

# THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

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## The Counterfeit Gospel of Charles Colson

John W. Robbins

### *The Body.*

Charles Colson with Ellen Santilli Vaughn.

Dallas: Word Publishing, 1992.

455 pages, notes, index.

In May 1985 I read Colson's book *Loving God*, listened to the audio tapes of the same title, wrote the author a letter, and sent him several books and essays published by The Trinity Foundation. Mr. Colson sent no acknowledgment or response, even after phone calls to his office confirmed that the letter, books, and essays had been received. The letter, which is reprinted below, asked some questions that apparently Colson did not care to answer.

### *The Letter*

May 21, 1985

Mr. Charles Colson

Post Office Box 17500

Washington, DC 20041

Dear Mr. Colson:

I have just finished reading *Loving God* and listening to the series of tapes based on the book, and I would like to make some comments about them.

In both the book and the tapes you make many true statements, for which I am thankful. Your defense of the inerrancy of Scripture is highly commendable. But you also make many false statements. As a teacher, you ought to appreciate James' warning about the severe judgment teachers will face and try to eliminate as many mistakes from your hooks as possible.

Let me be more specific. In both your book and tapes, you emphasize paradox. This is most unfortunate, since "paradox" is a code word of existentialism and neo-orthodoxy, a word used to express euphemistically the idea that the Bible is self-contradictory. Now I believe that you do not mean to endorse any view impugning the rationality of God. But you ought to realize that by publishing a book you are entering a theological conversation that was already in progress long before you spoke. In that conversation, the word "paradox" had already become a polite, subtle, deceptive way of denying the logical consistency of Scripture. By using the word, you are conveying that idea to your readers, whether you mean to or not. In the legitimate sense of the word, "paradox" means a seeming or apparent contradiction. But what seems contradictory to you may not seem so to me. Paradox is purely subjective. There is no good reason to emphasize this subjectivism as you do. A paradox, to quote Gordon Clark's definition, is a charley horse between the ears. It can be removed through rational massage.

Second, in your book and tapes you praise Mother Teresa very highly as one of the "contemporary giants of the faith" and "the greatest saint in the world." I do not know which faith you are speaking about, Christianity or Roman Catholicism, since you seem to think that the two are identical or at least that Catholicism is a species of the genus Christianity. I am enclosing a sermon by Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, the great Welsh preacher, on the subject of Catholicism. I urge you to read it. If R. C. Sproul did not tell you about Lloyd-Jones, he should have. After you have read the sermon, you will realize what a great betrayal of Christ your Protestant-Catholic communion-mass in Belfast was. It is this sort of mistake that is inexcusable in one who presumes to teach the church through his books and lectures.

Third, in your book and tapes you attack creeds and philosophies and emphasize the Person and cross of Christ. You contrast a "magnificent philosophy" with a "living truth," and "academic theory" with a "living Person." But the Bible makes no such contrast. Indeed, it teaches the opposite: As a man thinks in his heart, so is he. Christ said, "My words are spirit and they are life." The words are the Spirit. The Gospel, the truth, the words are powerful. There is no contrast in the Bible between words or teaching or doctrine or philosophy and Christ. There is a contrast between profession of belief and actual belief, but not between Christ and his words. The contrast is a figment of modern psychology. We know Christ only insofar as we know about him. One cannot know Christ, or any other person, except by knowing propositions about him. Knowledge is always knowledge of a proposition. Saving faith is always assent to one or more Biblical propositions. Therefore, please do not disparage knowledge or teaching or doctrine, for by doing so, you are disparaging Christ. As Calvin put it, we owe to Scripture the same reverence that we owe to God.

Fourth, in your book (37), you write that faith is "not just knowledge, but knowledge acted upon. It is not just belief, but belief lived-out – practiced." This blurring of the distinction between faith and practice is fatal to Christianity, for it makes the conclusion inescapable that we are justified by faith

and works. Augustine defined faith as knowledge with assent. So should you. Practice is the result of faith, not part of faith. Faith is the cause; practice is the result. Bonhoeffer's statement is precise and true: Only he who believes is obedient; only he who is obedient believes. If a person does not believe, he cannot be obedient, no matter how "good" his behavior is; and if a person believes, he will be obedient, as James says. To put it in more technical language, sanctification is a necessary consequence of justification; and justification is a necessary precedent for sanctification. But justification and sanctification are not the same. To confuse them is to be ignorant of the Gospel.

Fifth, speaking of justification, you failed to mention it once, in either your book or tapes. Since it is the heart of the Gospel, why?

Sixth, a very minor point. There is a glaring but insignificant contradiction on page 68 of your work. Line two reads: "The first [proposition] is the shakiest." The first line of the second paragraph following reads: "The myth theory is even more untenable than the mistake theory." Which is it?

Seventh, you believe that the resurrection "breaks what might otherwise be considered a circular argument" (69). But how do we know about the Resurrection? Only by Scripture. The relationship, if you will recall your high school geometry, is that of axiom and theorem. The inerrancy of Scripture is the axiom of Christianity. One does not, need not, and cannot prove axioms. Yet they are indispensable; every philosophy and every person must have axioms, or there would be no philosophy and no persons. From this axiom, all other Christian doctrines follow, including the doctrine of the resurrection. They are theorems. I urge you to read *God's Hammer: The Bible and Its Critics*, a copy of which is enclosed.

Eighth, on page 127 you make a contrast between obeying moral rules and obeying God. But Christ made no such contrast: "If you love me, keep my commandments." Both Paul and John define love as obedience to the law. You seem to have the right idea on this page, but in trying to be eloquent, you make a false disjunction. If we owe to Scripture the

same reverence that we owe to God, then we owe his commands the same obedience we owe to him. In fact, "obeying God" is a meaningless phrase unless it means "obeying his commandments." To hold otherwise is to posit the possibility of obeying God while disobeying his commands, an impious suggestion if there ever was one.

I am enclosing some books and essays that I hope you will take the time to read. You are obviously interested in truth, but I fear that your teachers have not taught you some of the basic lessons a Christian in the 20th century needs to know. Please read these materials carefully. If you have any comments or questions about them, I can be reached at the address and telephone number below.

Sincerely yours,

John Robbins

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Enclosures:

*A Christian View of Men and Things, God's Hammer: The Bible and Its Critics, Biblical Predestination, The Biblical Doctrine of Man, "What Is Faith?" "The Sovereignty of God," "Social Action and Evangelical Order," "The Coming Caesars," "God and Logic," "Abortion, the Christian, and the State," "Roman Catholicism," The Trinity Catalogue: New Books from the Trinity Foundation*

I wrote to Colson again last year; again I received no response. One knows how the Watergate Committee felt trying to get information from the Nixon White House.

### ***The Body***

Since *Loving God*, Colson has written a number of books, which I hope to review in next issue of *The Trinity Review*. His latest is *The Body*, a book about the church. It is enthusiastically endorsed by J. I. Packer, John Cardinal O'Connor, Pat Robertson,

Bill Hybels, Steve Brown, Jerry Falwell, James Montgomery Boice, Jack Hayford, Carl F. H. Henry, Adrian Rogers, Kenneth Kantzer, Richard John Neuhaus, and Vernon Grounds, a cross-section of the religious establishment in America.

Like other Colson books, it is a melange of fictional short stories, anecdotes, social commentary, autobiography, and theology. Although it is not a systematic discussion of the purpose, function, or structure of the church, it is perhaps his most theological work so far, and Colson makes his views quite clear.

Colson describes himself as "a Baptist with a thoroughly Reformed theology" (34). However, he shows no signs of having read the books and essays I sent him eight years ago; nothing by Gordon Clark, for example, appears in the nine page "Recommended Reading" list he appends to *The Body*. Works by "outstanding" theologians such as Richard Owen Roberts, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Malcolm Muggeridge, Richard John Neuhaus, Richard Niebuhr, Ern Baxter, Avery Dulles, S.J., Charles Finney, Keith Fournier, John Frame, John Paul II, Robert Webber, and Helmut Thelicke, for example, are recommended.

As one can surmise by reading his Recommended Reading list, Colson's views are quite eclectic – perhaps ecumenical is the better word. He expresses his gratitude to those who have helped him: Baptist Carl Henry; Presbyterians Francis Schaeffer, R. C. Sproul, and T. M. Moore; Roman Catholics Richard John Neuhaus, Tom Weinandy, and J. Daryl Charles; Anglican J. I. Packer, and so on.

### ***One-Church Fundamentalism***

The reason Colson is ecumenical is that he sees Christianity as "mere Christianity," a set of five or six "fundamentals" that constitute the essence of Christianity, fundamentals such as "the Virgin Birth, the deity of Christ, the Atonement, the Resurrection, the authority of Scripture, and the Second Coming" (104; see also 108- 109, 185ff.). Colson is a fundamentalist, and insistently says so. He calls for church unity around those fundamentals. He is a leading proponent of minimal

Christianity and maximal one-churchism. (Those two, by the way, always go together: minimal doctrine and maximal bureaucracy. The Biblical view is maximal doctrine and minimal bureaucracy.)

"There are fundamentalists in every denomination," he writes. "Catholic, Presbyterian, Baptist, Brethren, Methodist, Episcopal.... every Christian is a fundamentalist" (186). What we need is all to get together. Colson's book is a 400-page equivalent of Rodney King's whine, "Can't we all just get along?"

Colson lards his book with quotations from or references to John Calvin, Martin Luther, Jonathan Edwards, the popes, several cardinals, Charles Finney, D. L. Moody, Billy Graham, many Roman Catholic priests and United Methodist ministers; he gives no evidence of understanding that these men represent different religions. If Roman Catholicism – with its adoration of Mary, veneration of the saints, prayers to both, religious costumes, elaborate rituals, mass, totalitarian hierarchy, saving sacraments, eating the physical body and blood of Christ, adulterated Bible, perverted Gospel, and oral tradition – is Christianity, then Calvin, Luther, Edwards, the Puritans, Pilgrims, Reformed Baptists, and this writer are not Christians. Christians should never forget that Paul cursed the fundamentalists in Galatia who erred on justification (Galatians 1), and the author of Hebrews excoriated the fundamentalists in whom he wrote (Hebrews 5).

### ***Roman Catholicism***

How does one account for Colson's egregious lack of historical and theological judgment? Colson is no dummy. One does not get to be White House Counsel – Richard Nixon's lawyer – by being stupid. Now there are stupid mistakes in the book – the Cuban missile crisis is dated in 1961, for example – but stupidity is not a Colson attribute. He is a very intelligent, very clever fellow. My guess is he knows what he doing, and when he tries to gloss over the difference between Edwards and Finney or between Calvin, Luther, and the popes, he knows what he's about.

Justification by faith alone, for example, which Luther called the doctrine by which the faith stands or falls (Colson does not quote that statement) does not appear in the book's index, but Colson does discuss it briefly. What he says is revealing: "In recent decades, however, Catholic and Protestant doctrine has dramatically converged. In the fall of 1991, Pope John Paul II and Lutheran bishops from Scandinavia joined in an ecumenical celebration – not ignoring differences, but emphasizing growing unity on matters of orthodoxy, including justification. In his message, the Swedish primate said: 'Dialogue has proven the existence of a basic unity for instance in the question of justification by faith,' to which the pope agreed that both sides were 'very close' to a common understanding" (271). Colson is enthusiastic that the liberals – who, as J. Gresham Machen argued, are not Christians – and the Roman Catholics are uniting.

Colson's affinity for the Roman church is revealed throughout the book:

1. Colson favors making the sign of the cross (106);
2. Colson laments the lack of a Protestant magisterium (132);
3. Colson viciously attacks "individualism," "lone rangers," and the "entrepreneurial spirit" (32, 134); (one wonders if Colson has such people as Noah, Abraham, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, David, Athanasius, John Huss, Martin Luther, and Christ himself in mind when he condemns "Lone Rangers");
4. Colson favors private communion (140); (it seems that this is theologically correct individualism);
5. Colson laments the lack of a monolithic church structure (199);
6. Colson laments the fact that Americans are free to choose which church they will attend (41);

7. Colson thinks that "Catholics have better made visible the spiritual reality of worship" (73);
8. Colson uses the title "Father" throughout the book to refer to priests, despite Christ's explicit command not to do so;
9. Colson vigorously defends Mother Teresa's "Christian commitment" (87);
10. Colson endorses "natural law" (196);
11. Colson praises Billy Graham for including Roman Catholic priests in his "revivals" (333);
12. Colson includes all denominations in the work of Prison Fellowship;
13. Colson endorses "Catholic evangelicals" (101);
14. Colson asserts "the church is hierarchical and authoritarian and ultimately answerable only to God" (133);
15. Colson criticizes those Protestants who opposed John Kennedy's presidential candidacy (169);
16. Colson implies that anti-abortion activism is more important than a correct understanding of the doctrine of justification (I 14);
17. Colson praises the Catholic church for "calling heretics to account" (132);
18. Colson believes the pope to be "one of the most articulate defenders of democratic capitalism" (268).

While Luther may have been justified in some of his protests against the Roman Church, Colson admits, the reasons for the protests have disappeared: Indulgences, for example are gone; Rome has changed (271). Indulgences, however, are not gone, and Rome has not changed in any important respect. Rome has always prided itself on staying the same – *semper eadem* is its motto – while adapting to changing cultures. Moreover, if

Colson thinks the Reformation was about indulgences, he is inexcusably ignorant. Indulgences were the occasion for beginning the debate; the issue was salvation. The Roman Catholic church denied then and in 1994 still denies the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

### ***Theological Schizophrenia***

As in his other books, Colson says some things with which a Christian would agree. For example, he argues against sexually "inclusive" language: "The words are part of a litmus test that separates those who agree with the agenda from those who don't. Sort of a not-so-secret handshake or a campaign button that neatly identifies the wearer. These are code words of what one writer calls a 'feminist orthodoxy' – and this inclusive language represents subscription to the entire agenda" (242). He recounts how he changed the words "human" and "humankind" back to "man" and "mankind" after a professor at an "Evangelical" college made them politically correct (241). But why, then, does *The Body*, the very book in which he denounces inclusive language, use inclusive language throughout: "lay-people," "businesspeople," "spokesperson" etc.?

Worse, why does Colson, if he believes that Christ is our salvation, relate a sermon by a Roman Catholic monk – who Colson says is a Christian – who teaches that "It is Jesus who told us to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect. So do not think it is such a difficult thing. Actually it is a very simple mathematical problem.... All you must do is obey" (320). On one hand, Colson writes, "believers and congregations should stand for what they believe to be biblical truth and defend the view of liturgy or sacraments or eschatology or other matters upon which Christians honestly differ" (71). On the other, he denounces them for the "sin of presumption" if they do.

On one hand, Colson says he is "thoroughly reformed" in his theology; on the other, he praises the holiness and charismatic movements for "breathing life into the churches."

On one hand, Colson writes: "The charge is to preach the *whole* truth" (123). On the other, only the fundamentals. Everything else tends to disunity.

### ***Two Enemies***

Colson sees two enemies facing the church today: secularism and Islam. They are such serious threats, he believes, "it is so crucial for the members of the Body to put aside their less significant differences and join forces around our integrated world-view to defend the truth" (199). The first question is, What integrated world view? Thomism? Calvinism? What is this integrated world-view that Colson has in mind?

Second, when confronted with a similar argument in the 16th century, the Reformers would have nothing to do with it. They were urged to join forces with the Catholics against the "Turk." Islam was the threat then too. The Reformers were too wise to be fooled by that specious argument. They took the command to Biblical separation seriously. Colson doesn't.

One wonders how soon Colson will be joining the Catholic church – doing exactly what he and J. I. Packer are urging others to do: "It is about time for Christians who recite the creed and mean it to come together for fellowship and witness regardless of denominational identity" (99).

### ***More Books***

*Against the Night: Living in the New Dark Ages.*

Charles Colson with Ellen Santilli Vaughn.

Ann Arbor: Servant Publications, 1989.

205 pages, notes, index.

*Who Speaks for God? Confronting the World with Real Christianity.*

Charles Colson. Foreword by J. I. Packer.

Westchester, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1985.

192 pages, notes, index.

*The God of Stones and Spiders.*

Charles Colson with Ellen Santilli Vaughn.

Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1990.

xiii + 221 pages, notes, index.

*Kingdoms in Conflict.*

Charles Colson with Ellen Santilli Vaughn.

No city: William Morrow and Zondervan, 1987.

399 pages, notes, index.

*Life Sentence.*

Charles W. Colson.

*Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1979.*

306 pages.

### ***Against the Night***

*Against the Night*, an indictment of the West and a plea that we revive Western Civilization, grew out of lectures that Colson delivered at Wheaton College in 1988. There is little new in the book; if one has read C. S. Lewis, Russell Kirk, and Robert Bellah, he has already read *Against the Night*. Colson blames all the ills of modernity on Rene Descartes (wasn't he a Westerner?). "Individualism" is a swear word for Colson, which he regularly modifies by adjectives such as "rampant," "utilitarian," "experiential," and "radical;" and we have lost our sense of "cornmunity."

What we need to do is to revive the "classical" and Christian "consensus" about the "eternal things." We must recover "2,300 years of accumulated moral wisdom" and a "rationally defensible natural law" (44). (Weren't the Ten Commandments written in stone 3,500 years ago? What is this 2,300 year old "accumulated moral wisdom"?) Colson's prescriptions for political, social, and educational action are conservative bromides; he does not get to the heart of the matter.

According to Colson, the Roman Catholic church created the model we need for the next Dark Age:

"Instead of conforming to the barbarian culture of the Dark Ages, the medieval church modeled a counterculture to a world engulfed by destruction and confusion. Thousands of monastic orders spread across Europe... these religious [sic] provided attractive models of communities of caring and character." (132). One expects a new religious order – the Colsonites – to appear any day now.

Colson's heroes are the same as in his other books: the Roman Catholics, Jaime Cardinal Sin (yes, that's his name), Mother Teresa, Christopher Dawson, Russell Kirk, Richard John Neuhaus, Gordon Liddy, G. K. Chesterton, Paul Johnson, Pope John Paul II, Charles Williams, Malcolm Muggeridge, a smattering of Anglicans, and a few Protestants. Servant, his publisher, is Roman Catholic. There is little light in this book, and no hope of winning against the night.

### ***Who Speaks for God?***

In his Foreword J. I. Packer describes Colson as Richard Nixon's "fixer and hatchet man," as "remarkable" and "gruesomely brilliant." Packer says that Colson "seeks to confront secular America with Christian truth... to challenge the church to biblical fidelity and obedience.... He diagnoses our spiritual malaise in clear and stark terms. Thank God for his clarity and vision!" The last good Foreword J. I. Packer wrote was to John Owen's *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*. Since then he has been praising – and presumably being well paid for his praise – books he hasn't read. (And that is a charitable judgment.)

This book is a collection of essays that Colson wrote for *Jubilee*, a publication of Prison Fellowship. In these essays, as in all his books, Colson does exactly what he accuses the media of doing: "The Christian worldview has been undermined by a fierce frontal assault for the past twenty-five years.... But, startling as it may sound, these attacks are not really what alarm me. Of course, they are grave – but also obvious.... No, what concerns me more than the frontal assault is a more subtle attack – the insidious way Christian ideas are subtly altered by an interpretation here, a

nuance there." Colson's subversion of Christianity is dangerous, yet almost no one sees it.

### ***The God of Stones and Spiders***

*The God of Stones and Spiders* is a collection of essays originally written for Prison Fellowship's publication *Jubilee* and *Christianity Today*. Perhaps Colson's most startling statement in this book is that "there are 350,000 churches across America where people's spiritual needs are being met" (125). Does he seriously believe that? That's 7,000 sound churches in every state, over 100 in every county. Apparently he has a very broad definition of "meeting spiritual needs," just as he has a very broad definition of Christianity. This book continues Colson's program of subverting the Reformation.

### ***Life Sentence***

According to the blurb at the beginning of this book, *Life Sentence* begins where *Born Again* left off, chronicling Chuck Colson's growth to full Christian commitment in his prison ministry." The book is endorsed by Jack Anderson, Billy Graham, Catherine Marshall, Carl Henry, John Perkins, and Vernon Grounds.

Colson describes the writing of the book: "My first draft looked like a long-winded sometimes angry sermon.... Soon I discovered that my own thought and values were changing so fast that what I wrote one month was outdated the next. I was studying avidly under the tutelage of Professor Richard Lovelace, eminent church historian at Gordon Conwell Divinity School, Professor Jim Houston, principal of Regent College in British Columbia, and Dr. R. C. Sproul at Ligonier Valley Study Center" (10).

*Life Sentence* furnishes one bit of information that might explain why Colson glosses over the differences between Roman Catholicism and Christianity: His wife Patty "was increasingly uncomfortable about my becoming involved too much in religious work. The aggressive Christians nettled Patty, made her feel that her own quiet, Roman Catholic beliefs were inadequate" (35). Colson explains further: "I've been an Episcopalian,

but I go to Catholic mass occasionally with my wife and sometimes we go to different churches" (39). "Two days later, as I sometimes do, I accompanied Patty to mass in her parish church" (93). "In her third year of attending a community Bible study program, she [Patty] was at least comfortable among most believers except for those well-meaning but overly zealous Christians who would accost her at public events. 'And when did you accept Christ, Mrs. Colson?' they would ask, an expectant breathlessness in their voices. Patty would freeze and later vent her frustration on me. 'But I don't have a testimony,' she would protest. 'I've always believed and I'm still learning.'... Through all the harassments Patty and I were drawing closer together in our beliefs..." (74-75).

Colson is a religious relativist, although he denounces ethical relativism in his other books. Consider this conversation. Colson is being questioned by a member of the audience during an appearance at George Washington University:

" 'Do you believe that only Christians go to heaven?'

" 'Yes.'

" 'What about Jews?' The questioner was speaking for much of the audience on that one.

" 'Everyone must seek God in his or her own way. I do not judge others and I respect others' beliefs, but I know what is truth for me. I can't compromise what Jesus says and I won't because I believe it' " (79).

Notice that Colson says that "everyone must seek God in his or her own way." Christ said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father but by me." Colson says that Christianity is "truth for me." The Bible says that it is truth, period. "Truth for me" is the language of relativism.

This religious relativism explains Colson's practice of working with Roman Catholics wherever possible. In fact, he insists on working with "all churches," Protestant, liberal, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, you name it. He writes: "In the three years I had spent traveling the country, over and

over had I been struck by the tragedy of a church divided. Fundamentalists, evangelicals, charismatics – the labels were often misleading and the delineations blurred – were on one side, while the liberal social action Christians were on the other. The division, some thought, could be traced to the Moody era.... Other Christians, led by a compassionate pastor, Walter Rauschenbusch [Rauschenbusch was the father of the social gospel], began to see Moody followers as indifferent to the suffering of humanity. Distrust grew between the succeeding generations of disciples and the gulf widened.... Why could not those who have different theologies but follow the same Christ lock arms, one with another, for the glory of God?... As a part of this dream I saw Prison Fellowship going into prisons with the help and cooperation of all the churches in the surrounding community" (285). Colson informs us that "few churches have been more effective in prison ministry over the years than the Roman Catholics" (232).

Colson's religious relativism is an indication of theological confusion, and Colson is very confused, to put it most charitably. On page 148 he refers to "inner, regenerative experiences such as election and justification – that is, God's work in the believer." Colson teaches the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification. The Gospel is absent from this book. Indeed, (one looks in vain throughout his books for a clear and accurate statement of the Gospel.

### ***Kingdoms in Conflict***

The dust-jacket subtitle is "An insider's challenging view of politics, power, and the pulpit." This book breaks no new ground for Colson. In disregard of logic, he writes: "Granted, the whole can be greater than the sum of the parts, but can it be of different character altogether? Clearly not" (65). Apparently he has never heard of sodium chloride, water, or geometry. He continues his uninterrupted praise for and citation of Mother Teresa, Richard John Neuhaus, Christopher Dawson, Paul Johnson, and Pope John Paul II, among others. His reading of Christians is lacking. One finds no references to or citations of John Owen, Charles Hodge, Gresham Machen, or Gordon Clark.



Colson does take the correct view of prayer in public schools: "Children or teachers who want to pray in schools should have the same rights of free expression and the same access to public facilities any other group has. But organized prayer, even if voluntary, is another matter. The issue is who does the organizing. If it is the school board, Caesar is being given a spiritual function; admittedly a small crack in the door, but a crack nonetheless. I for one don't want my grandchildren reciting prayers determined by government officials. And in actual practice they would be so watered down as to be of no effect except perhaps to water down my grandchildren's growing faith" (115). Despite his views on prayer, he favors the use of government to erect creches and other religious symbols (209-210). And he says nothing in opposition to the billions of dollars the government gives to religious organizations every year.

Colson points out that Hitler was a Catholic who, quoting William Shirer, borrowed "a chapter from the Roman church [by] restoring pageantry and color and mysticism to the drab lives of twentieth-century Germans. This morning's opening meeting...had something of the mysticism and religious fervor of an Easter or Christmas Mass in a great Gothic cathedral" (131).

Colson tells us, incredibly, that "Christianity possesses the hearts of the [Polish] people and shapes the Polish culture" (195). In fact, "Christianity has been firmly established in Poland for a thousand years" (196). Confusing anti-Communism with Christianity (Colson seems to think that everything that is anti-Communist is pro-Christian, forgetting that Hitler was anti-Communist), he waxes enthusiastic about Papal Masses in Poland and the "worshippers" (what were they worshipping?) at the Shrine of the Black Madonna.

One might think that Colson, as a convicted Watergater, would change his mind about government lying, but he has not, at least not in principle. Quoting two noted authorities on lying, Ted Koppel and Winston Churchill, Colson writes, "The pressures of nuclear-age diplomacy create conscience-wrenching agony for sincere Christians

in office. Yet the Bible offers some surprising principles, citing Rahab, a prostitute, as one of the great heroes of the faith. Why? Rahab's place in history was established by the fact that she lied to protect Hebrew spies. Similarly, concentration-camp survivor Corrie Ten Boom lied to the Nazis to protect the Jews she was hiding. Most Christians today would likely do the same, for in this cruel and complex world, a lesser evil may be required to prevent a greater one. A Christian in public office may be placed in a similar situation, say, to save the lives of hostages. If the situation forced the Christian to lie against his or her conscience, the Christian should resign" (286).

But Scripture does not praise Rahab for lying; that is an invalid inference on Colson's part. He needs to read Hebrews again. It would be odd if the Bible, which repeatedly condemns lying, were to praise someone for lying.

Given his method of interpreting Scripture, why does Colson infer that God commends Rahab for lying alone? Her prostitution was equally important in the saving of the Jewish spies, and inferring that the Bible therefore endorses prosecution would be just as valid as the inference Colson draws. At least Colson does refer to lying as an "evil," and he does suggest resignation for those who wish to avoid doing evil that good may come, as God commands, but he also suggests that Rahab and Corrie Ten Boom are adequate precedents for lying when needed. He is not so enthusiastic in defending lying as the Theonomists and Jesuits are, but he defends it nevertheless.

Perhaps the most interesting part of this book is not the political short story with which it begins, but the true story of the political influence of Jaime Cardinal Sin, which appears near the end of the book.

After becoming Cardinal in 1983, Sin preached conversion, obedience, and reparation (penance) to the Philippine people. Sin criticized the Marcos government, hastened Marcos' departure from the Philippines, and aided Corazon Aquino in her campaign for the presidency. When Colson visited the Philippines, Cardinal Sin and Colson became

"fast friends." In fact, Cardinal Sin instructed his entire staff to read *Born Again*, Colson's first book.

### ***Evangelical Catholics***

In 1992 Keith A. Fournier, the man who now heads Pat Rohertson's legal firm, the American Center for Law and Justice, published a book entitled *Evangelical Catholics*. Colson wrote the Foreword to the book. In the Foreword, Colson informs us that he received the Poverello Award at the Franciscan University of Steubenville, Ohio. The Franciscan University is a charismatic, Roman Catholic school.

The Poverello ("little poor man") Award is named after Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of the University. It is the University's highest award, higher than an honorary degree, and it has been given to Alcoholics Anonymous, the Salvation Army, Mother Teresa, and Mark Hatfield, among others.

It was at the University that Colson met Keith Fournier, who was Dean of Evangelism. (The Franciscan University is where former Presbyterian preacher and convert to Roman Catholicism Scott Hahn teaches. Next month we will review his new hook *Rome Sweet Home* [no joke], God willing.)

Colson tells us that "as I walked across the grounds, I felt a sense of purposefulness often missing from college campuses. Students were involved in evangelistic outreach and community service.... The changes at Steubenville [in the years preceding his visit] have been miraculous. They can only be attributed to a great movement of the Holy Spirit among people completely committed to Christian living within the Catholic Church. Evangelical Catholics."

Colson goes on to lament the fact that the "pain and distrust between Catholics and Protestants goes back centuries. The church has often been plagued by wars within her walls, crippling her in her battle against the encroaching armies of secularism. But, at root, those who are called of God, whether Catholic, or Protestant, are part of the same Body. What they share is belief in the basics.... They also share the same mission...."

Colson concludes that "It's high time that all of us who are Christians come together regardless of the differences of our confessions and our traditions and make common cause to bring Christian values to bear in our society. When the barbarians are scaling the walls, there is no time for petty quarreling in the camp." So by implication the Reformation was a petty quarrel, and the doctrine of justification by faith alone, which Paul and Luther said was the article by which the church stands or falls, is not basic to Christian doctrine.

### ***Will Charles Colson Go to Hell?***

Charles Colson's eternal destination is not the issue, as some readers who object to these reviews will undoubtedly try to make it. God alone knows where Colson will go. The issue is the counterfeit gospel Colson teaches while on Earth, which is misleading many souls besides his own. Colson-and anyone else – will make it to Heaven only if he believes the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which is not the gospel Colson teaches.

The church has been plagued with celebrity Christians for much of this century. Colson is a good example of a man who has had some sort of religious experience and is smart enough to parlay that into an organization and movement that keeps his celebrity status alive. But the doctrine he teaches is false. His gospel is no gospel at all.

After reading Colson's books, one gets the impression that twenty years after Watergate, Charles Colson is still working for his party. This time the work is not so innocent as getting the president re-elected. This time, Colson is out to ensure the success of his *religious* party – a party that praises the apostate Roman Catholic church, a party that garbles the Gospel of Jesus Christ, a party that advocates religious relativism, a party tolerant of anyone calling himself Christian except the one who insists that broad is the way and wide that gate that leads to destruction, and narrow is the path and strait the gate that leads to everlasting life.

Charles Colson is a bright and clever fellow. One does not get to be White House Counsel by being stupid or ignorant. One might conclude that Colson knows exactly what he is doing in writing his

books, and perhaps he does. But my experience has been that bright and clever fellows in one area can be stupid and ignorant in others. That is the best and most charitable interpretation one can put on the matter. But that does not excuse the mortal errors that Colson is teaching in his books.

If one is looking for a proclamation and defense of Christianity, or even a clear and accurate statement of the Gospel, he will not find it in Colson's books. That is not to say that there are no good or true statements in them; any book whose every sentence is false would be rare indeed. But the "worldview" that Colson presents is not the Christian worldview. The Gospel is missing. The knowledge of theology that a person of Colson's stature should have is absent.

The issue is: Will those who read Colson's books find in them the information they need to get to Heaven? It isn't there. Only the grace of God will keep them from being deceived by the counterfeit gospel of Charles Colson.