

## *Seduction: A Primer for Persecution?* by TA McMahon

For the last three decades, Dave Hunt and I have addressed many trends and teachings that have influenced the evangelical church, particularly in the United States. Our concern has focused primarily on unbiblical beliefs and practices that were turning Christians away from the Word of God. Twenty-five years ago, we wrote *The Seduction of Christianity*, a rather controversial book that was motivated by feedback from those who had read Dave's earlier books and had watched the film documentaries to which I had contributed in the early eighties. Some dealt specifically with religious cults (Cult Explosion, The God Makers, etc). Responses from Christians who read those books and watched the films, however, alerted us to the fact that the cult beliefs that we identified were also being taught in their churches, which were being influenced by leading Charismatic and Word/Faith teachers. Those same false teachers were also spreading cultish doctrines throughout the country on Christian television networks.

One of the principal false teachings at the time was the belief that godhood could be attained by created beings. Though that is foundational to Mormonism ("*As man is, God once was; as God is, man may become*") and Hinduism (self-realization is realizing that man is God), it had worked its way in various forms and methods into different "*Christian*" movements, teachings, and practices. Much of it was promoted by extreme Charismatics, but it was also finding its way into conservative evangelical churches through so-called Christian psychology (with its emphasis on self and self-esteem, leading to the exaltation and deification of self). Of course, the lie that man could become a god was the cornerstone of Satan's seduction of the human race (*Genesis 3:1-5*).

In his war against those who have committed their lives to the true and living God, Satan, as God's chief adversary throughout history, has majored in seduction and persecution. Although persecution would seem to be more effective in its prohibition of Christianity than seduction (and it certainly generates more fear), it is far less productive for the Adversary in achieving his objective. The saying that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church" has been demonstrated throughout church history. Martyrdom and other forms of persecution have always increased and/or strengthened the body of Christ. The same, however, cannot be said for seduction.

Believers in the United States have never experienced significant religious persecution—certainly nothing like what has taken place in China, India, or throughout countries controlled by Islam. Historically, true Christians in the West as far as Europe have suffered violence from the Caesars of Rome, the Church of Rome, and Communism, among others, but a comparable level of persecution has yet to reach the shores of North America. On the other hand, spiritual seduction has proliferated here and has shipwrecked the faith of many within Christendom.

Unlike persecution, there is not even a remote value associated with seduction; it is spiritually debilitating and deadly. Stories abound of those believers who have survived and been strengthened in their faith during the persecution they suffered in communist countries only to have their walk with the Lord devastated after they escaped to the West. They could endure persecution but they could not resist seduction.

The thesis of this article, which is that seduction will ultimately bring about persecution, is intimidating for me personally. Why? Partly because Dave and I have only rarely addressed the potential for persecution in the U.S. and partly because it's only beginning to show its nasty head here. Then why write about it now? From my observations, increasing signs point to a pending clash between the professing—and even true—Christians who will conform to the world by compromising biblical teachings and those who will remain steadfast in the faith. Nevertheless, I put little value in my observations unless I'm confident that they reflect what the Scriptures teach. Nor should anyone who reads this article.

Following are seven pertinent verses (among others that could be given) that have influenced my observations and this thesis:

*In Matthew 24:4, Jesus warns that the last days prior to His return will be a time of religious deception: "Take heed that no man deceive you." He adds (v.24) that the deception will be so great that if it were possible the very elect could be deceived. In Matthew 7:13-14, Jesus refers to the "strait gate" and "narrow way" that leads to life and announces that "few there be that find it." Luke writes (18:8) the sobering words of our Lord regarding the time of His return: "Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith upon the earth?" Since His Second Coming is for the purpose of judgment and to save Israel from annihilation, His words here seem better suited to His coming for His bride in the midst of a professing Christianity that has joined the apostasy. The Apostle Paul gives this insightful explanation as to how apostasy could manifest among those who call themselves Christians: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (2 Timothy 4:3-4).*

Sound doctrine will not be endured in the last days because many who have been fed the milk of scriptural truth have already been weaned away from it, that is, seduced, by their own lusts and by false teachers. More than that, sound doctrine will become an issue that will foster division among Christians. Paul instructed the Roman believers to identify those who teach things *"contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them"* (Romans 16:17). It's clear that believers who desire to stand firm for the teachings of God's Word will be at odds with Christians whose beliefs and lives are not conformed to the Scriptures.

Could division over doctrine result in persecution? Both history and the Word of God indicate as much. In the Book of Acts, we are told that *"there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem"* (Acts 8:1). It involved violent assaults, imprisonments, and deaths, and the issues were doctrinal--pitting those who fiercely defended the religious traditions of men against those who followed the teachings of Jesus the Messiah. Persecutions continued as Christians who stood firm in the doctrine of Christ refused to bow down to the deified Caesars or conform to the pagan rituals of Rome. They became vicious entertainment for those who packed the coliseums to see them burned and torn apart by animals. Later, a *"Christianized"* Rome persecuted those who attempted to reform Roman Catholicism. From there, doctrinal inquisitions and trials by torture proliferated against the "protestants" and other biblical non-Catholics. Today, persecution continues against believers in Islamic countries and in those places in the West where Roman Catholicism still controls the society, such as cities, villages, and even some states in Mexico and South America.

Although none of the above has manifested itself substantially in the United States, could such religious persecution take place here? Roman Catholicism has never been in a position to impose its dogmas on the American populace; Islam has only begun to control some neighborhoods here with its Sharia legalism (*"Terror's Secret Weapon: Shariah,"* Townhall, 1/20/11). But what about a scenario of Bible-believing Christians being persecuted by other Christians who will *"not endure sound doctrine"*? Is that likely? Some who have previewed this article were doubtful that *"Christians killing Christians over doctrines"* would ever take place here, a law-abiding country where, for the most part, *"doctrinal apathy"* rules among evangelicals. I tend to agree, yet if someone told me 25 years ago that evangelicals would shift from the then highly influential moral majority/Christian Right to the socialism-oriented Christian Left—I would have laughed. No one is laughing at that reality now (Q&A 1/11). Only the Lord knows how extreme the oppression will become prior to His return for His bride, but there are many forms of persecution, short of martyrdom.

In previous TBC articles, we have addressed significant trends among evangelicals that have "weaned them off the Word," seducing them into following the ways, means, and agendas of man contrary to the Scriptures (See TBC 3/04;2/05; 3/05; 2/07, 3/07, 9/07, et al.). In the midst of that process of compromise, increasing numbers

of professing and true Christians have accepted the ideals of the world, including moral, social, and religious tolerance. "Intolerance" in thought, word, or deed of that which the world believes is good for humanity identifies a person as antisocial at least and as bigoted, prejudiced, or a practitioner of hate crimes at worst. Furthermore, what if a social gospel that is based upon "good works" became widely accepted as a better form of "salvation"—one that had the potential to rally everyone together, including governments, the world's religions, liberal Christians and cults, humanists and even atheists? Everyone, that is, except biblical Christians. What might be the consequences for those who would object to such a world-supported "Christian" development because it did not conform to sound doctrine?

Sound doctrine, that is, the teachings of the Bible, is what a true Christian is to abide by as one lives his life for Christ. Sound doctrine is the absolute criterion that dictates what beliefs, practices, and programs he can accept and what he must reject. Moreover, Scripture exhorts him to be discerning and steadfast in its teachings:

*"Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness.... And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:13-14,17).*

But would God allow persecution to take place within the church? That's what Peter seems to be acknowledging: *"For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" (1 Peter 4:17).* Judgment, in the sense of correction and strengthening that results from God's allowing of persecution, as we've noted, has always been a part of Christianity. The Epistle to the Hebrews also indicates that persecution is one of the things that God has used as a spiritual pruning and purifying process for Hebrew Christians.

If you're not sure how (or why) persecution might take place within Christianity, consider these examples: When Promise Keepers enjoyed popularity among evangelical men, it became known that one of its goals was to "break down the walls" between Catholics and evangelicals. Part of that process involved turning churches against ministries that evangelized Roman Catholics. When Rick Warren's "40 Days of Purpose" began to influence hundreds of thousands of churches throughout the US, long-time members who protested on doctrinal grounds were either disfellowshipped, or threatened with disfellowship, unless they submitted to Warren's program in their own churches (see TBC 10/04 and 9/08). To question a pastor or the elders' support for introducing yoga or "Christianized yoga" in a church has been grounds for disfellowship.

Although the above examples may seem marginal to some, they and other endeavors, including church-growth marketing programs, emerging church methods and mystical practices, ecumenical overtures to Muslims and Mormons, an ecumenical global PEACE plan that involves all the world's religions, movements aimed at solving the world's ecological, poverty, and social injustice problems, etc, have driven multitudes of believers to start home churches.

What if you were to preach against the various agendas mentioned above because they were a rejection of sound doctrine? Remember the Apostle Paul's admonition? *"I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ...Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine..." (2 Timothy 4:1-4).* What would be the reaction among those within and without the church who were supportive of those agendas?

Or what if even without your preaching or protesting it simply becomes known that you are one of those biblical Christians who is intolerant toward other religions, who rejects evolution, who won't go along with psychology, who is anti-abortion, anti-genetic manipulation, and anti-euthanasia; that you view homosexuality as a sin rather than an alternative lifestyle, and that you are against gay rights and gay marriage? Furthermore,

you seem to be out of touch with the acceptable morality of the day (marriage now being statistically a minority as a practice in the US) by having a "problem" with cohabitation, and it's been said that you believe sexual abstinence should be practiced outside of marriage. You are suspicious about the alarm over "global warming." It's become known that you support Israel against the alleged right of the Palestinians to be restored to the land they believe is theirs. How will such a person be dealt with in Christendom—as well as by the world that champions everything that a believer opposes? The dark clouds of persecution appear to be gathering over the church in the US; signs indicate that the seats of the "coliseum" are beginning to fill with a widely diverse audience (see TBC 1/11) that, at least in a figurative sense, has "a taste for the blood" of those who reject their programs and teachings on the basis of sound biblical doctrine.

The seduction of Christianity has created a condition in which biblical discernment and steadfastness in the faith are the exception rather than the rule. Standing for the truth and righteousness of the Word of God while the opposition increases within and without the church can only result in some form of persecution. Paul makes that quite clear: "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12). Although that verse may distress some believers, it shouldn't. Why? Because the beginning of the verse gives a believer the key to receiving the grace to glorify God and to benefit others through persecution: living godly lives in Christ Jesus! That is a believer's only preparation and it is more than sufficient. Jesus, who is the Word made flesh, gave His disciples this astonishing word of encouragement regarding standing for His teachings:

*"Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven..." (Luke 6:22-23).*

Our prayer is that the Lord Jesus will help us to live godly lives and by His grace remain steadfast in the faith as we look for His soon coming. tbc