

BEYOND THE SONS OF GOD

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God’s activity in the twentieth century—especially in what has come to be known as the Latter Rain Movement—has resulted in a deeper and more profound spiritual walk for those who have had ears to hear and hearts to receive the messages that have issued forth from it. Moreover, it has revolutionized our understanding of who *we* are in God’s great Kingdom purposes. We have come to understand that we are much more than merely “sinners saved by grace.” This mid-twentieth-century move of God known as Latter Rain went in a number of directions to be sure, but if there is one central theme, it is the unveiling of the fact that God is preparing and maturing His elect to rule and reign with Him in the Kingdom that He is establishing in us. These whom He is preparing in this way are referred to by Paul and others as the sons of God.¹

So powerful has been this revelation that we have witnessed the emergence of an entire movement promoting this understanding of the sons of God as its central theme. Great ministries have been built by those following in the Latter Rain tradition, including the healing ministries of William Branham and Oral Roberts. Other ministries, such as that of T.L. Osborn were birthed in this context,

¹ Greek *huios*, meaning mature sons, as distinguished from the more general “children” (*teknon*) of God, which typically carries with it the idea of a less mature child of God.

broadcasting this message in its myriad of forms throughout the world. So successful were many of these ministries, that this move of God became institutionalized and under the control of self-appointed prophets and teachers. What began as a mighty move of God in the mid-twentieth century followed the course of every other great work of God throughout human history—including Luther’s Protestant Reformation, Calvin’s Geneva, Wesley’s revival of a personal encounter with God accompanied by a circumcision of the heart and inner sanctification, and the Azusa Street outpouring in the early years of the twentieth century. All of these powerful invasions of God into the course of human history were brought under human control resulting in the thousands of organized religious orders that we, today, call denominations.

Understanding the sons of God to be those matured believers who are being purged and refined in preparation to rule and reign with Christ was one of the central themes of the Latter Rain Movement from its inception. This understanding has taken on such force that it might be rightly considered a movement in its own right. This “Sons of God” movement, with which many who are reading this article identify, is, regrettably following the same path of institutionalization. The wonderful truths that have been spoken forth through messengers such as George Warnock, Bill Britton, George Hawtin and J. Preston Eby, among numerous others, have been formalized, by those who would seek to institutionalize these truths, into firm and often strict doctrines that are being preached in various organized settings, both large and small, throughout the world today. But these precious truths are not to be contained within the walls of organized religious institutions, no matter how much these so-called “churches” claim to be free of the shackles of organized religion. Nor are they to be codified into a set of doctrines. These truths cannot be constrained in these ways because they contain within them the seed of radical transformation of individuals, families, communities, and indeed nations and the world; but this will not—indeed *cannot–take* place within the old wineskins in which the promoters of this message currently tend to operate.

AWAY WITH THE OLD WINESKINS...

Jesus said:

And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins (Mark 2:22).

Yet, we have tried to once again pour the fresh wine of God's Spirit into the old "tried and true" wineskins of churchianity. How has this happened with the message of the sons of God? This is important to understand because, in being forced into these old structures, the wineskins are bursting and spilling this new wine unto the ground.

The Message has Become Just Another Doctrine

The wonderful truth of God's election of a remnant of his creation to sonship has been carefully and methodically developed into but another doctrine on the smorgasbord of doctrines to which people give mental assent. We would be so bold as to suggest that many of those who consider themselves within the "sonship movement" know nothing of sonship beyond an intellectual understanding and affirmation of the tenets of the doctrine that have been put forward by leaders of this movement. They have confused *knowing about* sonship with *walking in* sonship, mirroring the modern day church's tendencies to do the same with even more basic truths concerning Christ and our relationship to Him. This is the problem with doctrine in the old wineskin. Like the law, it has no power within itself to provide the life necessary to walk in the truth that it declares. Like the many doctrines that have separated the body of Christ into the multitude of denominations in existence today, teachings regarding the sons of God have resulted in just another doctrine calling for one's allegiance. In this way, like the many other doctrines before it, this sonship doctrine has been made into a form of law because it demands a mental assent to a truth which, if the Life is absent, is powerless to enable one to abide in the reality it proclaims.

The other problem with life-less doctrine is that it divides. This is as true regarding the doctrine that has developed concerning the sons of God as it is

about any doctrine. Mental affirmation of doctrinal beliefs becomes a litmus test of sorts for the validity of one's faith and walk. Our observation has been that in the case of the Sons of God movement, the depth of one's walk has been measured by how fully one understands and affirms the doctrinal tenets set forth. If a fellow sojourner fails to believe or understand what it means to co-reign with Christ in the way articulated by certain accepted spokespersons, he or she is regarded as somehow inferior or lacking. Some doctrines held dearly by some sons of God adherents are rejected by others who also understand themselves to be sons. A belief in the reconciliation of all things to Christ and all of its implications, for example, is a dearly held truth by many who have come into this revelation, including us. This belief has often become a source of pride and engenders a sense of superiority over others who believe in an eternal hell. Those who do not accept this doctrine, on the other hand, regard those who do as having fallen victim to heresy. Division occurs.

These doctrines are not bad because they espouse untruths; *the problem is that these wonderful truths have become just another lifeless doctrine!* They have become a dividing wall that separates members of the body of Christ from one another. Doctrine is exclusive and divisive when it is devoid of Life. Those who cannot or will not endorse the doctrine are dis-fellowshipped, or at best, regarded as lesser in some way. This has played out over and over again throughout church history; and among those who identify themselves as "sons of God," we have observed a spiritual arrogance that rivals just about any doctrinal one-upmanship that has taken place in the some 2000 years of church history that have gone before.² The inevitable result, when the Holy Spirit is not alive and fully

² This spiritual arrogance does not characterize all who hold to these doctrines. Some of the humblest people we have met, for example, adhere to and teach the doctrine of the reconciliation of all things to Christ with fervor. While not compromising on this truth, they nevertheless embrace others who reject this truth as full brothers and sisters in Christ. There are far too many, however, who use the acceptance of this and other doctrines—or their rejection—as the basis upon which to continue fellowship. We would make a further point: We do recognize that there are some fundamental truths which are absolutely critical to a life of faith. Paul was adamant, for example, in holding the line regarding living by the Spirit and not by the law. This became a basis for dis-fellowship with the Judaizers who were seeking to proselytize their beliefs among the Galatian believers. There is clearly no fellowship of Spirit with law. However, while the many truths that have been revealed to and proclaimed by those in the Sons of God movement are precious and profound, they should never be a basis for fellowship with one another as members of the body of Christ; nor should the depth of one's walk with Christ be judged on the basis of adherence to these doctrines.

functioning in His many-membered body, is that when unveiled truths are developed and codified into doctrine they take on the character of law, which divides and elevates one group of people over all the others. Christ, however, transcends doctrine, and when He is in control, He breaks down the dividing wall that doctrine creates.

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility...(Ephesians 2:14).

The Sons of God has Become an Organization

That which was birthed among those very early followers of Jesus was a living, breathing *organism*. Whenever and wherever the fresh winds of God's Spirit have moved upon people throughout history the result was always the same, characterized by a newness of life, an outpouring of love for one another that came from the very heart of God, and a lively boldness in the Spirit in speaking forth God's word—even when that word was not a popular one. There is always a large measure of unpredictability about what might take place in any particular gathering, because the Spirit of God—not some humanly appointed leader—is in control of what takes place there.

Organizations are an animal of a completely different stripe. Organizations are painstakingly planned and highly predictable entities with carefully specified goals. Those organizations which are most successful take on the form of a *bureaucracy*, whose purpose is to accomplish these stated goals in the most efficient way possible. This is true of any bureaucracy, whether we are talking about Walmart, McDonalds, Delta airlines, *or the organized church system today.*³

This process of organizational development has been the fate of the Sons of God movement just as it was among previous moves of God throughout history. We saw this take place in the early years of this movement, with the organized healing crusades of William Branham and then others such as Oral Roberts. These

³ See an earlier article, [Bureaucracychurch](http://www.wordforthebride.net) at the website www.wordforthebride.net for a more extended discussion of the bureaucratic nature of the church and the implications that this has for the body of Christ.

and other ministries created very sophisticated publicity and fundraising strategies that would be the envy of Madison Avenue. Local churches were effectively organized to promote these meetings and participate in a smooth-running production when these ministries came to their town. We observe a similar effort at organization today in the many conferences that are sponsored to proclaim this message. There are, furthermore, many churches—both large and small—which are being carefully organized around this message throughout the land today. All of these efforts, as well intentioned as they might be, are deadly to the glorious gospel that they seek to advance.

It is important that we address why these efforts to organize are so devastating to the life of Christ among a body of believers. If the *ecclesia* of Christ is truly a living, breathing organism—and it was intended to be that by Christ when He established it among his disciples—then we must understand it in terms that are descriptive of an organism. Thankfully, we do not have to invent this description ourselves. Our forerunner, Paul, has provided us with a masterful analogy in 1 Corinthians 12, wherein he describes the *ecclesia* as a “body.” Most of us are very familiar with this passage in which he talks about each body part having a unique function, with each being vitally necessary to the functioning of the whole body. Paul even goes so far as to say that those parts which are more feeble, and which seem less honorable, are *especially* important in the functioning and proliferation of the body.

Let us consider the truth of this in the analogy itself. One of the most vulnerable parts of the human body is the eye. This is why we wear safety glasses when performing certain tasks; and all states require eye protection when riding a motorcycle, though many states do not require the use of a helmet to protect the human skull and brain! We treat the human eye with special care. Similarly, at least in western culture, the least honorable body parts consist of the genitalia. Nevertheless, God has ordained that these parts, which are even regarded as “dirty” or offensive, and not appropriate for public display, are the very organs required to bring forth new life—and in the creation thereof, provide an unparalleled joy in our human experience. In point of fact, every body part is necessary if we are to function as a complete and healthy human being.

Moreover, each part of an organism must be allowed to freely function in its created role. One with a broken arm, constrained in a sling, is at a disadvantage when playing baseball, playing a musical instrument, or engaging in a myriad of other activities. Lungs that are filled with water are unable to take in the necessary oxygen so necessary for the vital functioning of nearly every organ of the body. If one part of the body is hindered in any way in its free exercise, the entire body suffers to some extent or another.

This is obvious in the natural, and the analogy to the spiritual body that Christ has established is made crystal clear by Paul in the twelfth chapter of First Corinthians. Yet, by the very way in which His body comes together today as a bureaucratic organization, we are filling lungs with water and putting arms in slings. Rather than move and speak freely as the Spirit of God would lead them, church members are forced into positions that need to be filled to accomplish the goals of this organization that we call “the church.” They sing songs from a hymnal printed by a for-profit publishing company, and selected by a worship leader who chooses them based on what the pastor has told him or her is the sermon’s theme for that week. The big elephant in the room is the ever present clock—whether it hangs on the back wall or is simply strapped around the wrist of the parishioners. In such an environment as this, whether it be a weekly church service or an annual conference, the body of Christ is not functioning as its creator intended. It is sickly, and throughout most of Christendom today, is on life support. This is no less true of those organized bodies who claim to be “sons of God” than it is of our Roman brothers and sisters.

The most fatal flaw that comes with “organization,” in our understanding, is the tendency—necessity really—of establishing one or more individuals as “pastors” of these bureaucracies. This is an issue that we single out for special consideration.

The Sons of God has a False Head

Since at least the time of Constantine, Christ’s *ecclesia* has been under the rule (sometimes brutal, sometimes benevolent) of a human dictator. The Roman church, of course, has ruled through a human pope. Despite the many

revolutionary changes that Luther brought to Christianity, he did not trust the average, uneducated layman to interpret scripture for him or herself, and insisted on the need for a professionally trained clergy to teach and lead the people. Every move of God throughout history has left virtually unchallenged the sacred cow of a clergy class, devoted full or part time to being the “pastor,” “head elder” or leader by any other name, who is usually paid to provide leadership to a local flock. This is no less true of the many groups that have emerged from the Latter Rain Movement, that move of God that provided the impetus for the Sons of God teaching today. There are untold numbers of local churches today who identify themselves as “Sons of God” bodies with paid pastors and often other paid staff as well. They frequently hold conferences and gatherings featuring high profile pastors in those circles. Lip service is often given to full body participation, but inevitably the only ones that are heard from are those invited to “sit on the stage.” We are aware of one sons of God group that hosts an annual gathering of people from around the nation. Much lip service is given to allowing the Holy Spirit to identify and select those who would speak at the gathering. Predictably, however, the Holy Spirit seems to select the same people year after year, with an occasional variation, and there is evidence of younger protégés being groomed to insure the future of the ministry and the gatherings. It has become very clear that what is advertised as a Spirit led gathering is the same carefully choreographed stage show that has been going on in the larger church world for centuries. Please understand—the message that is presented at these gatherings, as with other meetings of this type, is more often than not a very powerful one, full of incredible life-giving truth. It is presented, however, in an old wineskin that relies upon a separated clergy class to present it. As we will be suggesting below, at gatherings such as this just about every member present should be prepared to have a contribution to make. In the settings such as that which we have observed above, however, their voices remain muted.

This is tragic. The *ecclesia*, when it is functioning properly, has a single Head, that being Jesus Christ. There is no need for a stage which lifts up and sets apart pastor-heads, song leaders and other assigned positions to “lead” the congregation in worship, or in prayer, or in any other of a myriad of activities

thought to be so crucial in “having church.” Christ alone is to be Head who, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, intends to speak through His many-membered body. It is His intent that the *whole body* be operative whenever it gathers together, and that it take its direction from *Him*, rather than some humanly appointed leader. This cannot happen under the Babylonian wineskin that has constrained Him all these many years. Babylonian leadership is greatly in fear of services getting out of control, or one or more voices speaking heresy if the congregation is given free rein to speak as the Holy Spirit gives utterance. They do not trust the Holy Spirit to bring forth His own order—an order which, to be sure, will not look like the order that old wineskin preachers would impose. What is desperately needed at this hour is a vision for a new wineskin in which to understand and experience the Kingdom and its message which God is now bringing forth.

...AND ON WITH THE NEW WINESKIN

The first words of Jesus recorded after he came into His public ministry were “*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel*” (Mark 1:15) . Let us consider the meaning of this word *repent*. The Greek word rendered here “repent” is *metanoēō*, which most literally translated means “to change one’s mind,” or “reconsider.” It is a word which suggests a complete change of mental orientation, a paradigm shift. Jesus was really saying: “Forget everything you thought you knew about God, you need a new mind to apprehend Him, because His kingdom is now here!” A short time later, Jesus presents a picture of what happens when we attempt to force this message of the kingdom into old ways of thinking and doing things:

And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins (Mark 2:22).

And so the *metanoēō* that is required is not merely a new message, but also a new wineskin with which to contain it. We need a new wineskin, and we invite you to vision with us for such a new “container” that will not burst with the new wine. For our part, we are aware that we are entering into uncharted territory

here, and we see “trees as men walking.” Much of what we share here is already beginning to take place, and has been taking place throughout the last 2000 years by a faithful remnant,⁴ though the religious system of Babylon has largely ignored, rejected and even persecuted those of that remnant because they have been a threat to the institutional framework that has so skewed our understanding of who we are as the body of Christ. So we share these thoughts and observations because we believe strongly in the truths conveyed in this message of sonship, and we do not want to see it relegated to the dustbin of religious history, as just yet another doctrine to be discussed by theologians, that has been the story of Christendom. This is a living and powerful message that cries out for a wineskin that can contain it.

Christ Alone is Head

The cornerstone of a new wineskin must be the establishment of Christ alone as the head of His body. The organized church has given lip service to this bedrock truth down through the ages, but when we examine closely how the church has operated throughout history, the *functioning head* has been the pope, or the bishops, or the district superintendents, or the pastors, or...whatever title has been adopted for any given denomination for this purpose. This “beheading” of Christ from His body has been no less true in the so-called “free” churches, including those who carry the Sons of God message. We do not necessarily lay the blame on pastors or leaders of these assemblies. While all too many are seeking to promote themselves and their ministries, exalting their positions to do so, we also know of many who eschew this positioning. They understand well that Christ and Him alone, is the Head, and in their writing and speaking would seek to diminish their own importance. The problem is, however, that their followers—those to whom they are speaking and writing—have put them on a pedestal and look to them as their spiritual guru, rather than the Holy Spirit within.

⁴ *The Torch of the Testimony* by John Kennedy provides an excellent history of various groups who refused to bow the knee to the organized Christianity of their day, experiencing brutal persecution by both Catholics and Protestants. Some of these groups, including the Wesley’s “The Holy Club,” would eventually themselves institutionalize and take on the character of denominations (Methodists). They and others, however, represent a faithful remnant and carried the torch of the testimony throughout their day. We highly recommend this book.

Because of this tendency of the body of Christ to promote certain individuals to a place of prominence, the Lord cannot and will not allow *anyone* to indefinitely occupy a place of such prominence in the body that He is drawing together and building up. We have seen some very great men of God stripped of their standing, whether through premature death or through scandal. Jesus Christ insists on being the one and only Head over His body.

If Christ alone is to be Head, how then are meetings to be conducted? Surely, you say, *someone* has to be in the leadership position! We are by no means suggesting that meetings conducted in the name of Christ alone as Head are characterized by disorder or even anarchy. Leadership *does and will* emerge in such faithful assemblies, but it emerges *organically*, directed by the Holy Spirit, as participants in those gathering come together with the intent of hearing and being obedient to the Spirit of God. God speaks to whomever He will in such gatherings. He is no respecter of position or title in doing this. Gatherings of His people who are truly committed to Christ's headship alone will respect and honor any word of the Lord issuing forth from the least among them. Furthermore, carnality of any kind will be quickly discerned as the Holy Spirit brings about *His* order in the gathering.

Those who meet with one another on a more or less regular basis⁵ will not be dependent on one, or even a small group of people to provide leadership for their times together. No one is considered *the* "pastor," or even *the* "leader" here, though some groups may find themselves in a situation of rotating leadership, where one member of the group is led to conduct a series of teachings on a subject for a season, followed by Holy-Spirit led guidance in another direction and through another individual in a season to follow. Other groups may come together with no pre-determined topic or focus, except to wait before the Lord for His direction, and He will move upon one or more persons for teaching, worship or sharing for that particular occasion. Whatever any given group looks

⁵ We believe that God is moving primarily outside the institutional church gatherings that have regular Sunday (or Saturday) and weeknight services. Indeed, the assembly of God's people is becoming ever more fluid in ways that we envision in the following section. There will also be groups which meet on a more regular basis, in homes, at places of work and elsewhere. The discussion in this sub-section pertains to such groups.

like in the details, *a defining characteristic of any local body that deliberately comes together under the headship of Christ is the lack of any on-going or permanent humanly appointed leadership.*

Our experience, sadly, has been that while many groups—including and especially home groups—may start out with these ideals in mind, they quickly devolve into mini-versions of old wineskin, institutional churches where one or two individuals become recognized as leaders and set the agenda for the group. This is why we envision a far more fluid ecclesia than that found in home groups.

A Decentralized Body

While the body of Christ will meet in various locales at various times, this *ecclesia* that is being raised up in our day has no need to meet at a regularly designated time or location. They may meet for a season, and then know and understand that the purpose of their getting together on a face to face basis has been accomplished—and agree to disband. Gatherings will also be spontaneous, meeting on street corners or in the aisles of supermarkets, drawn together by the Spirit of God because we have been given a word to share with someone at the other end of the aisle. We can no longer understand the “local assembly” as a permanent group of people who espouse a certain set of doctrines and who meet every Sunday morning in the church with the pretty little steeple on corner of Fifth Street and Main. The lively body of Christ that is being formed today, functioning in and by the Holy Spirit, is a much more fluid entity with no allegiance to any denomination or organization. Their only allegiance is to Christ. Many individuals in any given locale that come together in this way already know one another, but will have no group identity beyond being followers of Christ, their Head. Others are being drawn together by God-ordained circumstances, never having met each other before. Those coming together in these ways are accomplishing the Kingdom purposes of God. They *are* the body of Christ in that place, time and circumstance.

We are seeing something even more fluid taking place as God is forming this new wineskin. Increasingly, the body of Christ is coming together by way of phone, email, messaging, and discussion threads on internet websites. This is a

phenomenon that one has termed the “wire church.”⁶ Those who are connected in this way are often those who have been called apart to a very lonely walk, as God has separated them to do very deep and often painful surgery within them. These truly are sons being refined and perfected, a preparation that is taking place away from the hubbub of spiritual, and certainly religious, activity. Their connection with the wider body of Christ is almost exclusively through these long-distance connections.⁷

An important point that we wish to make here is that these “decentralized” and “fluid” manifestations of the body of Christ are not aberrations, or some temporary arrangement to meet the immediate needs of a few individuals until they can find themselves in some more “permanent” assembly. Nor are people who find themselves in these sorts of gatherings simply disillusioned with denominational (or other sorts of institutional) Christianity. It is our humble but deep conviction that these, many of whom the church world has considered “misfits,” are pioneers in the building of the new wineskin that God is constructing so as to contain the powerful new wine that has been pouring forth in these days.

⁶ We had been experiencing the reality of this form of gathering for some time before we first came across this term in an article by Jackie Caporaso entitled [The Bride, the Woman, the Wire Church](#).

⁷ Our personal experience of how God brought us to this place might be fairly typical, we are not sure. After being called out of the institutional church, we desperately longed for fellowship among God’s people. We came all the way from Alabama to Arkansas to join with a group that didn’t seem at first to have the markings of institutional Christianity. What we found when we arrived here was an even more severe dictatorial regime which attempted to control even the ability of members freely associating with one another. We left that fellowship within a month after arriving in Arkansas, and soon joined a small home group. Within months, we discovered varied agendas within that group, each vying for dominance. The same was true of a second home group that we joined. Old Adam was just as operative in these more intimate clusters as he was in the institutional religion that we left. At some point, we made the decision to launch a small website as a way of offering to others free of charge some music and written work that the Lord had been sharing with us. The website was miniscule at first, and still is small in comparison to most, as we post only that which we sense the Lord directing us to publish (whether our own, or the works of others). Every now and then we receive an email to the address posted on the site. When this happens, an email exchange will sometimes ensue. In rare cases, a relationship develops as regular email, and sometimes telephone conversations eventually take place. In a couple of cases, these relationships have blossomed into opportunities to spend time together face to face. We all recognize that God’s body building program is taking place among us despite the fact that it doesn’t look anything like institutional Christianity.

Unlikely Building Materials

Whenever God moved in past centuries, those who were a part of what God was doing were generally from among the ranks of church traditions. Certainly, outsiders were drawn, as evidenced by eyewitnesses to the fact that bars and saloons were closed because of a lack of business in cities where revival was sweeping. These alcoholics, prostitutes and others coming from their places of disrepute found their way into the church buildings where revival fires were being preached from the pulpits. The established church world of that time would typically reject these new moves of God, regarding them as heresy, and those who participated—especially the emergent leaders in these new moves—as “holy rollers,” “mystics,” or some other brand of heretic. New groups would then form from among these “disinherited,” however, and eventually another church denomination would form, as these small sectarian groups would grow in size and stature.⁸

We envision something quite different than that which has ever taken place before, and is even now taking place, though not recognized or even seen by those who have no vision beyond the old wineskin. Rather than those in the highways and byways being brought into the church, the Spirit is giving witness to us that the very presence of Christ is being *brought to them*, in their places of habitation, employment, and leisure; coming to their circumstances of suffering, sorrow and misery, or to their place of celebration and blessing. Indeed, “the least of these” will, in fact, *become* the church, right where they are. These are the “weak” and “dishonorable” members of the body that have been ignored and disdained, but who are so critical to the vital functioning of Christ’s ecclesia. There is no need for church buildings, pulpits, paid pastors, or any other of the accoutrements of the Babylonian ecclesiastical structure among these who are now being called out. There will be messengers of God’s precious truths, of course, and many of them will be those who have come out of the institutional church and have heard the call of God to “come out from among them, and be ye separate...and touch not the unclean thing” (2 Corinthians 6:17). These faithful

⁸ See H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (1929) for an excellent discussion of this process.

messengers, however, will not be ministering for the purpose of recruiting anyone to join any group, Bible study or home church that is forming, except as directed by the Holy Spirit. Their sole purpose will be to give witness, with word and deed, to that which God is doing. In turn, those receiving new life in Christ will find themselves ministering to one another. These will not have all the baggage of institutional Christianity to shed. They share with power and simplicity, the message of the glorious gospel that has apprehended them on street corners, in shooting galleries, in bars, at Walmart, and wherever else the Spirit of God has drawn them. Their language is almost certainly a little rough and not very “religious.” But their faces are aglow with the transforming presence of Christ in them, their hope of glory. Their gatherings, when they have them, are “fluid,” being comprised of new mixes of people every time they meet; they are spontaneous and without programmatic planning. Most importantly, there is no need of any designated “pastor” or other leader. Christ, as Head of His body is conducting these meetings through the yielded vessels that have gathered together.

There are others, those who are part of the *wire church*, whose “meetings” take place remotely with the aid of modern electronics. These may take the form of emails or discussion threads which allow for group conversations to take place. Similarly, these saints gather by telephone, sometimes on group calls. Many of those who meet this way have been called, not only out of the institutional church, but apart from regular face-to-face fellowship with fellow believers for an indefinite season. These are called apart for the specific purpose of refining and purifying, preparing and maturing them as sons who will be co-reigning with Christ. There is much of self that must be dealt with, and needs the application of the cross before they are ready for these Kingdom roles. God knows that this is most effectively done in the hidden place, apart from all of the spiritual activities and relationships that distract, and can so readily puff up the carnal man within. Even these hidden ones, however, are part of Christ’s body and in need of one another if they are to be complete. We observe that these, whose lives are unseen by most of the world, are discovering each other through these electronic means, and are profoundly ministering to one another in this way.

There is, of course, no limit to the ways in which God might reconstruct the wineskin that He is creating to contain what He is doing and about to do in our time. The specific expressions of the body of Christ are as varied as the cultures and subcultures in which they are manifest. However it is expressed in any given situation, it will take on the qualities of organic spontaneity and every-member participation.

New Mediums of Expression

The substance of what God is doing in our day cannot be adequately expressed in the forms of communication that have been used in the church to the present time. Michelangelo, Bach and even Fanny Crosby cannot possibly capture the powerful and glorious thing that God is beginning to bestow upon and through His sons. There will be new and unprecedented language, music, and artistic expression that will come from the very heart of God. These are Holy Spirit-inspired expressions that are transformative for those who can receive that which God is doing.

The *language* of contemporary Churchianity is impotent to bring forth anything which God is purposing to do in this hour. The churches of today bring a most anemic message that teaches its members that “we are but sinners saved by grace.” There is, of course, a truth that is captured here, namely that we have been born into alienation from God, and it is only through the working of His grace that we are reconciled back to Him. While we do not want to minimize the importance of this message, it is a message for babes in Christ. As we grow in Christ, He has in store for us deeper, more transformative truth. Those who remain under the constraints of organized religion remain babes sucking on the tit of pastors and itinerant evangelists for their next drop of watered down milk. This is fine, even necessary perhaps, in the infancy stage of one’s walk. There is a far deeper message, one which Paul refers to as “meat,” that is in store for those who would go on to maturity in Christ. Those whom God is calling apart today are indeed responding to a different message than that which has dominated the pulpits and the airwaves of Christian radio and TV. They are responding to a *Kingdom* message that empowers them to *take the Kingdom by force* (Matthew

11:12). These are not mere spectators of God's activity (or, as many of those in the old "church paradigm" see it, of the hold-your-breath battle between God and Satan); they are *participants* in His program of establishing His Kingdom here on earth. They are, therefore, inheriting a language that empowers them to do this.

There has been a new language coming forth since the mid-twentieth century that has revolutionized the thinking and lifestyles of a first-fruit remnant, while at the same time inviting charges of heresy from more "orthodox" circles. It is a language of empowerment—not in any humanistic sense, but rather of understanding who we are in God's great plan for the ages. It is a language that speaks of *sonship*, of being *heirs* of all God is, of *priesthood*, and of *co-reigning* with Christ. One remaining problem with the "language of sonship," however, is that it is still too often couched in vocabulary of a bygone era. Many of its proponents are still using King Jimmy's English! When God speaks, He speaks in a language understandable by those to whom He is speaking. He spoke the language of ancient Hebrew to the Israelites. He spoke through Paul to the Corinthians and others in their native language of ancient Greek. Moreover, both Jesus and Paul used idioms and metaphors that were commonly understood by their hearers. It is now time for a new language, understandable by the hearers of this message.

We have suggested earlier that this Kingdom is increasingly being brought to the marketplace—to the streets, the shopping malls, neighborhood parks, and even to alcoholics in bars and drug addicts in shooting galleries. It is also being shared with Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists and humanistic atheists within the various cultures in which they find themselves. The message of the Kingdom is being spoken forth in all of these cultures and subcultures with language, metaphors and idioms that speak to *them*. Speaking of a seed producing 30-fold, 60-fold and 100-fold, for example, was clearly understood by those in the agrarian society of Jesus' day, and to anyone involved in farming or gardening today. This metaphor may not so readily be understood by an inner city dweller, however. Such an individual (at least if they reside in the United States or some other capitalistic country) might relate much more readily to someone making an investment that pays 3,000, 6,000 or 10,000 percent interest. A heroin addict will understand this

same message when he or she is told that the Kingdom of God is like the investment of a bag of heroin that will produce bundles and even kilos in return.⁹ We must make it very clear here: We are not attempting to establish a new vocabulary that will be used by “the Church of Wall Street,” or “Shooting Gallery Chapel.” The point we are making is that this new language will be *fluid* in nature, readily adapting to the culture and understanding of the hearer, and done so by the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Most importantly, this Spirit-inspired, laser focused language will be used by God to bring transformation and overcoming power in the lives of those who are able to receive this word.

This is nothing more—nor less—than what took place on the day of Pentecost when Jesus’ disciples were gathered in the upper room. They were in one accord, and the Spirit of God came upon them with transformative power. The record states that they began to speak in other tongues. They were not merely speaking forth in a “prayer language” here. They were speaking in languages that were understandable to the hearers in their own native tongue:

Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. (Acts 2:6-11)

Where was this message being heard? It was in the streets and in the market place by whoever was within hearing distance of this upper room. And the multitude of people who were gathered from near and far and of many language

⁹ A “bag” of heroin is equivalent to about one-tenth of a gram; a “bundle” is equivalent to about 25 bags; a kilo is about 10,000 bags.

groups *each heard this message in their own language!* God is also empowering a people today to bring forth His message to those whom He has predestined to hear: first to those first fruits in every generation who are being called to a life of separation unto God, and ultimately to the whole world. And like those hearers of old, this message is one that is being heard in their own language, and in idioms that are intuitive to their understanding. This has always been God's way, for He is never limited in His ability to speak to anyone.

Not only is God bringing forth new language forms as part of the new wineskin that He is creating this day; but a new song with new *music* is being heard and sung coming straight from the counsels of Heaven. This music will be unlike any traditional hymns, contemporary Christian, or gospel music that we hear today, though to the spiritually untrained ear, it may sound very similar to these. As with the new language, the new music will appeal culturally to all walks of life. Much has been made in Christian circles, even Sonship circles, of the satanic "beat" of rock and roll music. We would contend, however, that the rhythm and cadence of rock and roll music is no more evil than the cerebral tones of Bach or Beethoven. God has created it all, and just like Luther's *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*, which was originally a German beer-drinking song replaced with alternative Christian lyrics, contemporary rock and roll (or rap or hip hop) can deliver powerful kingdom truths just as it can satanic and dark messages. Paul, in warning Titus that "*there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision*" (Titus 1:10), declared that "*unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled*" (Titus 1:15). It seems that just as the first century church was offended by the eating of meat sacrificed to idols and judged those believers under Paul's charge accordingly, so have many in our day been offended by certain kinds of music that they have dubbed "the devil's music." The music that God is bringing in our day, however, will not be held back by such odious judgments. The writers and performers of this new music that God is orchestrating are compelled by the very Spirit of God to speak forth that which He is proclaiming with music and lyrics that transform the hearers. We are not speaking here of music designed to appeal to the masses so as to titillate their

soul passion. We are in heartfelt agreement with those who decry the fact that we are “bringing the world into the church” when bands with drums and electric guitars are leading a “rock and roll” worship, simply substituting Christian lyrics so as to attract more attendees to what amounts to a religious concert. Most certainly, “seeker friendly” churches whose agenda is to bring in large crowds *does* bring the world into the church when they simply rewrite a few lyrics over secular rock and roll songs to provide a rather thin veneer of a Christian music. This is anathema to the Kingdom agenda that God is now bringing about in our day.

We are speaking of something very different here. We are speaking of music that originates in the very halls of heaven. The music that God is bringing will be truly Holy-Spirit inspired music, not only lyrically but rhythmically and melodically as well. It may not always follow the rules of musical scales and rhythms that are taught in conservatories. Harmonies will flow with a fluidity that comes only from the Living Spring of musical creativity. This music will be recognized by the spiritually astute as something totally “other.” It will, moreover, be highly varied, sometimes taking on a feel of southern gospel, other times a swing mode, and possibly even a rock and roll or hip hop flavor, depending on the cultural and subcultural milieu of God’s intended hearers. Still other musical creations will go beyond anything that we experience as music today in that they will be infused with the Author of Life and therefore will be imbued with the power of Glory to produce God’s spiritual life within those who have ears to hear it.

Moreover, this new music will increasingly blur the distinction between sacred and secular, as otherwise secular songwriters will find a new creativity coming alive within. They will be writing lyrics which speak forth Kingdom truths in everyday settings of work, family, love affairs gone wrong and even struggles with drugs and alcohol. Alongside these writers will be classically trained artists, perhaps even steeped in religious music, whose creative energies break free from the constraints of “sacred” musicology, boldly capturing heaven’s creative composition in song. God will move upon individuals from all walks of life to create a powerful mosaic of musical expression reflective of the varied cultural and subcultural realities that comprise God’s Kingdom people.

We believe that the defining characteristic of this music—regardless of the genre it might resemble—is that it contains life transforming power. The lyrics are not merely words, the melodies not merely a rhythmic changing of pitch, nor the harmonies but complementary pitches pleasing to the ear. This music, because of its origins in the very orchestra of heaven, is *life*, and beats the very heartbeat of God. It is a form of the spoken word that brought the very worlds into existence that resonates with the energy of Love. It is uniquely inspired for our day as part of the new wineskin that is necessary to contain the new wine that even now God is beginning to pour out on His elect saints.

We will also see the bursting forth of fresh and vibrant expressions of art, which will take the form of paintings, sculpture, stained glass, and manifold creations using light, colors and material objects. This art will be full of new spiritual language, speaking forth a bold word concerning Christ and His Kingdom being built. As with the new music, much of this freshly inspired art will resemble genres recognizable today, whether that be realism, impressionism, abstract art, pop art, primitive art or other art forms. Holy-Spirit inspiration of these expressions will be mediated through the cultural milieu of the artist and those receiving this art. It will speak of the power and reality of God and His Kingdom, and will have the power to transform the lives of those it touches. It will be vibrant and possibly even “other-worldly” in its hues and shapes. We even foresee a “synesthesia” effect, whereby sounds and shapes are translated into heavenly hues and imbued with profound meaning to those experiencing this heavenly art. This is, interestingly, one of the effects of using hallucinogenic drugs, which are not technically hallucinations at all but rather this “cross-sensory” effect of synesthesia. The synesthesia that God is bringing, however, is not some counterfeit experience induced by physically destructive drugs. It will, rather, be *life giving* and *life enhancing* in its effect!

These art forms will, as will the new music, almost certainly be rejected by orthodox Christianity. They will be accused of being “new age” or perhaps “too Eastern” and thereby relegated as unworthy or even dangerous. It is certainly true that the New Age movement as well as the LSD and other psychedelic drug subcultures have counterfeited these heavenly expressions. This does not mean

that there is not a substantive reality behind them, however. Indeed, for there to be a counterfeit, there must be the real thing! We have learned that one of Satan's strategies is to preempt any true work or creation of God with a counterfeit. The purpose of this, more often than not, is to prejudice and harden the hearts of God's people to the real thing when God brings it about. Those whom God has called out to be those first fruits of the new order that He is creating, however, are discerning between the profane and holy, and are by the Spirit of God, able to distinguish between that which is counterfeit and that which is of God.

Costly Obedience

The cost to those who faithfully follow the call of their Lord is staggering. These new wineskin people are suffering the loss of family, friends, careers, homes and lifestyles, just as Jesus promised. Most of all, they experience the most excruciating process of being dealt a death blow to the once dominant Adamic nature that had governed their life and decision making to this point. We say an excruciating process, because this old nature does not let go of its grip without a serious fight. This is not a fight between some wishy washy God who hopes against hope that we will make the right decision so as to avoid hell fire, and a seemingly all powerful Satan who is intent on putting us there. By no means. We are, however, destined to be brought through whatever fire necessary to purify and refine those of us whom He has called and chosen.

The exact nature of this cost will vary. Some are called to leave a lucrative career for the simple purpose of being set apart and isolated for God's refining purposes. Others are called to leave the security of home to live a nomadic lifestyle in search of the Land of Promise that God has prepared for them. Still others are called to leave husbands, wives and children as a result of their uncompromising obedience to that which God has called them to be and do. Indeed we, and others whom we have known, have experienced all of these costs. The endurance of these costs is not for the purpose of appeasing an angry God, nor for somehow proving ourselves worthy of the high calling to which we have been beckoned. It is, rather, for the ultimate purpose of *freeing* us from every obstacle

and distraction which would come in the way of true fellowship and union with Christ.

This is not a call to the masses, as the user-friendly churches would make. It is a call, rather to those few who know that there is more to life in Christ than the usual Sunday morning and sometimes hectic life of immersion in church activities. It is a call to those few whose only desire is to be all that He has intended them to be. Indeed, this very one-dimensional desire—placed in the heart by God Himself—is the evidence for their being one of the chosen. It is this desire which will lead us into persecution and suffering, and sustain us through it. But praise God, the desire only increases as we endure the suffering. We say, with Peter, *“Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life”* (John 6:68).

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