

The Promotion of DIGRESSION

By AL DIESTELKAMP

A widely-circulated e-mail contains an article by Leroy Garrett titled, "We Must Talk About Instrumental Music." His purpose is to embolden people who have no conviction against instrumental music in worship to bring the subject up in local congregations. He's confident that, if discussed, the conclusion will be that "We have been wrong about instrumental music."

He claims that "among our more 'progressive' preachers there is not one who believes that the use of instrumental music in worship is sin." Those he calls "progressive" preachers, I would call "digressive," and about them he may be right. He goes on to say, "There are no more sermons about the evils of instrumental music in worship." Though he overstates the case, I have to agree that there is much less emphasis on the subject.

Brother Garrett (erring brother, that is) cited an example of a congregation which dared to "talk about" the subject. The local preacher, who had no conviction against instrumental music, addressed the congregation on the subject "giving both sides." What motivated them to bring in the instruments was to keep their young people. Of course, the result was phenomenal! They not only kept most of their young people, but also saw their numbers swell.

The reason they "kept" their young people is because they had been feeding them a diet of spiritual pabulum all their lives. These young people hadn't been taught how to establish scriptural authority. I doubt they were even told they *need* scriptural authority! Had they been taught from childhood that the New Testament is our only source of authority, they wouldn't have been so easily swayed by the appeal to their carnal desires.

Not all young people have been misdirected by digressive preachers. Those having faithful parents are taught—first at home, and also at worship—that, "whatever you do in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col. 3:17).

On the surface, Leroy Garrett's appeal to "talk about it" may sound reasonable, but make no mistake about it: He wants *no talk* about authority—and no study—just "talk" about accepting instruments in worship.

Let's accept the challenge to "talk about it." We can start by teaching—young and old—"to observe all things" the Lord has commanded (Matt. 28:20). This attitude will prepare us to search out all commands, examples and necessary implications regarding music in worship and thereby know what will please the Lord—not ourselves.

THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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Running the Church Like Business



By AL DIESTELKAMP

The apostle Paul wrote that "not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called" (1 Cor. 1:26). He did not say that *not any* from these classes of people would be saved. Fortunately, for them, and for the church, some of these kinds of people humbly submit to the Lord and thus become Christians.

As our cultural environment has become more educated and prosperous the makeup of the church has followed suit. These changes have brought with them both improvements and some problems. Fortunately, at least in my experience, there does not seem to be much problem with discrimination or class envy among most brethren today.

However, one of the disturbing trends that has been a "side-effect" of our socioeconomic rise is a desire to try to "run the church" like a business. In this article, when I speak of the church, I am referring to a local congregation.

Successful businessmen who are Christians are a welcome benefit to a congregation. Their expertise can be invaluable to the church if they keep in mind that the church is not a business. For that reason not all decisions should be made using the same criteria as are appropriate in the business world.

This is especially true in matters regarding the relationship between the congregation and a preacher. Some are inclined to treat the preacher like an employee instead of a brother. Instead of merely agreeing to support a man to preach and teach the gospel, they "hire" a man and then attempt to micro-manage him and his family. If he, or his family, do not meet their expectations they

"ask him to leave." Don't mistake what I am saying. I am not referring to men who are not living right. Certainly they should not continue to be supported or allowed to teach what they will not live. Rather, I refer to his style and technique—and even his personality.

It appears to me that the apostle Paul was a man with a personality unlike most others. I get the impression that he was quite different in his approach to the work than that of some of his fellow-workers. Clearly, Paul and Barnabas had differing styles and personalities. Yet both were very useful in the kingdom.

I doubt that the apostle Paul would have had much patience with the brethren in Berea had they complained after he left there that Silas and Timothy, who remained, were not "like Paul" in either his methods or his personality.

In the business world, workers are often sought for positions that require a certain persona. The temptation might be for elders or (God forbid) business meetings to develop a profile that their preacher must fit. Oddly enough, the profile often includes qualities, traits and abilities absent in their own lives. Yet their preacher (and his family) must have them or be prepared to pack up and move.

A disclaimer is in order here. Let it be known that though I preach in a congregation where there are businessmen, including an elder whose profession is management training, this article and the concerns mentioned were not prompted from my current experience.

My appeal is for brethren to recognize the fact that the church is more like a family than a business, and decisions should be made from that kind of perspective.

Looking for God . . . In the Right Place

By RICK LIGGIN

On November 29th, George Harrison, former lead guitarist for the Beatles, passed from this life after a difficult struggle with cancer. The next day, as this news broke on the *Today Show*, there were several interesting interviews and reports concerning the deceased rock star, many of which mentioned Harrison's deep interest in spirituality and in a search for God. Anne Curry reported that Harrison felt many things in life could wait, "but the search for God cannot wait"—an admirable perspective, indeed!

How sad though, that Harrison looked for God in all the wrong places. His search for God led him to reject his childhood Catholicism and to explore the mystic religions of India, where he became an avid student of a Hindu religious leader named Maharishi Mahesh Yogi.

As I listened to several of the interviews that morning on the news, I began to be bothered by how positively everyone spoke of Harrison's spirituality. Everybody, including the liberal news media—at least for that day—was speaking in glowing terms of praise for Harrison's "deep spirituality." Here was a person who zealously followed after gurus and spiritualists who give no credible evidence for the validity of their spiritual views, other than their own subjective experiences or the mystical traditions of

superstitious ancestors—and he is lauded as "a deeply spiritual man."

The reason this bothered me so much is because of what I know often happens to me when I try to talk to people about Jesus of Nazareth. I unashamedly believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that He is the only true way for man to reach God (Jn. 14:6).

I believe this—not because of subjective feelings or some blind leap—but based on the solid historical evidence found in the Bible—evidence that can be objectively tested to determine its validity. But when I offer this evidence for Jesus as the Son of God, my evidence is often scoffed at. I'm looked on as a gullible simpleton. How is it that I am belittled when I suggest—based on objective historical evidence—that Jesus is the Son of God, but when George Harrison follows a mystic Hindu Yogi, he is considered a "deeply spiritual" man? It seems to me that the evidence for God and for Jesus as the Son of God is not being given a fair and impartial objective examination.

Why is that? I fear that it has to do with a form of prejudice. No, men are not necessarily adverse to the idea of there being a God; in fact, they have a kind of internal craving for something spiritual. Men just don't want a God who expects them to change their will to conform to His. And so, any god or religion that satisfies man's inner longing for spirituality, but that does not interfere

with one's own selfish will, is fine and acceptable—even revered! It doesn't have to be credible; it just has to be in keeping with what a man wants. But if God expects obedience—well, man just doesn't want that kind of God; and so, he refuses to objectively consider the evidence that might convince him. Oh, he may look at the evidence, but he will not allow himself to be persuaded by it, regardless of how powerful it may be! Why? Because he doesn't *want* to be persuaded.

To be persuaded that Jesus really is the Son of the one true God requires a degree of objectivity. How much objectivity? Well, Jesus once claimed: "My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from Myself" (Jn. 7:15-16).

Was Jesus' teaching really from God? Couldn't it have just been something that an ordinary man from Nazareth invented himself and tried to pass off as being from God? Here Jesus is saying that we can know the truth on this question. He is saying that the evidence is there to support the fact that what He taught was indeed from God, and that this evidence is credible enough to persuade men. But, Jesus says, it will only persuade the man who approaches the evidence with a willingness to do it. If one approaches the evidence with his mind already made up that he will not obey the teaching of Christ, such a man will not be persuaded.

No amount of evidence will persuade him, because he has a prejudice. To believe the evidence for Jesus as the Son of God does not require that we take our brains out, put them on a shelf, and blindly accept whatever we're told! But it does require that we approach it with an objectivity that at least admits a willingness to obey when it proves to be true. If we don't have at least that degree of objectivity, we will not be persuaded.

The question is how serious am I about finding the one true God, if He does indeed exist? Am I looking for God to be what I want Him to be? Or am I willing to accept God as He is—even if that means that He requires my obedience?

If you're looking for God on your own terms, then you will find the kind of God you want to find—and carnal men may even praise you as being a deeply spiritual man. But if you really want to find the true God, then let go of your prejudice and with real objectivity consider again the evidence for the teaching of Jesus.

If you have that kind of objectivity, you will know with certainty whether or not Jesus is from God. And in that knowledge you will find *real* spirituality.

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The Improved Economic Status of the "Church Mouse"

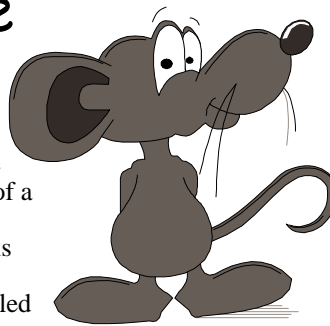
By AL DIESTELKAMP

Some of us grew up during a time when the expression, "as poor as a church mouse" had some meaning. We understood that the economic status of a mouse was determined by the amount of food available to him, and a mouse choosing to make his abode in a church building was poor, indeed.

Well, times have certainly changed. Most so-called houses of worship are little more than "fronts" for social clubs, requiring giant dumpsters for all their garbage that even a colony of mice could not consume.

I don't know if mice are social creatures, or if they are concerned about status in the rodent community, but if they are, the "Bill Gates" of mousedom would have nothing over the average "church mouse" of today.

Pity, however, the poor mouse who thinks he's found his fortune by making his home in a church building, only to find out he's in the meeting house of "antis"! What a letdown when all he can find are some meager crumbs from left-over communion bread and occasional stray Cheerios dropped by infants whose mothers were trying to quiet them. He might survive (if he's a bachelor-mouse), but he'll not be in the "upper-crust."



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Vengeance & Repentance

By **ANDY DIESTELKAMP**

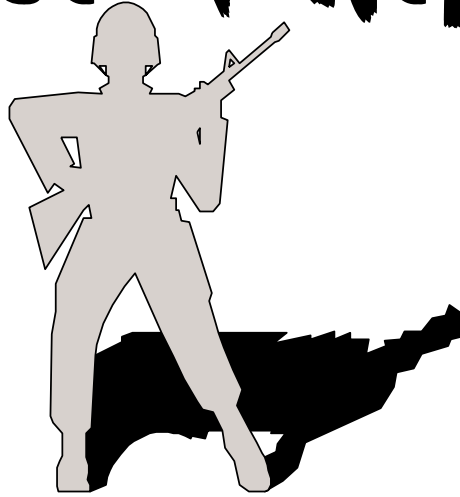
As a nation we got the wind knocked out of us September 11th. We were shocked and left numb by the attack on our fellow citizens. As New York City and Washington, D.C. became swarming hives of frantic activity, the rest of the nation screeched to a halt, mouths agape. Our emotions moved from shock, to horror, to sadness, to fear, to rage.

Behavior changed. People moved from the typical selfish attitudes expressed when being inconvenienced, to waiting for hours just to be able to share their blood with those who needed it. We cancelled our sports because it seemed profane to get excited about playing games while so many people were hurting. Patriotism began to swell. Flags flew everywhere. Spontaneous and planned choruses of "God Bless America" were heard. Prayers were lifted.

Some ask if it is right to seek vengeance, as if all vengeance is immoral. One only need read the words of the man after God's own heart to see that the desire for vengeance can be appropriate (Psa. 55, 59, 69, 79, 109, 137). But what about Jesus' command to love our enemies (Matt. 5:38-45)?

Jesus is addressing individual and personal treatment of other individuals. Vengeance is not ours to take personally, but there is a place for vengeance. Early Christians who were killed for their faith are pictured as crying out for vengeance (Rev. 6:9-11). However, vengeance belongs to God (Psa. 94:1-3; Deut. 32:34-43; Rom. 12:19-21).

Does that mean that we as a nation are to simply wait on God to accomplish vengeance? Interestingly enough, when Paul says that vengeance belongs to God, he immediately goes into a discussion of the responsibility of civil governments (Rom. 13:1-4). Paul says that government is God's minister, "an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil." Not only is it right for our government to avenge evil against its



citizens, it must, in order to be fulfill its God-given responsibility.

While it is certain that those who carried out this treachery did so with evil motives, let's not allow our zealous desire for vengeance blind us to our need to humbly consider our own sins and the need to repent of them. President Bush correctly observed in his speech at the National Cathedral, "God's signs are not always the ones we look for. We learn in tragedy, that His purposes are not always our own..." We may not be looking closely enough at God's signs and comparing our purposes with His.

None can say with prophetic certainty that God allowed evil to come upon us as a nation because of our own evil; but it must be noted that God has allowed such in the past, and we had better give serious consideration to that possibility today. Unfortunately, even the suggestion that we, as a nation, need to repent is being met with resistance and the charge of being unpatriotic. The attitude that America is so good that it has no need to repent before God for its moral failings is self-righteous hypocrisy. Such an attitude is more dangerous to our nation's future than any number of terrorists.

How can we stand in horror at the violent termination of so many lives in just one day, but then defend the right of mothers to kill their unborn children in nearly the same numbers every business day of the year? Many will cry, "Foul!" at this comparison as I supposedly attempt to "politicize" the deaths of these innocent victims of evil. Which innocent victims of evil? The ones killed everyday, or just the ones killed on September 11th?

The killing of innocent life is never simply a political issue. It is a moral issue. Some will say that I am being unpatriotic by suggesting that we have something to repent of. Thomas Jefferson wrote in his "Notes on the State of Virginia" in the context of the subject of slavery, "Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just: that

his justice cannot sleep for ever." Is this an unpatriotic statement?

People who have otherwise sought to diminish the role of God and His word in our society were singing "God Bless America." The same people who insisted that prayer to God must not be publicly supported, prayed publicly. Either this tragedy accomplished something very positive, or we have hypocrites using faith in God for political and social gain.

Some question whether God would allow evil to come upon a people to teach them a lesson. Read Deuteronomy 32:15-33. If God was willing to allow this to happen to His own chosen people who had forsaken Him, surely He would allow the same to happen to another nation that has also grown fat and forsaken Him. God has shown that He will use others (even those more wicked or foolish) to move the formerly righteous to be what they ought to be.

Were the thousands on whom the World Trade Center fell worse sinners than all the others in New York City? No, but unless we repent we will all likewise perish (Lk. 13:1-5). Disaster is an opportunity for each of us to consider our own lives which by the grace of God have been spared to this day.

One can wave the flag and at the same time suggest that America needs to repent. We can sorrow over the atrocities of these terrorists while suggesting the possibility that God used their evil to rebuke us. Consider the prophet Jeremiah who had the unenviable duty of telling the nation of Judah that it would fall to the evil Babylonians for its failure to be true to the God that it claimed to honor. Jeremiah found no delight in doing this. He was hated for it by his people, but he was true to his calling. He wept grievously over the fall of Jerusalem as recorded in the book of Lamentations.

What should we do? We should repent! Does this mean that we should not seek vengeance on those who attacked us because God may have used it to get us to straighten up? No! Psalm 79:5-10 mixes a call for God's help in vengeance against those who had attacked them with a humble spirit of repentance. Let those words be our words.

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EDITOR'S OOPS!

In the past issue of *Think*, Vol. 32, No. 3, we printed an article entitled, *I'm Not Ashamed*, under the byline of Dan Richardson. Dan has written some good articles that we have published in other issues, but this one was written by Andy Diestelkamp. Hopefully, Andy wrote nothing in the article of which Dan would be ashamed.

—Al Diestelkamp



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MOTIVATION FOR UNBELIEF

By **ANDY DIESTELKAMP**

I am always intrigued by those who do not believe and especially those who exchange their faith in God for agnosticism or atheism. What is it that turns the tables and convinces them that there is no God? What evidence is marshalled that is so convincing that faith in no God seems more reasonable than faith in God? Likely, it has little to do with evidence and more to do with the fact that faith in God interferes with or demands a change in lifestyle or direction in life.

Aldous Huxley, a noted humanist of the early 20th Century, admitted, "I had motives for not wanting this world to have a meaning; consequently assumed that it had none, and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption... For myself, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation, sexual and political," (*Ends and Means*, p. 270).

If professing unbelievers were honest with themselves, I believe they would have to likewise admit to approaching the evidence for and against God with the same bias. Interestingly enough, it is believers who are often portrayed as being prejudiced and even blind in their faith. It is the humanists who like to characterize themselves as free thinking and wholly unchained to religious dogma.

Paul Kurtz, another humanist, wrote, "The first principle of democratic secular humanism is its commitment to free inquiry. We oppose any tyranny over the mind of man, any efforts by ecclesiastical, political, ideological, or social institutions to shackle free thought," (*A Secular Humanist Declaration*, 1980, pp. 10,11).

I am certainly no humanist, but in principle I am in favor of free inquiry and I

encourage it, especially when it comes to issues of faith. Admittedly, many religious people do not, because their faith is weak or indefensible. However, the free exchange and consideration of opposing ideas only increases the likelihood of truth being embraced. Many on both sides of the faith in God issue have a "don't confuse me with the facts" attitude. Truth fears no investigation or challenge. The humanist claims to support free inquiry but does not really believe in it. Consider the following quote (also from Paul Kurtz) as proof.

"Today the theory of evolution is again under heavy attack by religious fundamentalists... We deplore the efforts by fundamentalists... to invade the science classrooms, requiring that creationist theory be taught to students and requiring that it be included in biology textbooks," (*ibid*, pp. 21,22).

What happened to Kurtz's belief in free inquiry? He does say those who believe in creation should be free to express their viewpoints in society but not in the science classroom. Why? "It is a sham to mask an article of faith as a scientific truth and inflict that doctrine on the scientific curriculum. If successful, creationists may seriously undermine the credibility of science itself," (*ibid*).

Both creationism and evolution have to do with origins. Neither are experimentally repeatable. In that sense, both are theories. Why does evolution belong in the science classroom, but creationism does not? Bias is the only answer.

If religious doctrine that may have some relevance to the scientific theories being considered are threats to the integrity of education and the credibility of science, then humanistic doctrines are equally threatening. Why is it not a sham to mask an article of humanistic faith (macro-evolution) as a

scientific truth and to inflict that doctrine on the scientific curriculum? Humanists have been successful in doing this with the theory of evolution and have thereby seriously undermined the credibility of science itself.

"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork" (Psa. 19:1). The truly free thinker looks at creation, sees order and design, and concludes there must be a powerful designer. The fool says there is no God (Psa. 53:1), and he is without excuse for drawing such a conclusion (Rom. 1:18-23).

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