

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 Threat of Promise Keepers

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Promise Keepers (PK) has been a spectacular financial success. Founded in 1990 by William Paul McCartney— former Roman Catholic (and now a Vineyard cult member), football coach at the University of Colorado, and Peter Jennings' choice for ABC Person of the Week in February 1996—PK has grown from nothing but an idea to an international organization with an annual budget exceeding \$100 million. Last year its legally reported income was \$87 million (its actual income was \$97 million), up from \$66 million in 1995, \$26 million in 1994, and \$663,000 in 1993. This year its budget is projected to be \$115 million.

PK boasts a full-time staff of 452, governed by 16 directors (including Ron Blue of Atlanta, Jack Hayford of California, and Howard Hendricks of Dallas), a president (Randy Phillips), and at least 11 vice presidents. In 1996, PK hosted 22 conferences, including some just for church pastors, on whom they spent \$1.6 million in scholarships and travel expenses. In 1997, 19 major conferences and 265 regional conferences are scheduled, the largest to be held in Washington, D.C., on October 4. PK claims to support 16,000 small groups of men, maintains a website, and produces a weekly radio program heard on 200 stations. Seventy-two men attended the first PK meeting in 1990; last year 1.1 million attended.

Promise Keepers has obviously tapped into a strong desire among church-going men: the desire to be

leaders. Male leadership is something that has been almost completely absent from the effeminate American churches of the twentieth century. Strong men have been perceived as a threat, not only by ambitious women who want to lead, but also by seminary graduates who have claimed an official and un-Biblical monopoly on church leadership. Ambitious women and ambitious clergy formed an alliance early in the century to keep laymen, elders, and deacons from governing the churches. PK has tapped into the male backlash against this monstrous regiment of women.

This, of course, does not make PK a Christian organization, any more than sending out missionaries two by two makes the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints a Christian organization. It does, however, indicate that both Christian and pseudo-Christian churches have adopted a view of the church that has driven men from it, and those men are looking for a home. Many seem to have found it in PK and the small groups it has spawned.

Although there seem to be good things involved in Promise Keepers, such as strong stands against abortion and homosexuality, there are fatal doctrinal problems. PKs come from an assortment of religions. Members of "evangelical," charismatic, and mainline liberal Protestant denominations, along with Roman Catholics and Mormons, attend PK rallies. Hence, doctrinal indifference is a necessary part of the organization. Bill McCartney, himself a charismatic, has said: "Promise Keepers

doesn't care if you are Baptist. Are you born in the Spirit of God? Promise Keepers doesn't care if you're Pentecostal. Are you born in the Spirit? Now hear this! Promise Keepers doesn't care if you're a Roman Catholic. Are you born again into the Spirit of God?" How different this is than the teaching of *Amos* (3:3), who asks rhetorically: "Can two walk together unless they are [doctrinally] agreed?"

Now, is it possible for any truly Christian man to associate with false doctrine, such as is taught in Pentecostalism (the charismatic Vineyard churches are heavily involved in PK) or Roman Catholicism or Mormonism? PK seems to be a coalition of cultists who would fail to recognize, or even deny, the Gospel, were they to hear it. PK has recently added a Roman Catholic to its board.

Second, due to the lack of Biblical doctrine, as M. H. Reynolds, editor of *Foundation* magazine, commented in a leaflet he wrote on the subject: "The Promise Keepers movement is dangerous because it promotes an unscriptural agenda of forging a religious unity which is absolutely forbidden in God's Word: *2 Corinthians* 6:14-7:1; *Ephesians* 5:11. Its founder and several of its leaders are part of the charismatic movement, which is a major catalyst in the effort to bring about fellowship and eventual union with the Roman Catholic Church; whereas, in truth, the Roman Catholic Church is a false church, preaches a false gospel, and is not a part of the body of Christ."

Third, fired by the charismatic element, PK stresses emotionalism. For example, Franklin Sanders reported (*The Harbinger*, September-October, 1995) that in Folsom Stadium (Colorado) the attendees of a PK gathering rose at the conclusion of a "Christian rock" band performance to do "the wave," shouting, "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus." Then, after several speakers spoke, "evangelist Chuck Swindoll roared onto the platform astride a motorcycle to deliver a sermon on avoiding temptation." Where, one may ask, is this kind of nonsense found in the Scriptures? PK substitutes entertainment and emotionalism for Biblical teaching.

The book principally associated with this movement, *Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper*,

published in 1994 by Focus on the Family and distributed by Word Books, is edited by Al Janssen and Larry K. Weeden. It has a number of contributing authors, none of whom is noted for doctrinal soundness and some of whom may be considered heretics: Randy Phillips (the president of PK), Jack Hayford, Wellington Boone, Edwin Louis Cole, Howard Hendricks, E. Glenn Wagner, Tony Evans, Gary Oliver, Jerry Kirk, Gary Smalley, James Dobson, Dale Schlafer (chairman of the board for PK), H.B. London, Jr., Bill McCartney, Phillip Porter, Gordon England, Bill Bright, and Luis Palau. An examination of the book will reveal more errors of PK. As the title suggests, members are asked to commit themselves to seven promises:

Promise #1

1. "A Promise Keeper is committed to honoring Jesus Christ through worship, prayer and obedience to God's Word in the power of the Holy Spirit."

Properly understood, the commitment is a good one, but the statement is extremely and deliberately ambiguous. How can persons of disparate beliefs, such as Roman Catholics and Protestants, make this commitment together? How, for instance, is worship to be carried out? Incredibly, one contributor seeks to remedy this problem by saying: "Redeeming worship centers on the Lord's Table. Whether your tradition celebrates it as Communion, Eucharist, the Mass, or the Lord's Supper, we are all called to this centerpiece of Christian worship" (19). Are we to understand that it really doesn't matter whether we adhere to the Roman Catholic view of Transubstantiation, the Lutheran view of Consubstantiation, or the Biblical view of the presence of Christ at the Lord's Supper? Clearly this is what PK is advocating. And by saying that "worship centers on the Lord's Table," the writer is taking the Romanist view.

Moreover, how are we to understand obedience to the Word of God? Is the canon of Scripture closed, as taught in Biblical theology, or does God still speak to us today by means of prophecy and tongues, as averred by Pentecostals? Or is the Church the living voice of God as the Romanists

teach? One's beliefs at this point will determine what the phrase "God's Word" means.

The distortion or misuse of Scripture is noticeable in this section of the book. *Proverbs* 29:18 is wrongly used regarding the nation's (or the church's) "vision" (30), for the "vision" spoken of by Solomon has to do with Biblical revelation. Then, too, the "last days" found in *Acts* 2:17 is relegated to the final days prior to Christ's second advent (31), whereas Peter clearly says that the "last days" began in the first century subsequent to his first advent. This criticism may seem excessively scrupulous to some, but the distortion of Scripture is never a small item.

Promise #2

2. "A Promise Keeper is committed to pursuing vital relationships with a few other men, understanding that he needs brothers to help him keep his promises."

Is this true? Does a man need another man to help him keep his promises? Is there any place in Scripture where the saints are told to put their trust in men? What does Jeremiah (17:5, 7) say? "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength. . . . Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is in the Lord." Likewise, the Psalmist (60:11, 12) writes: "For vain is the hope of man, through God we will do valiantly." At this point Promise Keepers sounds more like Alcoholics Anonymous than Biblical Christianity, finding strength in the collective, rather than in God.

Along this same line, PK literature stresses the so-called fact that there is "strength in numbers." Again, this cannot be supported by Scripture. As we read in *1 Samuel* 14:6: "For nothing restrains the Lord from saving by many or by few." The example of Gideon in *Judges* 7 confirms this. Says the Psalmist: "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes" (118:8, 9). What is important to God is faithfulness to his Word, not "strength in numbers." Whatever strength there is in numbers, it is not divine strength.

Promise #3

3. "A Promise Keeper is committed to practicing spiritual, moral, ethical, and sexual purity."

How can a Christian PK practice spiritual purity while being yoked together with non-Christians such as Mormons and Catholics? PK greatly overemphasizes "accountability" to other men. For example, on page 96 we read: "No substitute exists for personal accountability with other godly men." No substitute exists? How about God? The fact is that the pursuit of holiness that the Bible speaks of has nothing to do with promises made to other men (or women for that matter), but on God and his sanctifying Word. PK is one of the latest examples of an organization trying to substitute for a properly organized church. In this regard, PK is not wholly to blame, for the churches have become thoroughly feminized, and have driven men out.

Promise #4

4. "A Promise Keeper is committed to building strong marriages and families through love, protection, and Biblical values."

We must ask: What does PK mean by Biblical values? Martin and Deidre Bobgan, in their *Promise Keepers & PsychoHeresy*, have pointed out that some of the programs of PK involve dangerous principles of worldly psychology, rather than Biblical principles. They write: "If men are to come together as men, they would do well to follow what the Bible says rather than Freudian fables, Jungian myths, and other self-serving, man-made psychologies" (29).

This form of psychoheresy, which undermines the Biblical view of "a man and his family," is evident in another book promoted by PK: *The Masculine Journey: Understanding the Six Stages of Manhood*, by psychotherapist Robert Hicks, a complimentary copy of which was handed out to attendees of at least one rally. At one point in this book, "the phallic stage" of man is addressed: "Possessing a penis places unique requirements upon men before God in how they are to worship him. We are called to worship God as phallic kinds of guys, not as some sort of androgynous, neutered non-males. . . . I believe Jesus was phallic with all the inherent phallic passions we experience as men." The

shadow of Freud looms large across this blasphemous mush. Are we to understand that this nonsense is valuable in the building of Christian families? Perhaps Sanders was correct when he called it "the re-introduction of Canaanite Ba'al worship."

Promise #5

5. "A Promise Keeper is committed to supporting the mission of his church by honoring and praying for his pastor, and by actively giving his time and resources."

This goal is worthy only if we have a correct definition of the "church." A church must be a Biblically based church and the pastor a Biblically based pastor. In *2 John* we are warned against receiving any doctrine that is not based on the truth of Scripture. As aptly stated by the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (25:5): "The purest churches under Heaven are subject both to mixture and error, and some have so degenerated as to become no more churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan." In our day, false and heretical churches with anti-Christian pastors are legion: Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, neo-orthodoxy, neo-evangelicalism, Charismania, and Arminianism, not to mention cults like Mormonism. These are "no churches of Christ." To support them is sinful; it is to prop up a "synagogue of Satan."

Promise #6

6. "A Promise Keeper is committed to reaching beyond any racial and denominational barriers to demonstrate the power of Biblical unity."

Biblical Christianity does not recognize one race as superior to another. Racial barriers should not be barriers to Biblical unity. But denominational barriers serve to keep unbelievers out. The reason that there are different denominations is that there are different beliefs: some more and some less important to be sure, but nevertheless, barriers properly exist in doctrinal matters. There can be no godly unity where doctrine deviates from Scripture. Any schism that exists is to be blamed on those who deviate from the truth, not on those who defend it.

Promise #7

7. "A Promise Keeper is committed to influencing his world, being obedient to the Great Commandment (see *Mark 12:30-31*) and the Great Commission (see *Matthew 28:19-20*)."

In *Mark 12:30, 31* Jesus gives us what is sometimes called the Great Commandment: loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and loving your neighbor as yourself. What does it mean to love God and neighbor? According to Scripture, love is expressed by acting in obedience to the commandments of God: "Love is the fulfillment of the law" (*Romans 13:10*). To treat one's neighbor biblically is to love him. But in a movement of doctrinal indifference, how are we to define the "Biblical treatment" of our neighbor? In fact, the PK's stress on religious unity would seem to undermine the Biblical necessity of loving one's brother by disassociating with him when he is in sin (see *1 Corinthians 5* and *2 Thessalonians 3*).

As for the Great Commission, it is not possible for the PK to obey the words of Christ: "teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you." Why? Because PK is indifferent to the things that Christ commanded. Are we to teach, for instance, as PK does, that God loves all men so that he sent Christ to die for all men (186)? Certainly not! A PK might reply, "Well, we will teach those things on which we do agree." But that is not what Christ commanded; he specifically said that we are to teach disciples to observe *all things* that he commanded. Further, if disciples are to *observe* all things that Christ commanded, what will we do with the antinomian element in the church, which does not want to teach the brethren to observe the law of God?

There are a number of warnings given in Scripture regarding false teachings: John writes that we are to "test the spirits [to see] whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (*1 John 4:1*); Paul enjoins us to "test all things [and] hold fast what is good" (*1 Thessalonians 5:21*). It was the Bereans who "were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all readiness, and

searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (*Acts 17:11*).

On the surface, PK might appear to be a real movement of God. But when it is investigated in light of Scripture it is seen to be nothing more than a dangerous movement of deluded men. Of course, there are always those who insist that we should seek to emphasize the good in movements such as this. But as Reynolds correctly wrote: "Such an argument sounds reasonable until you consider the very serious doctrinal errors involved. When a deadly poison is discovered in a popular medicine, no one insists on emphasizing the good ingredients; everyone insists on identifying and warning about the poison."

Portions of this article first appeared in the September-October 1995 edition of The Harbinger. Dr. Crampton is a free-lance writer living in Montpelier, Virginia.