

"Truth without Love is too hard; Love without Truth is too soft"

Living Faith Church

Through

the

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03/03

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Confusing Times

George Barna, founder and President of Barna Research Group, a respected Christian polling organization, recently lit a controversial firestorm when he announced that his research showed that the Body of Christ was nearly insignificant to molding American life and values.

...the early returns from a year of research show the leading influencers in American society to be movies, television, the Internet, books, music, public policy and law, and family. The Christian church, his research shows, is not among the top dozen influences these days - a far cry from the way things used to be. (The Barna Update, September 17, 2002)

There is some reason to believe that Barna may be onto something. His polling results are alarming. Born again Christians (definition at the end of this article) often seem to have little grasp on the moral teachings of the Bible. For example:

- 36% of born again adults say cohabitation (living together though unmarried) is morally acceptable.
- 12% said having an affair (between unmarried adults) is acceptable. (But only 4% if at least one of the participants is married.)
- 23% say abortion should be legal in almost all circumstances.
- 63% said they had claimed to tithe when they had not done so.
- 34% say homosexuality should be legal.
- Only 32% of those who were born again said they believe in moral absolutes, while a mere 9% of born again teens believe in moral absolutes.

Barna hasn't given up on the church, but he suggests that church leaders must think in new ways to prevent the church from becoming irrelevant. His biggest complaint is that Christian leaders are frequently not leaders but followers who are attempting to "grow the church" by emulating large, successful, "user-friendly" churches.

"You go talk to pastors, and hear them talk about all the programs and all the numbers and the money and all the buildings," Barna says.

It's ironic that Barna has come to this pass. He seems to be saying that church leaders need to stop thinking about "how to grow the church" and concentrate on moving according to their individual prophetic calling, accountable to God not for numbers and income, but for accurately pursuing the vision God has given them.

(continued on back page)

Jim's Speaking Schedule

• **(Most) Every Wednesday Night**—Meridian Assembly of God, Meridian, Idaho
7:00 p.m. 1830 N. Linder Rd., Meridian Idaho, 208-888-0063

• **March 14—16, Worland, Wyoming**
Friday—Saturday, Youth Meetings, First Baptist Church Contact: 307-347-4442

Sunday Morning, First Baptist Church,
Sunday Evening, Zion Lutheran Church

• **March 20—22, Spokane, WA**
Spokane Christian Workers Conference
Spokane Convention Center, 509-487-0149 conference web site: <http://www.christianworkers.org>.

—Thursday, March 20, 4:15 p.m. "Why Mormonism is Not Christian, and Why it's OK to Say That."

—Friday, March 21, 1:30-3:35 p.m. "Defending Your Faith" Super session #1 and 2; Panel Discussion, Ed Decker, Dr. Stan Fleming, Eric Barger, Jim Spencer

—Saturday, March 22, 2:10 p.m. "From Enlightenment to Chaos: An Overview of secular humanism in history from the Middle Ages to Today"

• **Sunday May 4, Richland, Washington,**
Richland Assembly of God, 1110 Stevens Drive, 509-943-2636

• **May 18—21, Juneau, Sitka, Ketchikan, Alaska**
• **Sunday, May 18, Juneau**

Evening Service, Valley Chapel, 9741 Mendenhall Loop Rd., 907-789-3513

• **Monday, May 19, Sitka,** Evening Service, Sitka Christian Center, 502 Hirst St., 907-747-6771

• **Wednesday, May 21, Ketchikan**
Evening Service, Clover Pass Community Church, 105 N. Point Higgins Road, 907-247-2360

• **Sunday, June 8-13, Ketchikan, Alaska,**
Clover Pass Community Church, 105 N. Point Higgins Road, 907-247-2360

—Sunday a.m. & p.m. services

—Tuesday-Friday, Joshua School, a.m. & p.m. services.

POLYGAMY'S BLOOD

A Novel by James R. Spencer

Polygamy's Blood is a novel I began three years ago. For more than a year I have been trying to get it published. It is set in the Northern Wyoming of my youth. Although it is fiction, it could be about real people because all of the events described in it have happened at one time or another. My agent calls the book "edgy." She also says it is a "bloody book," but she believes it has an important message.

I believe it will be difficult to place this book with a Christian publisher because the content is so challenging. But the body of Christ needs to know that polygamy is still alive in the Western United States. Estimates range as high as 100,000 practitioners, most all of them members of Mormon fundamentalist sects.

Polygamy has been one of the top news stories in Utah for the past several years, with high-profile convictions for bigamy, incest, child rape, and (other) unlawful sexual behavior.

My novel pits the protagonist against a local polygamous cult leader, a "prophet" with more than a dozen wives who believes he is the man Mormon founder Joseph Smith prophesied would restore order to the Mormon Church after it abandoned the practice of polygamy.

The prophet practices the Mormon "law" of Blood Atonement, a murderous practice that Brigham Young and Joseph Smith invoked to keep their followers in bondage.

The protagonist, a retired Associated Press bureau chief, writes a freelance article about the polygamous cult for the *New York Times*. Shortly thereafter, his wife is killed by the cult. The story centers in the writer's attempt to bring the prophet to justice. Along the way, the history of Mormon polygamy is described

and the practice of Blood Atonement is explained (and demonstrated).

I hope you will pray that this project finds a strong publisher to carry this factual information disguised as fiction to the public. It could just be the most important project of my ministry.

Polygamy is raising its head on another front. There is now a so-called "Christian Polygamy," that is gathering thousands of adherents throughout the United States. Those who promote this new perversion are adamant that their theology is biblically sound. They defiantly challenge any and all to come forward to debate their position.

I have decided to do that. I recently received a telephone call from a pastor in Oregon who had been referred to me to help him deal with some women who were escaping from one of these new polygamous cults. I didn't have ready answers for him. So I am now gathering them and preparing a response.

Pray for me as I take on this challenge. Christian apologetics is needed more now than ever. More than ever before we need ministries like this one to respond to the errors of the cults, secularism, and the New Age Movement. The Bible warns us that error will increase in the last days.

For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if [it were] possible, they shall deceive the very elect. (Matt.24:24)

The rise of complexity and sophistry threaten the simple message of the gospel of Christ. Sophistication is the world's brand of wisdom, which is no wisdom at all.

Now this is our boast: Our con-

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**Heber LeBaron:
Doing Four Life Sentences**

"[Your novel] hit a little too close to home. But like they say, 'The truth hurts'.... You definitely got a feel for the Madness Mormonism turns into very quickly. All you need is a nut trying to live out the old ways."

—Heber LeBaron is serving four life sentences in federal prison for his part in a dozen (Mormon) cult murders.

This is as good as anything John Grisham has written."

—Ed Decker: founder of Saints Alive in Jesus, Author, *The God Makers*.

science testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God's grace. (2Cor. 1:12 NIV) ■

An Internet Favorite

1830 Book of Mormon Comparison Machine

<p>18 And he said unto me, Behold, the virgin <u>which thou seest, is the mother of God</u>, after the manner of the flesh.</p> <p>19 And it came to pass that I beheld that she was carried away in the spirit; and after that she had been carried away in the spirit for the space of time, the angel spake unto me, saying, look!</p> <p>20 And I looked and beheld the virgin again, bearing a child in her arms.</p> <p>21 And the angel said unto me, behold the Lamb of God, yea, <u>even the Eternal Father!</u> Knowest</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; font-size: 1.2em;">1830 Text</p>		<p>18 And he said unto me: Behold, the virgin <u>whom thou seest is the mother of the Son of God</u>, after the manner of the flesh.</p> <p>19 And it came to pass that I beheld that she was carried away in the Spirit; and after she had been carried away in the Spirit for the space of a time the angel spake unto me, saying: Look!</p> <p>20 And I looked and beheld the virgin again, bearing a child in her arms.</p> <p>21 And the angel said unto me: Behold the Lamb of God, yea, <u>even the Son of the Eternal Father!</u> Knowest thou the meaning of the tree which thy</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; font-size: 1.2em;">Modern Text</p>	
<p>Title Page Testimonies of the Three Witnesses</p>	<p>Significant Title Page <u>I Nephi 11:18</u> <u>I Nephi 11:21</u></p>	<p>Changes Title Page <u>I Nephi 11:18</u> <u>I Nephi 11:21</u></p>	<p>Title Page Testimony of the Three Witnesses</p>

Visitors to my web site praise my "Book of Mormon Comparison Machine. They appreciate the ability to look at the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon side by side with the modern version. Two dozen of the most significant changes can be accessed with a click of the mouse. In addition, I have inserted notes where appropriate. The entire text of the 1830 version and the entire text of the modern version can be read side by side. I continue to marvel that the Internet allows thou-

sands of people anonymous access to this material. In conjunction with

son machine as a result of the Google advertising. Hundreds have written me requesting free literature. I have had some amazing email exchanges with these seekers.

All of my books (except my new novel Polygamy's Blood) are now online, where they can be downloaded without charge.

this effort, we now have a prominent ad displayed on the popular search engine Google. Every time someone searches for words like "Mormonism, Mormon, or Mormon Church, they geat an ad for my website.

Thousands of people have visited the 1830 Book of Mormon Compari-

Hoever, all of this is very costly. We spend as much as \$1,000.00 a month for the advertising and give away at least that much more in free material.

Please bear that in mind as you pray God's continued blessing on this ministry. ■

Is this your last newsletter? We must hear from you once a year in order for you to continue to receive it. (No donation is necessary.)

Confusing Times. . . .

This is ironic, I say, because Barna has been an advocate of “marketing the Church.” He even wrote a book by that title. A sizeable movement within the church endorses the idea that the message of God should be contextualized within the expectations of the local community. Up to a point, I agree. Ministers *do* need to be aware of the culture within which they operate. And, of course, they need to speak the language of their parishioners.

However, if they shape and frame their message with an ear cocked too closely to the desires of their flocks, they begin to fray their prophetic mantle. A creeping “accommodation” can arise when every question is “What are my people looking for?” rather than, “What does God want to say to His people who will hear me preach this Sunday.”

The gospel is a slap in the face

The gospel is in its nature confrontive. We dare not take the edge off the confrontation because that is accommodation by default.

Nobody knows that more than I do. I pastored for nine years in the heart of Mormondom, I was part of establishing ten churches there. The pressure then, and the pressure now, is to “make friends with” Mormonism. Note that I did *not* say we should not make friends with *Mormons*. Over and over I was counseled to adopt a less confrontive stance regarding the teachings of Mormonism. The payoff, I was told, was that Mormons would then be much more receptive to what I had to say.

There are two serious problems with that philosophy. First it simply does not promote a listening environment, but simply leaves Latter-day Saints “at ease” in their Mormonism. Confrontation (loving, but firm) arrests people. It gets their attention. It causes their hackles to go up. But, of course, that makes it uncomfortable.

Early in my ministry I began questioning those who urged me to soften the message. I asked them, “How many Latter-day Saints have you led to the Lord?” Invariably the answer is “none” or at least not many.

Ed Decker, the founder of Saints Alive in Jesus, repeatedly tells his audiences that “Jim Spencer has personally led more Mormons to Jesus Christ than anyone I have ever heard of.” It is true that I have been present when lots of Mormons came to Christ.

Confrontation is not about being *rude*. Since the gospel is offensive (Rom. 9:33; 1Pet. 2:8) to the sinner, we don’t need to be.

There is lots of Bible precedent for confrontive witnessing. The life of the Apostle Paul demonstrates it clearly. He confronted the sophisticated philosophers on Mars Hill in Athens. His opening line to them was, “. . . I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious..” (Acts 17:22) Likewise, he confronted the Jews in their synagogues and invariably got into serious trouble. And in Ephesus he burned the witchcraft books in the streets, upset the followers of the goddess Diana, and caused an uproar. Paul’s efforts often landed him in jail or got him beaten, whipped, and once, left for dead.

Confrontation does not necessarily have to be tempestuous, but it *is* an integral part of evangelism. Evangelism is a declaration of the Good News. But a declaration of good news—pardon from sins—must follow a declaration of the *existence* of sins. A gospel without confrontation is powerless.

As G. K. Chesterton, the British thinker and theologian, said:

There is notion abroad that to win a man we must agree with him. Actually, the opposite is true. Each generation has had to be converted by the man who contradicted it most. The man who is going in a wrong direction will never be set right by the affable religionist who falls into step beside him and goes the same way. Someone must place himself across the path and insist that the straying man turn around and go in the right direction.

The second problem with *de facto* accommodation is that it sets a nasty precedent. If we attempt to make the church “nonthreatening” and “user friendly,” when do we finally spring the trap? When do we finally announce the bad news that mankind is hopelessly trapped in sin?

We say that people coming to our churches are “pre-Christian” or ignorant of the Christian message. We are afraid of scaring them off. We want to accommodate them. We will “hook” them with love and then eventually we will preach the gospel to them. This is not only backwards from the biblical precedent, but it begs the question, “When will they hear the *full* gospel message?”

We think that “seekers” will come to church, hear the music, experience the pres-

ence of God, and fall in love with us. Then, *later*, we will confront them. But by now we have created an atmosphere where confrontation has been “defined out.” It doesn’t fit with our overall mission statement. Only love, acceptance, and forgiveness happens in our church.

Maybe all this works. In spite of the New Testament example, maybe this process actually creates born again Christians. But even if it does, what are the implications? Barna asserts that Christians demonstrate the same absence of commitment to moral values that the world does. He says born again Christians fail at marriage as often as nonChristians.

Could those sad statistics reflect the fact that too many of our leaders are failing to preach the confrontive gospel message while pursuing positive, loving, affirming, relational, warm Sunday services?

I may be wrong. All I know is that the church I was attracted to thirty years ago was old fashioned and unsophisticated. We had no research mentality, no marketing programs, no church-growth philosophy.

It was the directness that attracted me. I was routinely beat up by the Holy Ghost in the Sunday sermons. Nevertheless, as I saw my reprobate nature illuminated by the Holy Spirit, I also saw the loving, gracious hand of God extended toward me.

Things were simpler then. Less sophisticated. When I pastored, I thought it was by the foolishness, not the sophistication, of my preaching that got results. The pastors I knew never asked what the people wanted to hear, they asked what God wanted to say. And it was often brutally frank.

I wonder if adultery, cohabitation, abortion, and lying were preached on more if the results of the Barna poll would be different?

Maybe not. But it doesn’t hurt to ask the question.

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

“Barna defines ~~born-again Christians~~” as people who said they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life today and who also indicated they believe that when they die they will go to Heaven because they had confessed their sins and had accepted Jesus Christ as their savior. (II Tim. 4:3)