Apostasy In The Church

How it is accelerating and how it relates to the return of Jesus.

Observations by Dr. David R. Reagan

(Note: This article is a highly abridged version of a chapter from Dr. David Reagan’s new book, Living for Christ in the End Times.)

The Bible clearly prophesies that the Church of the end times will be characterized by apostasy. Paul said that the Antichrist will not be revealed until "the apostasy comes first" (2 Thessalonians 2:3). Jesus prophesied that "many will fall away" and "most people’s love will grow cold" (Matthew 24:10, 12).

In the book of Revelation, chapters 2 and 3, the Apostle John records seven letters of Jesus to seven churches in the area of modern day Turkey. Among other things, these letters present a panoramic prophetic survey of the Church in history. The last of the churches mentioned, the one that represents the Church of the end times, is the church at Laodicea. It is pictured as a church that is neither hot (healing) nor cold (refreshing), but rather is lukewarm or tepid (Revelation 3:15-16). In short, it is a church that is apathetic. Jesus also pictures it as a worldly church enamored with its wealth (Revelation 3:17). The Lord is so dissatisfied with this church that He declares, "Because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth" (Revelation 3:16).
Clues from the Apostle Paul

Paul supplies us with some strong clues as to why the end times Church will be weak, vacillating, and full of apostasy. One of those clues can be found in 2 Timothy 4:3-4 which says that "the time will come when they [Christians] will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths."

Another clue is located in Paul’s famous prophecy about end time society, the one in 2 Timothy 3. After describing in graphic detail how society will fall apart in the end times, Paul adds that the basic reason will be due to people "holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power" (2 Timothy 3:5). There will be no lack of religion, says Paul, but people will deny the true power that is able to transform society for the good, producing peace, righteousness and justice.

What is that power? First and foremost it is the power of the blood of Jesus. It is also the power that comes from accepting the Bible as the infallible Word of God. It is the power of believing in a Creator God with whom all things are possible. And certainly it includes a belief in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Today, these essential beliefs, which constitute the power of Christianity, are being subjected to an unparalleled assault from within the Church itself. The Bible says that in the end times people will mock the promise of the Lord’s return (2 Peter 3:3-4). What is so shocking is that most of the mockery is coming from within the Church!

The Root of Apostasy

How have we reached this crisis point in the Church? It is rooted in the German School of Higher Criticism which invaded this country big-time in the 1920's. According to the "scientific approach" of this school of skeptics, the Bible is not the revealed Word of God. Rather, it is Man’s search for God, and therefore it is filled with myth, legend and superstition.

Today this viewpoint dominates the seminaries of America. The Bible is studied not to be believed and obeyed but to be analyzed, dissected, and criticized. The result is that the Scriptures have lost their authority.

Apostate Leaders

John Spong, Episcopal Bishop of New Jersey, has written books in which he denies the virgin birth, denies the miracles of Jesus, denies the resurrection, denies the Second Coming, and argues that Paul and Timothy were homosexual lovers. Bishop Spong has become so enamored with other religions that he has announced he will no longer witness to those caught up in the spiritual darkness of pagan faiths!

Similar apostate thoughts were mouthed by Norman Vincent Peale in 1984 on the Phil Donahue program. Peale announced, "It’s not necessary to be born-again. You have your way to God; I have mine. I found eternal peace in a Shinto shrine . . . I’ve been to Shinto shrines, and God is everywhere."

Phil Donahue was so shocked that he actually came to the defense of Christianity. "But you’re a Christian minister," he retorted, "and you’re suppose to tell me that Christ is the way and the truth and the life, aren’t you?"
Peale replied, "Christ is one of the ways. God is everywhere."²

Look again at Peale’s incredible statement: "It’s not necessary to be born-again." What did Jesus say? "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born-again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Who are we to believe?

Schuller’s Apostate Gospel

Peale’s leading disciple, Robert Schuller, has outdone his teacher with the development of his "gospel of possibility thinking." In his book, Self Esteem: The New Reformation, Schuller states that the leaders of the Reformation Movement made a mistake in centering their theology around God instead of Man.³

Schuller teaches that the essence of Man’s problem is low self-esteem.⁴ The Bible teaches it is pride. Schuller says that when Jesus referred in John 7:38 to "rivers of living water" flowing out of believers, He was speaking of self-esteem.⁵ The very next verse says He was speaking of the Holy Spirit. Schuller argues that sin is anything that robs us of our "divine dignity" (our "divine dignity"?).⁶ The Bible says sin is rebellion against God.

The Response of Christendom

Schuller’s book calling for a "new reformation" caused a firestorm of controversy. The Evangelical magazine, Christianity Today, invited readers to give their opinions of the book, and many people wrote in to denounce it. One writer referred to Schuller as "a modern-day apostle of humanism."⁷

The letters continued to pour in for weeks, and they were so critical that Dr. Schuller decided to respond to them. In a long letter published in the October 5, 1984 issue of Christianity Today, he made an incredible comment that has haunted him to this day:

I don’t think anything has been done in the name of Christ and under the banner of Christianity that has proven more destructive to human personality and, hence, counterproductive to the evangelism enterprise than the often crude, uncouth, and unchristian strategy of attempting to make people aware of their lost and sinful condition.

As a writer for Time put it in an article in 1985, "For Schuller, an acknowledgment of self-worth, more than a confession of sinfulness, is the path to God."⁸

Further Evidence of Schuller’s Apostasy

In an appearance on the Phil Donahue show in 1980, Schuller tried, incredibly, to portray Jesus as an egotist! Here’s what he said:⁹

The Cross sanctifies the ego trip. That’s very significant. In other words, Jesus had an ego. He said, "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men to me." Wow! What an ego trip He was on!

What blatant blasphemy — to accuse the One who was the very essence of humility of being an egotist!
Schuller gave a speech at the headquarters of the Unity Church in Lees Summit, Missouri and shared with their pastors his church growth principles. This is a cult that denies the deity of Jesus and which teaches reincarnation! He also dedicated a new Unity Temple in Warren, Michigan, in spite of warnings from a local Baptist pastor not to do so because of the errors of this cult.11

In a recent speech honoring an Islamic spiritual leader named Alfred Mohammed, Schuller said that if he were to come back in 100 years and find his descendants to be Muslims, it wouldn’t bother him!12

An Apostle Seminar

Another modern day apostate is Robert Funk, a New Testament scholar at the University of Montana. He is the founder of the notorious Jesus Seminar which began operating in 1985. The avowed purpose of the Seminar was "to renew the quest for the historical Jesus."13 The Seminar conducted this quest in a very unusual way. Meeting twice a year for six years, the group voted on each of the sayings of Jesus recorded in the Gospels. They voted by dropping colored beads in a box. A black bead meant Jesus definitely did not make the statement in question. A gray bead meant He did not say it, but it might have represented His thinking. A pink bead meant He probably said something like this, but not in the words recorded. A red bead meant He definitely made the statement.14

As you can see, the very approach expressed contempt for the veracity of the Gospel accounts. What a spectacle this must have been to the Lord as He watched these so-called scholars vote on passages from His Word. "Professing to be wise, they became fools" (Romans 1:22).

The final product of the Seminar, published in 1993, was a blasphemy of God’s Word. It was titled, The Five Gospels.15 The title comes from the fact that the Seminar decided to grant the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas equal standing with the four traditional Gospels.

Only fifteen sayings of Jesus made it into The Five Gospels in red! In Matthew’s account of the Lord’s Prayer, the only words that made it in red were, "Our Father." Only one saying in the entire book of Mark was colored red. It is the statement of Jesus in Mark 12:17 where He told His disciples to "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s." Likewise, only one statement from the Gospel of John qualified for the red coloring: "A prophet has no honor in his own country" (John 4:44).

The chilling thing to keep in mind is that the men who produced this spiritual pornography are professors at seminaries across America. They are the ones who are training the current generation of pastors and teachers.

Apostasy in the Denominations

The apostasy is not confined to the seminaries. It is pervasive. It can be found in all denominations. Consider the following examples.

In 1997, on the eve of Lent, the Right Reverend Alan Smithson, the Bishop of Jarrow (Anglican Church in England), held a press conference in London. He announced that it was traditional for Christians to give up something during the forty days of Lent. He then dramatically announced that he had decided to give up Bible reading! He went on to explain that he was going to devote his time during Lent to reading the Koran, because he felt like the Muslim scriptures would make him "more understanding, more compassionate, and more fully human."16
R. Kirby Godsey, president of Mercer University, a school heavily supported by the Georgia Baptist Convention, "denies the infallibility of the Bible, the unique power and authority of God, the validity of the Gospel’s account of the life and teachings of Jesus, the efficacy of Christ’s atonement, and the uniqueness of Christ as the only Savior."17

In 1997 the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church sponsored a meeting in Kansas City that attracted 4,000 participants from all over the world. Called, "Global Gathering III," the conference featured a parade of speakers who attacked the fundamentals of the Christian faith. One speaker declared that the crucifixion of Jesus reveals an "abusive Heavenly Father who is not fit for Christian worship." The speaker urged instead that the Church revere all the world’s children as little messiahs equal to Jesus.18

**Apostasy in Local Churches**

The spreading cancer of apostasy in the Church is not confined to theologians and church conferences. It can be found at the grass roots level, in local churches.

Consider, for example, The Episcopal New Church Center in Walkersville, Maryland. This church hired a public relations firm to develop a print and television advertising campaign. One of the first ads in this campaign carried a banner headline that read, "To Hell With Church!" It showed a man thinking, "If I want to feel guilty, I’ll eat some cheese fries." Another ad in the series showed a painting of Christ nailed on the Cross. Scrawled over the painting were the words, "Of course people with pierced body parts are welcome in our church."19

The Maryland church really went wacky when it moved to producing TV ads. They hired a fellow known for the kinky cartoons he produces for *Saturday Night Live*. His first ad for the church opened with a father and son tossing a baseball to each other in the front yard.

"Guess what, Timmy?" the father asks. "Tomorrow your mother and I are going to take you to church." The father continues, "Not only will you be able to learn about the wages of sin and eternal damnation, but you can play fun games like ‘Bible Sword Drill’ and sing inspirational songs like ‘Kumbaya’ and ‘I’ve Got Joy, Joy, Joy Down in My Heart.’"

Dejected by this prospect, little Timmy walks into the middle of the road and holds up his hands in surrender as a semi-truck blows its horn and bears down on him.20

Not only apostate, but sick.

**Inter-Faith Apostasy**

The big move at the grass roots level these days is interfaith worship services. I’m not talking about inter-denominational — rather, the emphasis is on inter-faith. Christians are inviting Muslims, Jews, Hindus, American Indian practitioners of "native religion," and others to join in worshiping "the one true god, regardless of the name you may give to him or her."

Pope John Paul II got caught up in this inter-faith fad in 1986 when he invited the leaders of the world’s religions to come to Assisi, Italy to join him in praying for world peace.21 One hundred sixty representatives came, including the Dali Lama (who considers himself to be a god). Each representative prayed to his own god at the Pope’s request! Did the Pope believe their gods were real? Or did he
believe that they were all praying to the same god, but under different names?

**The Challenge**

Englishman William Booth (1829 - 1912), who founded the Salvation Army, was a man with a great zeal for the Lord and a passion for lost souls. He was also a man of vision. On the eve of the 20th Century when Christendom was caught up in euphoria about how the Church would soon take the world for Christ, Booth predicted that the Gospel would not fare well in the new century. Specifically, he prophesied that by the end of the 20th Century, much of the Church would be preaching:

- Christianity without Christ
- Forgiveness without repentance
- Salvation without regeneration
- Heaven without Hell

That’s exactly where we are today. Because of it, as we begin the 21st Century, Christians are faced with unparalleled challenges from the decay of society and the apostatizing of the Church. Increasingly, many are going to give up hope. Some will express this hopelessness by withdrawing from society and assuming a siege mentality. Others will throw in the towel and adopt the attitude, "If you can’t lick them, join them."

Considering the magnitude of the challenge, is there any hope for triumphant Christian living? And if so, how then shall we live?

(Note: Dr. Reagan proceeds to respond to these questions in his new book by presenting ten chapters of down-to-earth guidelines for living as a victorious overcomer in these end times.)

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**Notes:**


http://www. issuesetc.org/resource/archives/guide12.htm. There are other excellent
summaries of Schuller’s thought that can be found on the Internet. One is an article by David W. Cloud entitled "Evangelicals and Modernist Robert Schuller" (http://cnview.com/on_line_resources/evangelicals_and_modernist_robert_schuller.htm).

Another good analysis is entitled, "The God of the Bible Versus the God of Multi-level Marketing: Positive Thinking," (http://www.users.fast.net/~gospeltruth/positive.htm).

4. Ibid., p.19.

5. Ibid. p. 80.


11. Rick Miesel, p. 5. Schuller’s support of the Unity Church is also documented in an article by Dave Hunt published in the CIB Bulletin, January 1988. In a letter to the author, dated January 24, 2000, Dave Hunt states that he has a tape recording of the speech that Schuller delivered to the Unity pastors about church growth principles.


17. Dave Hunt, "What’s Happening to the Faith?" *The Berean Call*, May 1998, p. 1. Dr. Godsey’s views can be found in the book, *When We Talk About God, Let’s Be Honest*, (Macon, Georgia: Smyth & Helwys Publishing Co., 1996). The Georgia Baptist Convention adopted a resolution of censure in November 1996 in which it asked the trustees of Mercer University to consider whether Dr. Godsey should be continued as president of the institution. The trustees voted to affirm his presidency.


