

**A Lover's Quarrel  
with the Evangelical Church**

*Warren Cole Smith*

**Authentic Publishers**



## Acknowledgments

To the team at Authentic Books I offer a special thanks. Volney James and Dana Carrington saw the potential of this book before many others could, and Bette Smyth, my editor, helped realize that potential. My gratitude runs de

## Foreword



I still believed in the great hope of evangelicalism, which is summarized in the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19–









Indeed, when I read Richard Weaver's sixty-year-old critique of the modern world and translated it into my own experience, a light bulb went on in my mind. Weaver was



That's the myth. And like all myths, there is truth in it. But also like all myths, it is











It was a defining moment for both the Bush campaign and Ralph Reed. When Bush ultimately moved into the White House, Reed became known as something of a kingmaker. He was elected chairman of the Georgia Republican Party in 2001; and in the

campaign by inviting Rudolph Guiliani to campaign for him. To many of Reed's former supporters, it was a sign of desperation—and a sign that Reed had completely sold out his Christian values. Guiliani was both pro-choice and pro-gay. He was the kind of Republican that Reed and his supporters in previous years would have worked against.

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It's possible that Perkins knew that things were trending badly for the Republican Party, and he was attempting to rally the troops. Said another way, it is possible that Perkins was intentionally lying. But it is much more likely that Perkins was simply fooled by the hype he had helped create at such events as the Stand for the Family rallies and the Washington Brief (lying...T3 ( It's...ag9 n.24-2 (moas )charitaossible.24a7 (and ) probaos[ (by ) -2

fifty thousand people or more. And on October 4, 1997, Promise Keepers organized the Stand in the Gap rally in Washington, D.C. A million men attended that event.

Women have their own, slightly more evolved, version of these rallies called Women

use, and other issues. We should also note, though, that these matters were addressed by the ministry and that Samaritan's Purse is now a member in good standing in the ECFA.<sup>19</sup>

Another characteristic of these organizations and the mass rallies they produce is the degree to which these rallies have tapped directly into the local churches. The most successful of these events are often sold out weeks and months in advance because of

Fourth, is their ability to stand apart from the local church—or, for that matter, from





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**The New Provincialism**

clearly at history, we do not erase or eliminate these causes. But we do risk becoming victims of these corrosive causes again and again.

What I attempted to do in chapter one was to describe some of the effects. But these effects, the symptoms we discussed in chapter one—



conversion to be relieved of the front-row scrutiny—which at these revival meetings could go on for days.

These camp meetings resulted in large crowds and claims of many conversions to







months since they have led a funeral service, because there are no old people in their churches.<sup>12</sup>

The most obvious, but in some ways the most superficial, indicator of the new provincialism in the modern evangelical church (or what we might more accurately call



activities and innovations of the evangelical church are fueled by pop culture, and youth culture in particular. These churches made no place for children and o6p



## **Utopias and Dystopias**

offered Eve in the garden of Eden: *Your Best Life Now!* That Osteen could title his book thus, completely without irony, and that much of evangelicalism could accept it without





model all but ensures that every generation would have to be reevangelized, since the

Because Willow Creek is so intentionally youth ministry for big people,



became president of the college in 1925, the so-



Oral Roberts University, but he soon dropped out to return to Houston and work in the audiovisual ministry of the church. When John Osteen died unexpectedly of a heart attack

But the pandering seems to be working, as the growth of the church indicates. Osteen seems to think so. “I think Joel views the fact that Lakewood is the largest church in America as a sign of God’s favor,” said Liichow. “But Mormonism is one of the fastest-growing religious groups in America, and Islam is one of the fastest-growing religions in the world. We certainly can’t say that’s a sign of God’s favor.”

Instead of numbers, Liichow said Christians should examine content. And it’s Osteen’s content that troubles critics like Liichow. The basic message of *Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential*



A partial answer to this question is that our concern he

therefore never able to fully discern the complete glory and character of God. There are mysteries of God that will not be known because they cannot be known.

But it is also true that humankind is the pinnacle of God's creative handiwork and that we can and should discern all of what God intends for us to discern of his character.

That is why the sentimentality of the evangelical church is idolatry, because it replaces a biblical God with one we prefer. This new god is therapeutic, but not redemptive. By embracing this new god made in our own image, we commit the same sin Eve committed in the garden of Eden: "You will be like God."







“ But Rosenberg remained a popular blogger, and when the *Times* story hit, he wrote,

## **The Growth of Christian Music**

When contemporary Christian music emerged in the 1970s, it was enough for most Christian music consumers that the songs contained Christian lyrics













century.<sup>10</sup> However, the focus of these early holy days—or holidays, as they came to be called—w





arenas, but the Millers suddenly found they could make small and midsize venues look full, and their albums were selling steadily.

Typical of their latest tour was a near-sold-out show at Charlotte's Neighborhood Theatre, a



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### **Body-Count Evangelism**

The paradox is that a genuine “love for souls” [is] diverted by fashionable modes into a mere “winning” of them [and] a total misuse of people for alleged evangelical “results.” The consequence is a loss of respect for people and their souls, and the withering of the original concern and love.

than fifty years ago? And whatever the difference—for better or worse—was the growth of the megachurch and the parachurch the cause of the change or just coincident with the change?

These are the open questions we will attempt to answer. But whatever investment you may have in the answer to these questions, almost no one would disagree with my presupposition that these ministries have become a dominant feature of the evangelical







author of evil and hell? Arminius argued that

The First Great Awakening was largely a church-based and urban phenomenon. Jonathan Edwards was one of the best-educated persons in The First Gre

Billy Graham and Jerry Falwell have called Charles Finney a hero. Theologian Michael Horton has not been so complimentary.<sup>15</sup> But both his admirers and his detractors agree that he was, perhaps, the defining religious figure of the nineteenth century.

The basic facts of Finney's life make it clear that he was not only a central figure of







At the risk of piling on, let's look at one more example of how body-count evangelism has become both pervasive and perverting in modern evangelicalism, and that is in the megachurch.

Rick Warren is perhaps the most famous evangelical pastor in the United States, at least he was at the opening of the twenty



sermon series





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### **The Great Stereopticon**

The Church is to develop a realistic alternative to the contemporary technocracy which is marked by bondage, materialism, self-



conflicts arose and so did the pressure. That pressure found an outlet artistically and romantically with producer T-Bone Burnett, who left his wife to marry Phillips.



Is it any wonder, then, that the rise of the g



The age of broadcasting had begun. And churches and denominations were in on it from the beginning. Mark Ward wrote an authorized history of Christian broadcasting for the National Religious Broadcasters (NRB) on the occasion of its fiftieth anniversary in

Indeed, some say Graham's association with Republican politicians was the seed for what came to be a decades-long association between Republicans and religious conservatives

Because our purpose here is not to recount the entire history of Christian broadcasting, I will observe that the rise of television also more or less corresponds with the rise of parachurch ministries. Campus Crusade for Christ, Navigators, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, Young Life, World Vision, the Billy Graham

was



today can understand the reconfiguration of social and political institutions



said that the message “Fear not. Jesus is Lord” might be unchanged from one medium to the next. However, that message has one effect when it is spoken by a televangelist asking for your money and quite another effect when it is spoken by a beloved pastor comforting you in a time of grave sickness. The words may be exactly the same, but the messages could not be more different.

I learned this lesson when I was in high school with a girl who would eventually become a world-class musician.











So it may not seem obvious that twenty years later, Johnston—after attending

But just because there are many people going doesn't mean that there is a lot being done on these trips. Indeed, Priest said that "the shift to short-term missions is significant, [in that] it may be the first mission movement in church history that is based largely on

followed more and more by people who have tried the Christian-

could use even young people in a foreign country.”<sup>5</sup> Verwer and his friends began making trips all around the world, including one to the Soviet Union in the summer of 1961. Verwer was arrested and accused of being a spy. He was ultimately released, but the

hundred people, the sheer pace of the church planting and the rate of conversions mean that the Believers Church of India is growing at the rate of about ten Saddleback churches per year.

The strategy of GFA/Believers Church means that they receive no missionaries from the United States or any other country—



This modern-day “Simon son of John” believed that this had to be more than a coincidence. “I surrendered my life,” he said. “That was a real encounter with God. I told

just as easily have come from the mouth of Jonathan Edwards: “My joy is to see people hear the gospel. A clear presentation. To accept the gospel is the work of the Holy Spirit. He will do his business when we do our business.”

to self-sufficiency and self







I have already mentioned the Mormons because in the twentieth century they embodied the same growth trends that the early church demonstrated and for much the same reason: they had large families that successfully transmitted their faith to the next generation. And there is another, even more interesting analogue, embodied in the Old Order Mennonites.

Old Order Mennonites are also known as “horse-and-buggy” or “Wenger” Mennonites after













the root of the New Testament word for the church, *ekklesia*

## **Epilogue**

There will be visions and revisions.  
—T. S. Eliot in *The Love Song of*

## Notes

### Introduction

1. It's interesting to browse MinistryWatch.com's website and see how many of today's major Christian ministries were founded in the 1940s and '50s. A few examples: World Vision (1950), Campus Crusade for Christ (1951), Compassion International (1952), " (ew ) Tj ET Q q 0.2400000 0 0 0.240000264.0048 6 612.99cm BT 50 0 0 :

7. From a press release from the Barna Research Group dated December



was hired to lead the group, but Robertson remained the public face of the group until it became clear to many that it was Reed, with uncommon organizational skills, communication skills, and a relentless work ethic, who really built the organization into the powerhouse it became. Both the Republican takeover of Congress in 1994 and George W. Bush's election in 2000 owe a great deal to the activism of Reed and the ChristinCoaliecti.me



any of these views.” ([www.sbc.net/aboutus](http://www.sbc.net/aboutus)) My own view, having been raised in a large Southern Baptist church and having covered the church as a journalist for more than twenty

8. The attendance and membership figures of Mars Hill Church have been called into question by critics of the emergent church movement. Mars Hill was planted by another megachurch in the Grand Rapids area, Calvary Church. Calvary's long

of higher education. Grove City College, on the other hand, has a tuition about half that of other academically comparable colleges.

18. Lauren Winner recounted the story in a November 13, 2000, posting on the *Christianity Today* website.

Every year, a few dozen folks from Willow Creek Community Church make a pilgrimage to 121 Keogg Placery iWheb



evangelicalism has become a cult of celebrities. We no longer follow the suffering servant, but the successful one.

10. The

1. Mark Cahill, *One Thing You Can't Do in Heaven* (Rockwall, TX: Biblical Discipleship Ministries, 2002).
2. All of these figures are from MinistryWatch.com, which posts the financial statements of the five hundred largest Christian ministries in the country on its w





21. Ibid.
22. Finney, *Memoirs*, 629–632.
23. B. B. Warfield, *Studies in Perfectionism*, 2 vols. (NY: Oxford, 1932), 2:26–







doubles each day, and one lily pad ultimately covers the entire pond in thirty

