

Friday Church News Notes

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CALVINISM ON THE MARCH AMONG EVANGELICALS

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A report in *Christianity Today* for September 2006 was entitled "Young, Restless, Reformed: Calvinism Is Making a Comeback--And Shaking up the Church." It documents the rapid spread of Calvinism in Evangelical circles, and I am seeing the same thing among Fundamentalists. The report cites John Piper, R.C. Sproul, R. Albert Mohler, Louie Giglio, Joshua Harris, J.I. Packer, and the Puritans as among the chief influences responsible for the upsurge in Calvinism. Piper's book "Desiring God" has sold more than 275,000 copies. The trend toward the acceptance of Calvinism is evident at leading evangelical seminaries such as Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Under the direction of Al Mohler, Southern Seminary has become "a Reformed hotbed" and is turning out "a steady flow of young Reformed pastors." Writing in *SBC Life*, Malcolm Yarnell, associate professor of systematic theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, observed that TULIP theology is causing division in churches. Steve Lemke, provost of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, warns: "I believe that [Calvinism] is potentially the most explosive and divisive issue facing us in the near future. It has already been an issue that has split literally dozens of churches, and it holds the potential to split the entire convention" ("The Future of Southern Baptists as Evangelicals," April 2005). Lemke says that "the newest generation of Southern Baptist ministers" is "the most Calvinist we have had in several generations." He warns that Calvinism can result in a lowered commitment to evangelism, saying: "For many people, if they're convinced that God has already elected those who will be elect ... I don't see how humanly speaking that can't temper your passion, because you know you're not that crucial to the process." There are exceptions to this, but in my estimation there can be no doubt that Calvinism tends to cool evangelistic fervor. Among Calvinists, evangelism is done IN SPITE OF Calvinism, not because of it. Those who protest that it doesn't hinder evangelism point to EXCEPTIONS rather than to the rule. While Charles Spurgeon was an evangelistic Calvinist, for example, a large number of Calvinists of his day opposed him and denounced his broad, indiscriminate invitations for sinners to come to Christ. One Calvinist publication warned in Spurgeon's day, "... to preach that it is man's duty to believe savingly in Christ is ABSURD" (*Earthen Vessel*, 1857; cited in *Spurgeon vs. the Hyper Calvinists* by Iain Murray). Calvinism almost killed the evangelistic zeal of the Baptist churches of England in the 18th century. Baptist historian Thomas Armitage wrote: "William Carey's 'Inquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use means for the Conversion of the Heathen' was published in 1792, but it found few readers and produced little effect. To most of the Baptists Carey's views were visionary and even wild, in open conflict with God's sovereignty. At a meeting of ministers, where the senior Ryland presided, Carey proposed that at the next meeting they discuss the duty of attempting to spread the Gospel amongst the heathen. ... Ryland, shocked, sprang to his feet and ordered Carey to sit down, saying: 'When God pleases to convert the heathen, he will do it without your aid or mine!'"



FUNDAMENTALISTS ALSO TURNING TO CALVINISM

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A few years ago I visited the Bob Jones University bookstore and was amazed at the large number of volumes that were available on Puritanism. I thought to myself at the time that this probably signifies that many BJU teachers and graduates are being influenced by Puritanism's Reformed theology. Since then I have seen growing evidence of this. I know of formerly non-Calvinist Baptist churches that have become Calvinistic after BJU graduates were called to the pastorate. On a recent trip to Australia I was shown a publication ("Why Read the Puritans Today") that was sent out to an independent Baptist mailing list by a BJ graduate. The booklet lists 10 reasons for the renewed interest in Puritanism. The recommendation was not accompanied by any warning about Reformed theology and its attendant Calvinism and Amillennialism. I don't know if this BJ grad is a Calvinist, but he is certainly helping to promote Calvinism with this type of thing. And this is not something limited to those associated with Bob Jones. In 2005 an extensive survey was done of "young fundamentalists." Entitled "Young Fundamentalists' Beliefs and Personal Life," the survey results are available online at <http://www.sharperiron.org/downloads/2005%20Young%20Fundamentalists%20Survey%20Results.pdf>. For the purposes of the survey, a "young fundamentalist" is one who is under 35 years old. The survey contained 135 questions pertaining to life and doctrine, and roughly 1,100 surveys were completed. The vast majority of respondents identified themselves with three fundamentalist schools: Bob Jones University (29%), Maranatha Baptist Bible College (22%), and Northland Baptist Bible College (21%). When it comes to Calvinist views, an amazing 58% of the respondents hold a Calvinist view of sovereign election, with another 8% unsure. **THUS ONLY ABOUT 35% OF THE RESPONDENTS TO THE FUNDAMENTALIST SURVEY REJECT CALVINISM.** Some 14% of the respondents hold to either amillennial (8%) or postmillennial (5%) views,

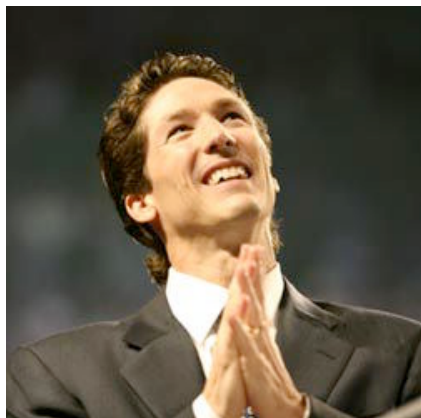
which goes hand in hand with Reformed theology. I believe we will see this percentage increase in coming days, with a growing rejection of the pre-millennial, pre-tribulation position. The chief culprit in the growth of Calvinism is literature. John Piper and John MacArthur are popular among fundamentalists. The Puritan literature is also increasing dramatically, as previously noted. On a recent trip to England I had a nice visit with Dr. Peter Masters at Metropolitan Tabernacle. He graciously showed me the various artifacts associated with previous esteemed pastors, particularly Charles Spurgeon and John Gill. Dr. Masters told me that visiting preachers often like to sit in Gill's chair, which is located in a hallway outside of Masters' office; but I told him that I would be afraid that I might catch Gill's Calvinism! I admire a great many things about Spurgeon and the Puritans and many modern-day Calvinists, as well, but I vehemently disagree with Reformed theology. (I reject the Quick Prayerism scheme that is so prevalent among independent Baptists just as vehemently. In fact, I have no doubt that the unscripturalness of this popular evangelistic program and the doctrinal shallowness of many independent Baptist churches and schools

has caused some to fall into the arms of Calvinism and its more intellectual approach.) Having studied the Bible earnestly and prayerfully for 33 years and having studied both sides of this issue, I am convinced that neither Calvinism nor Quick Prayerism is Scriptural. I have no ill will toward those who differ, but here I must stand, and I believe it is an issue worth standing for.



John Gill

PASTOR OF AMERICA'S LARGEST CHURCH SAYS HIS CALLING IS NOT TO CONDEMN HOMOSEXUALITY



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At a recent book signing in Boston, Joel Osteen, pastor of America's largest church, said he doesn't believe it is his calling to condemn homosexuality and homosexual marriage. When Osteen, the pastor of Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas, was asked his opinion about "gay marriage," he gave the following vapid reply: "I never feel like homosexuality is God's best. I don't feel like that's my thrust ... you know, some of the issues that divide us, and I'm here to let people know that God is for them and He's on their side" ("Osteen's Answer to 'Gay Marriage' Question Less Than Direct," Baptist Press, Sept. 22, 2006). Osteen's Christianity is a fulfillment of 2 Timothy 4:3-4 -- *"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and*

they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." He is the king of positivism. His Christ wears a smiley face. His God never judges sin. His gospel has no repentance, but he is wrong. God, in fact, is only on the side of the sinner who repents.

MORE TRASH FROM NASHVILLE

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I have often warned about the spiritual and moral danger of America's country music. It is as vile and wicked as rock & roll or rap, but it is often considered safer, because of its thin veneer of God and country, and it is therefore not uncommon for professing Christians, even those who claim to take the Bible seriously, to listen to it. But it has the same addictive sensual back beat as rock & roll (a back beat that the rock & rollers themselves call "sexy") and the lyrics are just as godless. The themes of country music are drinking, complaining, drinking, quitting your job, drinking, quitting your marriage, drinking, dancing, drinking, loneliness, drinking..... I think you get the idea. Only the Lord knows the true extent of the evil fruit of country music, how many men and women have become alcoholics, how many marriages broken, how many babies born out of wedlock, how many fights, how many terrible accidents caused by drinking and driving, how many suicides, not to speak of the eternal consequences. Consider just two of the country songs playing on mainstream radio.



Country music gets its inspiration in a barroom.

The first one, which is number seven on the country charts, is "If You're Going Through Hell" sung by Rodney Atkins. Typically, it is about someone who steps "off the straight an' narrow" and ends up drunk and debauched. The singer's advice contains not a hint of repentance or the new birth. He mentions prayer, but only in passing. His main advice is to "keep on going"; don't slow down; if you're scared don't show it; you might get out 'fore the devil even knows you're there." The second example is "The Bad in Me" by Owen Jakes. It is a filthy song about an immoral woman. Beware of country music and its damnable philosophy that you can have the world and Christ, too, and that immorality and rebel-rousing are

things that God winks at. *“But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience”* (Ephesians. 5:3-6). Music is a powerful thing, and it behooves God's people to be exceedingly careful about the music in their homes, cars, personal music players, and churches.

POPE MAKES JOURNEY TO MARY SHRINE

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On his recent trip to Germany Pope Benedict XVI visited a popular Mary shrine at Altoetting. Thousands of people lined the roads leading to the town and jammed the town square. Altoetting's Black Madonna is a popular destination for Catholic pilgrims. In his sermon the Pope said: “This is the mother that generations have come to Altoetting to visit. To her we entrust our cares, our needs and our troubles” (*The Bangkok Post*, Sept. 12, 2006). Rome's dogma pertaining to Mary (e.g., Immaculate, Mother of God, Queen of Heaven, Co-Redemptress, Intercessor) destroys Christ's sole Mediatorship and is not only wretchedly heretical but truly blasphemous.



The Pope in Altoetting

CONCLUSION: Friends in Christ, do not be discouraged by any of this. It is God's will that we know the times (1 Ch. 12:32; Mat. 16:3) and that we be as wise as serpents and harmless as doves. These things remind us that the hour is very late, and we need to be ready for the coming of the Lord. Are you sure that you are born again? Are you living for Christ day by day? “And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof” (Rom. 13:11-14). This material is sent only to those who personally subscribe to the Fundamental Baptist Information Service list. To SUBSCRIBE or UNSUBSCRIBE or CHANGE ADDRESSES go to <http://www.wayoflife.org/fbis/subscribe.html>. Way of Life Literature, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061. 866-295-4143, fbns@wayoflife.org. David Cloud is the director of Way of Life Literature and author of the Friday Church News Notes.