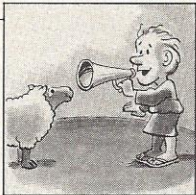


CHARISMATIC FADS



Both American culture and American Christianity, according to George Cowan, operate on fad. Cowan, who is president emeritus of Wycliffe Bible Translators, was making reference to

what he called the "self-fulfillment" fad, saying it dangerously approaches heresy in some of its applications.

Duff Deitrich, a Congregational pastor from Rye, New Hampshire, related the same "fad principle" to the charismatic application of spiritual gifts. "It's easy," Deitrich has discovered, "to use this as an excuse to escape responsibility."

Ask Charlie Charismatic to do something and if he says, "It's not my gift," well, hands off. We stand back and marvel at his holy perception and his willingness to operate inside his gifted area. Maybe.

Could it be there are times when it pleases God for us to force ourselves to do something we don't want to do—maybe something we aren't even "gifted" to do?

Heresies do not develop out of thin air. Rather they are truths that become distorted, twisted. Often a heresy begins with an overemphasis on some point of doctrine to the exclusion of other points of doctrine. This creates an imbalance.

Those of us who have survived the "charismania" of the charismatic movement do not have to look far to see evidence of these fads which have swept through modern day Christendom.

What about the faddish emphasis on deliverance from demons?

Then there was the everyone-should-relate-to-someone fad which grew out of the discipleship movement.

The entire Pentecostal movement has struggled with the everyone-has-to-speak-in-tongues emphasis.

The faith/prosperity movement gave us the impression real Christians should be rich—a western culture fad, to say the least.

The think-big-and-grow-bigger concept, was the basic emphasis of the church-growth fad.

Recently we've been hearing about the Kingdom Now emphasis, the Christian Zionist emphasis, not to mention the occasional "rapture" hiccup.

All of these movements have their roots in biblical truth. Yet all verge on heresy if their emphasis or perceived exclusivity is not balanced with the application of the full gospel.

For instance: emphasizing the truth of Hebrews 11:1-31 is heresy unless it is coupled with and balanced by the truth of Hebrews 11:32-40.

Requiring *all* to speak in tongues, emphasizing Acts 2:4, can become heresy unless it is coupled with and

balanced by 1 Corinthians 12:4-11,30—which indicates that while all receive gifts, not all necessarily have the gift of tongues.

Our love of Israel must never overshadow God's equal love for the Arab people.

While the Bible does teach in many passages that we should relate to each other and be under spiritual authority, the apostle Paul is a prime example of a man who sometimes went against spiritual authority because he alone knew God's direction for his personal life.

And while church growth is, indeed, desirable, bigness must never be equated with God's favor. Three hundred dedicated men, Gideon discovered, were far more effective than a 30,000-seat auditorium filled with amen-shouting charismatics who come out on Sunday but can't be counted on in a time of crisis.

The word "fad" is an acronym meaning "for-a-day." While all these modern emphases are meaningful, they are merely faddish if not balanced by a historical understanding of God, as well as a willingness to add and delete as the Holy Spirit instructs today.

Deitrich says when his parents went to the mission field in 1955, commitment to Christ took precedence over all other commitments. If necessary, missionaries sacrificed family on the altar for the sake of following God overseas. Family priorities, as everywhere defined and propagated today, were non-existent. Dobson, Gothard, Peterson, Hendricks, Christenson—these names and their strong teachings on family were yet to be heard. Back in the 50s—and before—many felt it was right to sacrifice family for the faith.

In recent years there has been a glut of Christian books telling us how important family is, and how to make the family even more important. To do otherwise is now considered heresy. None of us seems to be able to live up to the standards set by the authors. Yet we continue to buy more books, read them and feel lousy.

Is there a time when you put God above family? C.T. Studd did it when he left his wife and small child to evangelize Africa. In 1793 William Carey took his wife with him to India. He was the first Protestant foreign missionary since the apostle Paul. Every pastor in England told him he was out of God's will. His wife later went insane and died—but the result was the modern foreign-mission movement. Wrong? If God tells a man to do something and he responds, and his work bears fruit, is that wrong?

Who can say?

Are we afraid to look at this? Are we afraid to realize there are probably exceptions to every interpretation we have of God's Word? ►

► Every doctrine, every biblical interpretation, every creed needs to be constantly re-examined, as objectively as our subjective minds will allow, in order to hear what God is saying today. Then, when we do hear, let us be bold enough to say: "Yesterday I believed this way. Today God has given me more illumination on His revelation."

The fullness of the gospel can never be written on paper—or chiseled in stone. It is a living gospel intended to be written on the hearts of men. Christian leaders should beware lest we become legalists who, bound to our theologies, are forced to write talmuds, or interpretations of the logos, which we then use as addenda to the Bible.

This new, imbalanced fad—that family is more important than anything—grew out of another imbalance. The original imbalance was the selfish and often egotistic neglect of wife and children by a "man of God" who proclaimed it was more pious to do God's work than to take care of the family God had given him.

Over the last few years, several popular American evangelists have divorced their wives, claiming these poor women were holding them back from accomplishing the things God had called them to do. At least two re-married much younger (and far more worldly attractive) women who were "better equipped" to help them fulfill their call. Thus out of this heresy that nothing—including wife, husband, children, mother, father—is as important as ministry, grows another heresy: namely, that family is more important than anything.

So the crazy pendulum swings in its seemingly out-of-control arc, causing many of us to want to sit back on a tree limb and sigh with Puck, "Lord, what fools these mortals be!"

Fred Price says he is worth a million dollars and intends to draw that much salary from his church someday. Mother Theresa, who works with the poor and dying in Calcutta, draws no salary at all. Is there no center to the pendulum swing so we may tick on God's time schedule? Must we ever be at the mercy of some strong teacher who overwhelms us with his (or her) call from God as though it were eternity's truth?

The balance to laying family on the altar is Paul's reminder that the man who neglects his family is worse than an infidel.

Balance? Is that the way to escape the deception of fads? Yet balance itself may be the greatest of all heresies if it prohibits us from ever doing the unpopular, the bold, the radical thing which God may be calling us all to do.

Good point. Was St. Francis balanced? What about Martin Luther? Consider Kathryn Kuhlman. What's balanced about Oral Roberts? What about James Robison?

Most missionaries are really lopsided. When you look around it seems balanced people seldom get much done. On the other hand, without them the hyper-activists would lead the rest of us into all kinds of wild heresy.

As much as some deplore his methods and his spirit, a laxative like Dave Hunt, who writes books and accuses people of heresy, is good for the body of Christ. He keeps us from becoming theologically constipated because of our steady diet of fads.

The only safety for the true man or woman of God is to be grounded in the Scriptures—but also to have the ability to hear the Holy Spirit as He interprets that Word situation by situation. Yet, even that interpretation often comes through the mouths of men and women who speak from their own perspectives, flavoring all that is said with their own imbalance.

God, it seems, has created us to need one another. The wise man realizes this and does not react when his theology or life-style is questioned by another. Instead he welcomes the opportunity to examine—and perhaps change. Through "speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ" (Eph. 4:15, NIV).

Perhaps we may one day realize that how we handle ourselves and how we treat each other along the way may be far more important than whether we reach our destination. Indeed, the journey itself may be the destination. **M**

Jamie Buckingham
Editor-in-Chief