryside, enjoying nature which he believed God had created perfect, "as one of the sacraments for His Church."<sup>14</sup> During one of these occasions he was confronted by a leper who was begging for alms. At first sight he was repulsed by the individual's smell, and uncomely appearance. To rid himself of the beggar's presence, he quickly satisfied the man's need by handing him a coin or two. But, as he was about to depart, something supernatural constrained him to have pity on the man for he, like the birds and the flowers which Francis worshipped, was also a part of God's creative power and should be honoured.<sup>15</sup> Immediately Francis jumped off his horse, embraced and kissed the leper, for he

saw standing in the man Christ, manifested as a leper. This incident sealed Francis' unwavering commitment of servitude to Christ to all people, in all things.

Sometime later (1205), Francis would encounter his second life-changing experience, while visiting the church of San Damiano,<sup>16</sup> which was pastored by a poor, dejected priest. While in the church meditating, Francis was impressed to look on the crucifix which hung directly over the altar. As he obeyed his impulse, he heard the crucifix say, "Fix My Church." The church, at this time, was in a dilapidated and deplorable condition structurally. Francis was a builder. Immediately "he sold his horse, and many bales of his father's cloth, making the sign of the cross over them to indicate their pious and charitable destination."<sup>17</sup> With the money he received, he purchased materials to repair the church.

After hearing about Francis' stealing the bales of cloth, his father brought him before the Church, and charged him with theft. When the Church ordered Francis to repay his father, he became incensed with his father's arrogance, and separated himself from his family completely. G. K. Chesterton describes the event:

There was a new air about Francis. He was no longer crushed, still less crawling, so far as his father was concerned: yet his words do not, I think, indicate either just indignation or wanton insult, or anything in the nature of a mere continuation of the quarrel. They are rather remotely akin to mysterious utterances of his great model, 'What have I to do with thee?' or even the terrible, 'Touch me not'. He stood up before them all and said, 'Up to this time I have called Pietro Bernardino father, but now I am the servant of God. Not only the money, but everything else that can be called his, I will restore to my father, even the very clothes he has given me.' And he rent off all his garments except one; and they saw that was a hair-shirt.<sup>18</sup>

Now fully separated unto God, Francis set out on a lifelong venture of "Fixing Christ's Church". However, this time it was not physical disrepair he would tackle. It, on the other hand, was spiritual reformation through preaching the Kingdom Of God, calling fellow church members to repentance, and demonstrating the compassion of Christ wherever he went.

In 1208, Francis had his third and most profound life-changing encounter with the supernatural. It happened while worshipping at the

church in Portincula, some two miles below Assisi.<sup>19</sup> As he sat thinking about God's direction in earlier days, he was directed to Matthew 10:7-19, which called Christ's disciples to abandon earthly riches for servitude to God. For some time Francis knew God had been calling him to a special, selfless servanthood. How he would fulfill this calling, he was not sure. The passage from Matthew answered his question. He was to become poor in earthly matters, and of himself so through this poverty he could become rich in Christ as he imaged the Christ-like life "with a deep sense of humility and compassion to others he met."<sup>20</sup>

Immediately he submitted himself to the "call" by discarding or selling all his earthly possessions, and living among the poor. When his friends heard Francis was exhibiting this abhorrent and unbecoming behaviour, they thought he had gone mad. In response to their concerns, Francis had one reply, "He had married 'Lady Poverty' who was "the noblest, the richest, and the most beautiful woman ever seen,"<sup>21</sup> and he was ecstatic. Henry H. Milman adds:

Francis was now wedded to Poverty; but he would love it in its basic form – mendicancy. He wandered abroad, was ill used by robbers, on his escape he received from an old friend at Gubbio a hermit's attire, a short tunic, a leathern girdle, a staff and slippers. He begged at the gates of monasteries; he discharged the most menial offices. With even more profound devotion he dedicated himself to service at the hospital at Gubbio to that unhappy race of beings that even Christianity was constrained to banish from the social pale - the lepers.<sup>22</sup>

Whereas Francis could have lived the "good life" enjoying his father's wealth, he cast it aside so he could preach the gospel as he lived among the poor in relentless, compassionate servitude, for "his attentive care for others was rooted in Jesus Christ."<sup>23</sup> On first consideration one might think he was "swept away" by a social gospel which attended only to the temporary ills of society. Such, however, was not the case. By marrying 'Lady Poverty,' Francis wanted to touch individuals in their need, and motivate them to seek Christ as the final and full source of meaning in life. Frederick Sontag states:

The treasure of eternal life is what Francis sought to convey to those in want, not necessarily a socio-economic program, although in his own case, the renunciation of possessions was



Chapter 12

***The Pietists:  
Spiritual Awakening  
in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century  
Lutheran Church***



## **Introduction**

Within most religions there often arises is desire by the faithful to discover and follow a gratifying and edifying form of worship which will satisfy both the mind and soul. Throughout many religions, when segments of the church become dissatisfied with the populace view of faith, and no longer see any meaning or purpose in worship, a split within the sect occurs, and a new group is formed. This occurred in the German Lutheran Church around the middle of the 17th century. A new group, The Pietists, started under the leadership of Jakob Spener.

In this paper I will show how Jakob Spener, through Pietism, instilled within this sect's adherents a fresh appreciation of personal salvation, and the need of exemplifying Christ's character through kind and generous works daily as an inseparable part of their faith.

## **The Origin of Pietism**

The catalyst for establishing Pietism was found in the contemptuous spiritual condition of Germany after the Thirty Year's War. This struggle between Catholics and Protestants, which ended in

the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, could be described partly as economic, partly political, and partly religious. Germany, spiritually, was in a chaotic condition. Within the Lutheran Church, there was no spiritual direction or stability. The noble and the rich occupied important places within the Church, and they almost controlled the depth of worship offered by their pastors. The deep and devoted personal commitment to Christ and His Church had been minimized. In its place came structured liturgy which stressed the study of dogmatics<sup>1</sup>. Unfortunately, this new direction taken by the Church strongly promoted the notion Christianity was nothing more than a matter of intellectual assent to correct doctrine.

Luther's central teaching of "justification by faith" was being taught in the Lutheran congregations, but without a complementary, and balanced emphasis on the work of God in spiritual regeneration of the soul. Apathy to reading scripture, praying and godly care one for the other was commonplace. Nothing would change until a new call for the laity to display their faith through interpersonal, Christ motivated care, was preached. F. Stoeffler comments:

Lutheran orthodoxy did not only succeed in theologizing the Christian faith, but in so doing often distorted it. Examples are numerous. While it paid lip service, for instance, to the authority of the Bible, the real authority was lodged in the orthodox perspective upon the Bible. Devotion from that perspective, and its accepted forms of expression was considered a deviation from Scripture and, hence, heresy.<sup>2</sup>

This polemic condition in the church was heightened through a pronounced lack of Christian service by the laity because of "ethical insensitivity."<sup>3</sup> From the clergy to the commoner in the pew, troublesome problems existed in the church because few, if any, knew their ministry gifts or were given opportunity to use them for the good of the body. Instead of endorsing everyone's ministry gifts, competition for ministry opportunity based on favoritism was widespread in Lutheran Churches. Spener, recognizing this unwholesome and ungodly situation existed, states:

Distressing as conditions in the political estate are, we preachers in the ecclesiastic estate cannot deny our estate is also thoroughly corrupt . . . when you see the people are undisciplined you must realize, no doubt the priests are not

holy. We must confess not only men are to found here and there and in our estate who are guilty of open scandals, but also there are fewer than may appear who do not understand and practice true Christianity, (which consists of more than avoiding manifest vices and living an outwardly moral life). Although, according to the common estimate of men as seen through eyes captivated by the fashion of the world, they may seem to be blameless, yet their lives reflect (subtly, to be sure, nonetheless plainly), a worldly spirit, marked by carnal pleasure, lust of the eye, and arrogant behaviour, and so it is evident they have never taken even the first practical principle of Christianity seriously, namely, self-denial.<sup>4</sup>

Clearly recognizing that such situation did not honour God, and did not build the body to the fulness of Jesus Christ, Spener launched his campaign for spiritual renewal within the Lutheran Church. His emphasis – regardless what other pastors might think – was to teach a Pauline commitment of spiritual renewal parishioners – young and old - would comprehend the basis of salvation, in and through Jesus Christ, and would then live it out through expressions of kind, godly good works daily.

## **Background to Spener**

Jakob Spener, who was born on January 23, 1635 in Rappotsweiler, Upper Alsace, Germany, is credited with starting Pietism.<sup>5</sup> He was the son of a well-to-do merchant of the community, and because of his father's status, he often had contact with the wealthy and influential people of the area.

From his earliest childhood Spener was prepared for service within the Lutheran Church by his devout parents. During his early years in school, he spent much time reading religious, scholarly books. Because of this, he was greatly influenced by John Arndt's, *True Christianity*, and by the English Puritan author, Richard Baxter. In 1651, at sixteen, he attended the University of Strasbourg<sup>6</sup> for religious education. After gaining a comprehensive knowledge of scripture, he concluded there was more to being a Christian than the Lutheran Church had been teaching. Being disappointed the Church had not been teaching "the full gospel," he started investing his time in reading John Calvin's writings. Much to his delight he discovered Calvin taught much of what he believed about the need for the laity

being instructed to exemplify Christ by doing good works. Immediately he resolved he would study Calvin's writings more in-depth and see what changes might be brought within the Lutheran Church. In the middle of his third year of studies at Strasbourg, Spener started speaking publicly about the radical, God inspired changes that needed to take place within the Lutheran Church if it were to provide effective ministry in Germany.

In 1659, shortly after completing his studies at Strasbourg, Spener spent the following two years travelling throughout Europe visiting Lutheran Churches which, he concluded, "were far from what God had intended them to be." In 1661 he arrived at Geneva. After residing here for five months, he started studying the teachings of Jean de Labadie. Labadie was a Jesuit who, some months before Spener's arrival at Geneva, had met a popular Reformed Church preacher who had left the Reformed Church to establish "Separatist' House Churches"<sup>7</sup> in which parishioners were taught how to live out Christ by doing good works. Probably, it was from Labadie Spener got his idea for the "cell groups," which he later established and called, "conventicles."

In 1666, after a time of preaching in Strasbourg, Spener accepted a "call" to be senior minister in Frankfurt Am Main. So impressed were the people with his preaching, they asked him to be the president of all the churches in the region. Although only thirty-one, he had responsibilities in the city's main principle church, as well as over a dozen or more pastors. Throughout his ministry Spener was convinced Christians needed to intensify their appreciation of salvation by gaining a deeper understanding of scripture. Therefore, he published his "Collegia Pietatus." These were devotionals by which he instilled within Lutheran parishioners the fundamentals of personal piety. He also took steps to improve the instructional atmosphere of the children, and to review the Lutheran "Rite of Confirmation" which had fallen into disuse.<sup>8</sup>

In 1669 he "planted the idea" of spiritual renewal for believers by suggesting:

How much good it would do if good friends would come together on a Sunday and instead of getting out glasses, cards, or dice would take up a book and read it for the edification of all, or would review something of the sermons that were heard. If, they should they not be quite able to find their way through, they would ask a preacher to clarify the matter. We preachers

cannot instruct the people from our pulpits as much as is needful unless other persons from the congregation, who by God's grace, have a superior knowledge of Christianity, take the pains by the virtue of their universal priesthood, to work with and under us to correct and reform as much in their neighbours as they are able according to the measure of their gifts and their simplicity.<sup>9</sup>

The impact of this message on the people of Frankfurt Am Main was outstanding. Many parishioners started to meet as Spener had directed. But the reform the Lutheran Church so badly needed, and desired did not take place as fast as Spener had hoped it would. Therefore, in 1675 he published his *Pia Desideria* in which he set out the spiritual condition of the Lutheran Church, and suggested six proposals by which the Lutheran Church could be renewed spiritually from within the ranks. The writings were reservedly accepted, and the foundation for reform was established. Within a few months, after the book's publication, hundreds of "cell groups" were established. A spiritual rebirth was now awakened within the Church.

Spener died in 1705. But by this time, the movement had been firmly founded. A coworker, Hermann Francke took up the "torch" of truth." Through his strong preaching of the Word, and consistent mentoring of new converts, the movement grew rapidly. Positive, marked reform in the Church, as a whole, took place throughout Germany.

## **Tenants of Pietism**

The Lutheran Church was in an appalling, and shameful spiritual condition. Although church attendance was large, devotion to, and understanding of the Gospel the Church claimed to follow, was weak. Spener was driven with an insatiable desire to correct the reprehensible problems within the Lutheran Church which included, "both the laxity of the clergy and the shortcomings of the established church system."<sup>10</sup>

In starting the Pietists, Spener was looking to establish an authentic life-style expression of faith within believers which would reform, and possibly replace the then present superficial practice of worship which he had found in it. The cause for Spener was simple; reform at any cost, but reform that would last and touch people within and without! At the onset of his reform attempts for spiritual renewal

## **Chapter 13**

### Liberation Theology: Its Influence on South American Christianity



## **Introduction**

Before 1960 little, if anything was heard in North America about Liberation Theology that was gaining growth in Latin America. For the major part North American Christians considered Latin America as a “third world mission field” which desperately needed its evangelistic message so the uneducated, poor and unregenerate could experience the abundant, salvific life Christ intended for those who would believe in His name. Undoubtedly, this desire was commendable for believers in North America. But, despite what they planned and what they did, God had a new, fresh, Holy Spirit rebirth of faith for South American Christians – Protestants and Catholics alike – whereby thousands of poor, disenfranchised and forgotten poor would come to faith in Christ and a more welcome socio-economic standing.

However, since 1970 Liberation Theology has become a prominent theology practiced in many parts of the world, including Latin South America, Asia, and Africa. Therefore, an understanding of it no longer remains an option for North American believers if they are to understand the ‘fight’ for socioeconomic, political and religious freedoms faced by the disenfranchised so they can enjoy unrestrained dignity as humans. Although it is not the author’s goal to minimize the



significance of Liberation Theology in other communities, his focus will centre on effect Liberation Theology has had in Latin America.

## **A Brief Historical Overview of Latin America**

South America was discovered by Columbus in 1492. In 1495, by the Treaty of Tordesillas, Pope Alexander VI allotted colonization of the 'new world' between Spain and Portugal. With this order in place immediate settlement of South America by Europeans began. From the onset the Church's primary goal was evangelization of the Aztecs of Mexico and Incas of Peru through commendable peaceful pronouncements of the gospel. But, shortly after their arrival, and the acquisition of large landmasses, the clerics became sidetracked and reverted to violence to control the natives who questioned their misdirected activities. As cleric, autocratic power increased within the Church questioning of their authority, by the natives, was repelled through inhumane punishment or segregation of the natives into the isolated and rural areas of the country.

During the sixteenth century, when colonization was well on its way, and excessive profits could be realized from exports of South America products, class distinction and class segregation became ramped. Because the Church clerics held unrestrained authority and had no tolerance to the inquiries posed by the natives, the natives became "isolated to a subordinate status because of the imposition of social, economic and religious groups carried out during this time."<sup>2</sup> Already, by this time, natives were deprived, by the Church, of food, clothing, and education, even though it offered them religious instruction providing they submitted to the Church's authority. If Christ or Paul were to have visited Latin America at this time, neither would have detected the Church's commitment to Christ's teaching of Matthew 25, "whosoever doeth these things does them unto me."<sup>3</sup>

By the middle of the nineteenth century, as the wealth of the Church increased, national officials began openly attacking the Church about the inconsistency between its financial holdings compared with that of the grass-roots population in Latin America. Despite this, however, the Church made no efforts to correct the disparity. Instead of offering relief, the Church alienated and 'crushed' the people more, so within a short time they became regarded as "nonpersons".<sup>4</sup>

In the 20 century Latin America gained independence from Spain and Portugal. Having grasped this, hope for improvement in

the now deplorable conditions of the poor was induced. But, despite this and later “economic development programs”<sup>5</sup> started by Britain and the United States, no immediate notable change in the welfare of the oppressed, and isolated natives would be realized “because only those at the top of the ‘social ladder’ received the benefits offered while the natives were left powerless with no recourse to address their continuing plight of exploitation and abuse.”<sup>6</sup> Equating the conditions in Latin America to those of Africa, Dianne Stinton, considers the economic efforts of multinational corporations hypocritical as they pour wealth into nations for cultural reform, while forgetting to reach out and meet the needs of the impoverished. She thinks:

Can a nation develop culturally while being politically oppressed and economically exploited to such a horrifying degree, while its people, faced with starvation and many other catastrophes, struggle for survival? Social concern and theology cannot exist if these take a one-sided interest in culture while not being directly concerned with the people of God being liberated from their deplorable misery.<sup>7</sup>

As far as the poor were concerned there was no immediate remedy for their despicable plight. But knowing of the works of such people as Francis of Assisi, who had “married poverty,”<sup>8</sup> John of the Cross, and others who had also identified with the plight of the poor, the natives accepted their present status and hoped beyond hope that their plight eventually would be changed.

## **Ground Work for Liberation Theology**

Because of this, the plight of Latin America’s poor looked dismal and irreversible. However, during the middle of the 20 century ‘seeds of redress’ were to be planted when, in 1955, Pope Pius XII attended the Council of Latin American Episcopacy. During his visit he pleaded with the clerics to “reexamine and return to the true message of Christ which was to bring liberty to the poor.”<sup>9</sup> Although there was no immediate, radical provisional relief offered to the poor, this meeting aroused many clerics to review the Church’s prejudiced and unorthodox practices that were extended to the poor.

A second, more pronounced, incentive for change, within the Church, came during Vatican II (1962-1965). During these sessions Pope John XXII challenged the Church to “integrate doctrine with pastoral care and practices which would be greater gospel influence for change to bear on the despicable, harsh, and inhumane life-styles of the poor around the world.”<sup>10</sup> For the greater part the clerics departed Vatican II with an intense realization that they needed to move the gospel beyond the sanctuary to the streets where people lived if they were to be effective in ministry. For the first time in Latin America the Church began to see and empathize with the poor who they previously had regarded as nonpersons.

The most profound influence on the church to reevaluate its attitude towards and treatment of the poor came in 1968 at Medellin, Colombia. During the General Conference of Latin American Episcopate, the clerics discussed the political attitude of faith, and began working for social justice among the poor. Their approach was to be distinctly contrary to what had been practiced earlier. Sherron George provides the following:

Seeking to apply the edicts of Vatican II, the bishops introduced a new hermeneutic to the Roman Catholic Church by integrating scripture ‘from below’, from the perspective of the people of God. The ‘liberation narrative’ in Exodus, and the emphasis on poverty and wealth in Luke, *especially Luke 14:18-19*, opened a fresh chapter on interpretation for both scholars and oppressed people. From these, and other biblical accounts in both the Old and New Testaments, they discovered that collective identity and solidarity with the poor was the central theme of the biblical ethic.<sup>11</sup>

Through this conference the Church was reawakened to what it believed, and should have been practicing, that being the contending for social, economic, political and religious liberation for the poor. With this new appreciation of faith projected as practice, the Church collectively would “find itself moving its traditions and ministry beyond the confessional walls as it joined others in the

common struggle for a just and sustainable world for everyone, including the poor, who, for so long, had been ignored.”<sup>12</sup>

## **Definition of Liberation Theology**

Although Liberation Theology is practiced in many parts of the world, no homologous definition for the term has been reached. Generally, however, “all genuine Liberation Theology finds its motivation in fighting against of all forms of oppression, be it sexism, heterosexism, homophobia, racism, classicism, or cultural and religious discrimination with effective solidarity.”<sup>13</sup> The hermeneutic for Liberation Theology was unveiled as cleric reread the scripture and discovered that God displays both preferential love and concern for the poor.

Holding this understanding, proponents of Liberation Theology began openly declaring all of God’s creation is essentially good because it possesses dignity as the *imageo dei* which should not be abused regardless of one’s socioeconomic, educational, political or religious standing. This affirmation incited Liberation Theologians to align themselves with the poor, and contend that change for the poor, must rise from the “bottom up” - from the marginalized ‘nonpersons’ who are afflicted with appalling living conditions, malnutrition, inadequate health care - as they recognize they have inalienable human rights. The result will be love in action moving all believers to participate with each and God, in a collective struggle for radical, positive improvements socially for the poor. As this happens, a nonviolent and radical revolution will be spurred on by love and respect one for the other. Eventually social, economic, political, and religious change, for the better of everyone - will be realized. Such a change would allow everyone access - without discrimination - to land, political offices, as and all essential goods for a dignified and healthy life-style. This would not happen automatically because of government incited social reform. This entraps citizens to greater dependency on government.<sup>14</sup>

Gustavo Gutierrez, a Peruvian Priest, and possibly the Father of Latin American Liberation Theology, in his book, *A Theology of Liberation Theology* delineates three kinds of “violent” poverty recognized in the oppressed and marginalized poor, because women, blacks, the uneducated, and the impoverished are delegated as second-level creatures. These are cited as follows:

First, there is the overt, immediately recognizable material which is scandalous, and must be fought against. Second there a spiritual poverty of those who have made themselves available to God as little children. But, Gutierrez goes on to elaborate a third meaning, which is known because of the circumstance in Latin America: “Christian poverty,” - an expression of love, is solidarity with the poor and is protest against poverty. Christian poverty in Latin America is solidarity and protest.<sup>15</sup>

Four integral steps or “rubrics”, as provided by the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, (EATWOT 1979), that are necessary before Liberation Theology can be started. Reuben Rodriguez describes them as follows:

First, the church’s commitment to undertake scientific analysis of social, economic, political reality; second, the church’s mission defined as liberative evangelization; the church’s commitment to a program of liberation construction of a just society; and fourth, a doctrinal reflection on the church’s preferential option for the poor.<sup>16</sup>

Without this collective agreement and directive, Liberation Theology could never have a viable platform from which it could work towards successful elevation of the poor from their deplorable conditions to one of justice and hope!

### **Model for Liberation Theology**

The conviction and determination that the poor should be liberated from their insidious plight was not a self-initiated accomplishment. Rather, it was advocated by Thomas Hanks and others. Its purpose was twofold. First, to develop a “detailed assessment of the plight of the poor,<sup>17</sup> and gain the clearest understand of God’s plan for humanity so a practical means of action to resolve these problems will be in keeping with God’s original plan.”<sup>18</sup> The resolve of Liberation Theology includes unreserved release from social, economic, political, and religious oppression as the church and the state is transformed by the grace of God to be what He has always intended them to be. Dialogue to accomplish this may be necessary, but liberation must happen - and it will happen - because hope will

drive these entities to it even as it caused the first century church to turn its world “upside down” (Acts 17:6).

Although not appealed to today as strongly as it had been in the early 1970's, the Exodus Narrative is regularly chosen as the example Liberation Theology must follow if justice for the poor is to be implemented. According to the Avant-Gard, who promoted Liberation Theology, God has always wanted liberation from oppression. Although He tolerated it for a season, He eventually intervened, and crushed it by commissioning an avenger - Moses - to activate a unified community with freedom as their prime focus. The Exodus motif provided the stimulant for Liberation Theology because its proponents saw that the Hebrew Children believed God was working directly with them. Even though their freedom was not presently actualized, God eventually would provide it. This motif creates a cooperative solidarity towards a common goal that no amount of oppression can extinguish. Once adopted, it inspires the oppressed to pacifistic, revolutionary action that resonates with unwavering determination to see their freedom regardless of the difficulties incurred.<sup>19</sup>

Many Liberation Theologians have appealed to Isaiah 61:1-3 and Luke 4:18 as further authentication that God empathizes with the poor, and fights with them in their deplorable circumstances. They affirm with David God's faithfulness in their distress (Ps 18:6). Because of this, they continually collectively pray, study, and work towards correcting the injustices that have been afflicted on to them through the past centuries. For those that hear Christ's teaching in Luke 4:18, and hear the distressful cries of the poor, “it is unquestionably clear Christ congratulates believers who go beyond recognizing the exploitation of the poor and embrace their destitution by helping them find release from it.”<sup>20</sup>

Although the aforementioned have provided inspiration for the marginalized in the “fight for liberation from poverty,” St. Francis of Assisi, by “marrying poverty”<sup>21</sup> may be regarded as the greatest mentor in this area. Reflection on Assisi's Franciscan Order at Medellin may have been motivation for the clerics to extend pastoral care beyond the pulpit to the poor, for through his example they were drawn to scripture to investigate how Christ taught His followers how to relate to the poor, and “demonstrate they had come to a personal relationship with Him.”<sup>22</sup>

Despite not being well-known beyond Latin America, Bartolome de la Casa, a 16<sup>th</sup> century Catholic Priest, also provides impetus for believers to contend for social change among the poor. He,

Chapter 15  
Baptist Pastoral  
Leadership Training  
in  
Post-Communist Romania



## Introduction

Donna and I have visited Romania eight times since 2001. During our visits we have talked with hundreds of Romanian pastors of large city, and small isolated village churches. Unlike us, not many westerners are familiar with the hardships pastors who lived under Ceausescu's rule faced. This paper is a historical sketch of the growth of the Baptist Union Fellowship from the 1909 to 1991.

From 1994 to December 25, 1989, whenever the western world received news about Romania, it usually was about oppression the nation suffered at the hands of Gheorghiu-Dej or Nicolae Ceausescu.<sup>1</sup>

Although the entire nation faced immeasurable dictatorial controls, evangelical churches in particular, suffered worse as educational programs were introduced to desensitize Christians from believing in God and to “destroy” the seditious, unwholesome influence evangelicals had – especially in the small, isolated



villages. Not only would God no longer be worshipped, it was hoped He no longer would be thought about. Peter Dugulescu rightly concludes, “Romania’s problems began in 1944 when communists assumed leadership of the country’s government, and declared it “a land without God.”<sup>2</sup>

Of the two leaders, Gheorghiu Ceausescu proved to be the greater “albatross” for Romanian evangelicals. On gaining power in 1962<sup>3</sup> he became threatened by the rapid growth of evangelical church congregations. Immediately he developed a disdainful disgust towards them. At his inaugural address he unabashedly stated that evangelicals were an imperialist enemy to the state. Within six months he limited the number of evangelical denominations that would be recognized by the government, strictly monitored the pastor’s activities, and had them arrested “on the slightest suspicion” they were not complying with his orders. Necula Marian comments about Ceausescu’s pastoral control:

The cults (evangelicals) were a “legitimate target” for the communist regime for a twofold reason: first, as another religious challenger to its ideological prominence; second, because they were labelled as agents to the imperialist camp. So, even if the constitution guaranteed the freedom of conscience and of confession, persecutions were an everyday reality for the members of these protestant cults.<sup>4</sup>

The height of Ceausescu’s overwhelming hatred for evangelical churches was demonstrated in 1985 when border authorities confiscated twenty-four thousand Bibles which were being smuggled in from England. On receiving the report concerning the discovery, he became so incensed he had the “entire load ground to pulp for the use of toilet paper.”<sup>5</sup> Commenting on this travesty, with uncontrolled tears, Peter Vidu remarked, “that which thousands regarded as being more precious than food, one man regarded as nothing more than dung.”<sup>6</sup>

Of the four religious denominations “recognized” by Ceausescu,<sup>7</sup> the Baptist Union Fellowship incurred the most vicious persecution. But, regardless how intense the oppression became, the attacks did not thwart the believers’ steadfast commitment to God or

their zeal to establish new centres of worship. Under the cover of darkness, in homes or in village forests, pastors boldly preached the gospel, and thousands came to faith in Christ despite the consequences that could befall them. Peter Vidu comments on these events:

My father was one of the preachers who would not surrender to Ceausescu's demands. When the Secretariat learned that his church was increasing in numbers, it withdrew his ministerial license and sent him to Muldova to work in a textile factory thinking that this would crush his zeal for ministry. However, on arriving, my father immediately began preaching Christ, and many villagers believed and repented. When they inquired about baptism, my father baptized them in nearby streams using the moonlight God provided. According to my father, the risk of being one of Christ's Ambassadors was nothing compared with the joy he discovered as he saw countless individuals come to Christ. So, day and night, he laboured to see God's kingdom be established in earth as it is in heaven.<sup>8</sup>

## **Background to the Baptist Union Fellowship**

Although Baptists were known in Romania as early as 1869, the first recognized group had its beginnings in 1909 when a group of German Christians visited the nation, and started a mission church near Arad.<sup>9</sup> During the following four years, because of intense physical and verbal harassment by the Orthodox Priests, they made no further attempts to establish new churches. In 1913, however, Constantin Adorian<sup>10</sup> an ethnic Romanian felt God was appointing him to start a Romanian "fellowship church" in or near Bucharest. As a result of his faithfulness to the "call," the church – with another five or six – was started within the year. By 1917, because of unexpected church growth, the pastors laid the foundation for the Baptist Union Fellowship, and in 1920 it became a reality. Today the Baptist Union Fellowship is Romania's largest sect consisting of

over five hundred churches, two theological seminaries<sup>11</sup> a Christian university,<sup>12</sup> and a hospice care centre.<sup>13</sup>

## **Clergy Training during Pre-communist Times**

In the earliest days of ministry 1913-1920, Baptist pastors had no official theological training, so they started, and oversaw churches based on their “perceived call” to ministry. On weekends, or in evenings after working on farms, they visited nearby villages and boldly proclaimed what they had been taught by missionaries, or what they understood from reading the scriptures. When a new church was started, the “church planter” commissioned a trustworthy, competent new believer to oversee the work, and then moved on to another village where he would start a new work.

The first “revivalist missionary and noteworthy “church planter” at this time was Iosif Trifa. During his earliest days of ministry he was an Orthodox Priest. However, as he began understanding – through an illumination of the Holy Spirit – that Christ was the Savior, he began preaching the need for people to repent, and follow God. His ministry among the Orthodox churches ended in 1922 when he was excommunicated from the Church. Over a period of fifteen years, 1922-1937 he established thirty-five Baptist churches, of which twenty-one still exist today.<sup>14</sup>

Although many new works were established during this time, their survival was doubted. Two major deterrents to their survival existed. First, relentless caustic and belittling verbal and physical attacks on Baptist pastors by the Orthodox priests often discouraged young and untrained workers from starting new works. If the pastors did not succumb to the attacks, the priests would confront the converted and discourage them from attending the meetings by saying the evangelicals had entered into a battle for their souls, and “through their dubious and untested teachings they were leading them into deeper sin by causing them to leave the True Church and the spiritual care they had been promised by God’s appointed priests.”<sup>15</sup>

Second, charges by Pentecostal missionaries that Baptist pastors neglected preaching the full gospel about the Holy Spirit<sup>16</sup> greatly hindered church growth. Using this accusation as a foundation for starting new congregations, Pentecostal missionaries



## Endnotes & Bibliography

### Chapter 2

#### Endnotes

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