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America's Moral Decline and the Rise of False Christianity

by Karen Horst Cobb

"This is the year God wants to make you a millionaire." The visiting evangelist stomped back and forth on the stage of the rented school building. His "hallelujahs" and "praise God" crescendos were followed by jumping up and down. Sweat ran down his face as he proclaimed that the church members would not need to be afraid if the economy collapses and their neighbors houses are foreclosed upon because they are blessed and will have all of their needs met. The service ended with the explanation that the first step to becoming a millionaire is to pledge \$200 of "seed faith money" to the church .

Just prior to the introduction of the evangelist the young single minister with spiky hair introduced the beginning of fellowship "life groups," explaining that the "free market" will decide which ones succeed. Recently, Ted Taggard of mega church New Life Fellowship in Colorado Springs explained that Spirituality is a "commodity " to be bought and sold. The writings of Milton Friedman are recommended for all new converts. This young minister must also be a free market convert . His small group is a satellite of World Harvest Church. The sermon themes of the mega churches are all very similar and reflect the cause of America's moral decline. Christianity is getting a makeover using the classic trappings of Money, domination and military aggression.

It looks like the 50 million dollar Bible theme park which was to be built in Israel by evangelicals will not happen now that Pat Robertson insulted Ariel Sharon. Imagine a 50 million dollar Bible theme park protected by nuclear weapons in the holy land and off limits to Arabs. The harvest of the mega church is ready; welcome the gleaners, the seed faith money has matured.

According to a 2003 article in Forbes Magazine big churches are big business. Researchers found that in 2003 there were 740 mega churches each averaging 6,876 participants. The average net income of each was \$4.8 million at the time of the study. The Forbes article states, "[the] entrepreneurial approach has contributed to the explosive growth of mega churches".

Is it the entrepreneurial spirit or the Holy Spirit which is enticing the converts to this new religion? Some used to say that the love of money is the root of all evil and the rich man (like the camel) will forever be outside the kingdom. I guess that is just "too first century" for the modern believer. The millennium church makeover is all about Christian capitalism, he who the free market has set free shall be free indeed! Remember, this is the year God wants me to be a millionaire.

Some might think that putting your last hundred bucks in the offering satchel as "seed faith money" is a lot like gambling or buying a lottery ticket. Perhaps James Dobson and Ralph Reed can explain that to the Indians (and the rest of us.) A Washington Post article explains that Ralph Reed (former head of the Christian coalition) "received \$4 million to whip up public sentiment against expansion of gambling in Louisiana and Texas." He did this by mobilizing evangelicals to take a stand against the immorality of gambling.

The buildings and technologies of the mega-fellowships are edifices to capitalism, free market economics, and the entrepreneurial spirit. The lexicon is slightly different but the concepts are exactly the same as those of CEO motivational speakers or a slick late night infomercial promoting real estate schemes. You can do it! You can win! You can be a success! You are smart! There are no limits to what you can achieve. Just send me some money and get started today. A quick internet search reveals sources concerning the personal life styles of the pastors of many of these churches. Their seed faith has been harvested into private jets, extravagant cars, multimillion dollar homes and much, much more. The storehouses are overflowing and with this wealth comes power.

Like Ted Haggard's New Life Fellowship in Colorado Springs, World Harvest Church is a very politically active mega church. Rod Parsley is the pastor, "co-laborer", as he puts it. He is also founder and president of the politically active "Center for Moral Clarity." In a few weeks he is scheduled to speak on the topic "the War on Christians and the Values Voter in 2006" at the Vision America Conference. Other speakers scheduled for the event are Alan Keyes, Senator Sam Brownback, John Cornyn, Gary Bauer, Phyllis Schlafly, Janet Parshall, Rick Scarborough, and Tom Delay. (yes that's right - the multiply-indicted Tom Delay.)

I have not listened to Pastor Parsley's CD set "Injustice in American Courts" nor have I purchased the shiny "King Arthur style sword" for \$41.10 to display in my home. I have not considered taking courses at World Harvest Bible College where I can learn to "shape the culture" nor have I spent the thousands necessary to learn how to "walk in *Dominion power* to advance the kingdom of God through the earth" [italics added]

In his Ohio Community, religious leaders exposed the use of Pastor Parsley's religious tax-free status to support Gubernatorial candidate Ken Blackwell. Yes, the same Ken Blackwell who was the co-chair of the committee to re-elect Bush/Cheney in 2004 while at the same time responsible for overseeing Ohio's election which ended up with many irregularities.

Parsley and Blackwell launched a voter registration campaign but only to register Republican voters. Money leads to power and power leads to war.

It seems today there is a need for a tougher, meaner Jesus, a government issue Jesus (GI-Joe) who comes complete with state of the art Kevlar tunic, two edged sword, and secret code book (the book of Revelation). Evangelical Christians are organizing and conspiring to manipulate governments to use weapons if necessary to kill some of God's children so that prime real estate goes to people whom they believe God likes best.

This immoral clarity was reported recently in the Jerusalem Post. Rev John Hagee is the organizer and leader of the Armageddon war cry and has now created the powerful political lobby, Christians United for Israel (CUFI). Christians united for Israel (CUFI) includes Jerry Falwell, Benny Hinn, Jack Hayford, George Morrison, Rod Parsley and Steven Strang and many other media evangelicals. According to Hagee, "The goal is to be strategically placed to successfully lobby Washington on behalf of Israel... Every state in the Union, every congressional district will be accounted for." Reportedly, this lobbying group represents 30 million evangelical Christians. As we know, congress

alone has the power to declare war. Will it be Christians who pressure elected officials into war? Will it be people who declare themselves to be Christ-like, who use his name to sound the collective war cry which unleashes the deadliest weapons on earth? George W. Bush said recently that "all options are on the table" when it comes to Iran.

The Evangelical Christian right is working to insure a manmade apocalypse develops in the Middle east. This powerful political faction runs parallel to the economic foreign policies of the slightly more secular neo-conservative "republican" party which has visions of empire and military rule as outlined in the Project for a New American Century's "Rebuilding America's Defenses: Strategies, Forces And Resources For A New Century" [pdf format]. It was written a year before 9/11, and, prophetically, the plan to put bases throughout the Middle East is right on schedule. John Hagee's latest book is *Jerusalem Countdown* which can be viewed on his website. Evidently, it presents Iran as a horrible nuclear threat to Israel and the United States. Just for a quick check with reality here is the score on nuclear weapons: Iran-0, Israel-200, US-10,600 (as of 2002). Please explain to me who are these "people of faith" and what do they put their faith in? Experts agree that Iran is at the very least ten years away from obtaining even one nuclear warhead. Ten years is a lot of time to wage peace.

Theocratic capitalism appeals to human lust for money, power, and military rule. Conversely, simplicity, service, and humility belong to the divine. Confusing fables are taught to itching ears. (Timothy 4:3 paraphrased). The first century followers of Christ did not entertain the entrepreneurial spirit, market competition and accumulation of wealth or organized to lobby Caesar.

For some, generosity is a strategy to gain wealth to purchase political power. Christ-like generosity however results from empathic compassion and a longing for the welfare of others. This is the core of moral clarity and makes it impossible for true believers to hoard wealth. The rich man and the camel are both unable to kneel low enough to pass through the eye of the needle. (Matthew 19:24).

In the upside down kingdom Jesus taught that the poor are rich, the weak are strong, and the servant is the master. It is a change of heart rather than a change of legislation and circumstances. The new Jerusalem is a community governed by the golden rule, not ancient real estate governed by religious politicians. A person living in love does not need PowerPoint seminars, CD boxed millennium sets, ornamental swords, or novels written in code. It's all summed up in a sentence and a sacrifice-Love the lord and love your neighbor.

Warriors lust for more powerful weapons. If the Christians Untied for Israel are successful in lobbying Washington on behalf of Israel they will insure that more living souls will be destroyed. God is not an angry real estate broker who uses extortion and violence to get his way. He does not think of suffering and dying children as "collateral damage".

The charred bodies in Fallujia incinerated by white phosphorus were living souls. Deformed babies fused together or born without limbs because of the use of depleted uranium weapons is beyond depravity. It is estimated that 150,000 living souls have

been extinguished directly or indirectly as a result of the war in Iraq. Many of these are women and children.

Beautiful news models and impressive military strategists describe “magnificent” weapons and manipulate us into pride and patriotism brought to us by companies with military contracts. With deadened empathy we watched the “shock and awe” as whole families explode before our eyes. What family’s values support this behavior? The American dilemma remains unspoken. If I become aware, how can I remain comfortable and keep shopping?

The lust for money, dominance, and military power is at the core of America’s moral decline. It is imperative that church leaders and laity boldly proclaim that violence, torture, hostage taking, conquests of land and resources are actions Christians can never condone. Killing for Christ is an abomination leaving us with blood-stained hands and darkness in our hearts! Every church must be a peace church or it will become a state church and then it will be... no church at all.

[Note from the author:] Some might read this article with a spirit of anger and hatred toward those mentioned. If so please re-read it in a spirit of extreme sorrow, compassion and utter despair for the loss of the Gospel of love. You may direct comments to me at cairnhcobb@msn.com.

Karen Horst Cobb wrote No Longer a Christian and No Longer a Christian - Part II published by CommonDreams.org in the fall of 2004. She is a mother and a grandmother, and with God’s grace, tries to follow the example of Christ as she speaks Christ’s message to the world that there is no Government Issue Jesus (GI-Joe Jesus.)