

Protestant Reformation

How Does Rick Warren Deconstruct the Reformation?

By Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Part seven of a series. Read [part six](#).

Purpose-Driven Church movement leader Rick Warren has been anointed Billy Graham's successor as "America's pastor" by the secular media. He takes fellow Southern Baptist Graham's ecumenism a step further by calling for a "new Reformation" that would obliterate the old.

Warren's constant theme is to criticize those who seek to hold to sound doctrine, saying that they are letting theology stand in the way of the greater good of "a new Reformation." Warren's "new Reformation" would bring mainline liberal churches, Evangelicals, and Roman Catholics together to spread a "gospel" of worldwide social and economic reform.

The Purpose-Driven Life

In his book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, Warren cites Roman Catholic notables as great Christian examples of his kind of "purpose". Among them are:

Mother Teresa, who believed that the work she was doing in India placed her "on the cross with Christ" to earn merit that would gain her eternal life;

Henri Nouwen, a Dutch homosexual Roman Catholic priest who wrote over forty books on "spirituality";

Friar John Main, who invented a system of "Christian meditation" based on Eastern religions that utilizes endlessly-repeated "prayer mantras";

St. John of the Cross, who was named one of only thirty-three "doctors of the church" by the Vatican because of his massive contributions to the development of Roman Catholic theology; and

Madame Guyon, who adhered to an extreme form of Catholic mysticism in which a person seeks to merge personalities with God, a teaching that has its close counterpart in New Age philosophy.

Warren gives his undiscerning readers no warning that these venerated Catholics, and the others he names and quotes, held to a system of doctrine that is diametrically opposed to Scripture. Warren doesn't seem to care, as long as he can cite such people to make his un-Biblical case for a "new Reformation."

Evangelicals + Catholics = A Majority

At a *Pew Forum on Religion, Politics, and Public Life* in 2005, Rick Warren gave his view of the Protestant Reformation, and the need for a "second Reformation" to be led by the Purpose-Driven church movement. He thinks the Protestant Reformation was a mistake because it was based on differences in doctrine. He views churches and churchmen of all stripes, regardless of their beliefs, as "Christian". And, he believes that a "second Reformation" will bring them all back together under a single, Purpose-Driven, big tent. He said that if Evangelicals teamed up with Roman Catholics, "that's called a majority." He explained:

You know, 500 years ago, the first Reformation with Luther and then Calvin, was about beliefs. I think a new reformation is going to be about behavior. The first Reformation was about creeds; I think this one will be about deeds. I think the first one was about what the church believes; I think this one will be about what the church does.

The first Reformation actually split Christianity into dozens and then hundreds of different segments. I think this one is actually going to bring them together. Now, you're never going to get Christians, of all their stripes and varieties, to agree on all of the different doctrinal disputes and things like that, but what I am seeing them agree on are the purposes of the church. And I find great uniformity in the fact that I see this happening all the time. Last week I spoke to 4,000 pastors at my church who came from over 100 denominations in over 50 countries. Now, that's wide spread. We had Catholic priests, we had Pentecostal ministers, we had Lutheran bishops, we had Anglican bishops, we had Baptist preachers. They're all there together and you know what? I'd never get them to agree on communion or baptism or a bunch of stuff like that, but I could get them to agree on what the church should be doing in the world.

And the way I expressed it is that the Bible calls the church the body of Christ, and what's happened in the last 100 years is that the hands and the feet have been amputated and the church has just been a mouth, and primarily it's been known for what it's against. It's been known for what it's against. And I am working toward a second Reformation of the church....

...it's what Augustine said: 'In the essentials, unity; in the non-essentials, liberty; and in all things, charity.' And I think that's how evangelicals and Catholics can get together....

A fundamentalist basically would look at many others in Christianity and say, 'You're not even a Christian.' They'd say it about Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Catholics. You know — even Evangelicals. It's interesting — maybe 15-20 years ago, Jerry Falwell stopped calling himself a fundamentalist, and actually left the fundamentalist fellowship, and he went and joined the

Southern Baptist Convention — which is as wide — I mean you can find anything in that."¹

"We're On the Same Team"

Also in 2005, Warren addressed a conference of the Anglican Communion Network. A news report of the event said that Warren

urged the churches to join a "new reformation" to spread the Christian faith and use the resources of "the universal, worldwide church of Jesus Christ in all of its local expressions"...

"It really doesn't matter what your label is. If you love Jesus, we're on the same team," he said.

He said that God uses many churches and traditions to meet broad and varied spiritual needs.

"Now I don't agree with everything in everybody's denomination, including my own. I don't agree with everything that Catholics do or Pentecostals do, but what binds us together is so much stronger than what divides us," he said.

"I really do feel that these people are brothers and sisters in God's family. I am looking to build bridges with the Orthodox Church, looking to build bridges with the Catholic Church, with the Anglican church, and say 'What can we do together that we have been unable to do by ourselves?'"²

No Grasp of Biblical Truth

Warren deliberately masks the critical theological differences between true Bible-believing Christians and Roman Catholics in order to promote his Purpose-Driven agenda. Warren seeks to build a better world in the here and now by promoting what

is in fact a re-hash of the old "social gospel", and suppressing the truth of the one true Gospel that will save souls for eternity.

The extent to which Warren is willing to smooth over these vital differences — on the authority of Scripture, the content of the Gospel, the purpose of the true Church, and so much more — clearly demonstrates that he has no grasp of God's truth himself. He may use a lot of the Evangelical jargon, but both John and Paul warned believers about such persons and commanded them to have nothing to do with them:

Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds. (2 John 9-11)

Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple. For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple [in the original, *akeraios*, "unmixed"] concerning evil. (Romans 16:17-19)

Rick Warren poses as a uniter, but in fact he is a divider. He may be able to unite unbelievers in an ungodly ecumenical cause, but he divides Evangelicals who follow him from the one true Gospel. He divides them from all of the fundamental doctrines that were reclaimed at the time of the Reformation, after having been shrouded in the darkness of Catholicism for centuries.

He makes a pretense of being inoffensive, but his position could not be any more offensive to Christ and to His true church. Unlike Rick Warren and the apostles of the Purpose-Driven Church movement, the Apostle Paul did not fear to proclaim the one true Gospel, even if it offended some. His motivation, above all, was to please his Lord, not men:

But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ. But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ. (Galatians 1:8-12)

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References:

1. "Myths of the Modern Megachurch," a transcript of Rick Warren's remarks to the Pew Forum's Faith Angle Conference on Religion, Politics, and Public Life, May 23, 2005, Key West, Florida, as viewed on 10/6/2008 at <http://pewforum.org/events/index.php?EventID=80>.
2. "Pastor Urges Anglicans to Unite and Care for Poor," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, November 12, 2005.

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