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## BETWEEN THE COVERS OF POWER FOR LIVING

by David Chilton

Dear Friend,

I am delighted that you have asked for the book *Power for Living*. It has been a real help to thousands of people, and I trust it will be to you also. . . .

Millions of Americans have read those opening lines of the cover letter from Nancy DeMoss, which accompanies each copy of the most heavily advertised book in history. On television and in the pages of *Fortune*, *Newsweek*, *Time*, and the *Wall Street Journal*, stars and celebrities urged their audiences to call a toll-free number for a free copy. Pat Boone, Tom Landry, Janet Lynn, and others explained how *Power for Living* would enable its readers to find courage and strength to overcome the difficulties and problems all of us face in daily living.

I was a member of the team that wrote *Power for Living*. The group was composed of some of the younger leaders in the "Christian Reconstruction" movement, identified with the writings of R. J. Rushdoony (*The Institutes of Biblical Law*) and Gary North (*The Dominion Covenant*). The main distinctive of the Reconstructionist movement is that biblical law provides the foundation for thought and activity in every area of life. We hold that there is no religious neutrality anywhere, and that all men and institutions must conform to God's ethical requirements as explicitly revealed in the Bible.

*Power for Living* began last August, when Mrs. Nancy DeMoss (President of the Arthur S. DeMoss Foundation) and Bill Bright (President of Campus Crusade for Christ) decided to produce a book "in celebration of the Year of the Bible." One major obstacle: 1983, the Year of the Bible, was almost over. To write, publish, advertise, and distribute millions of copies of a new book—all before the end of the year—would be a massive undertaking, not even counting the reported \$15 million the Foundation planned to donate to the project. In order to pull it off, they came to the Reconstructionists for help. It turned out to be a classic example of a project designed and operated by what Gary North has called "sugar daddies." (*Biblical Economics Today*, Vol. V, June/July, 1982) This project turned out to be a \$20 million "gospel blimp." (See Joseph Bayly's marvelous book, *The Gospel Blimp*.)

Obviously, neither Campus Crusade nor the DeMoss Foundation could fairly be described as Reconstructionist. But they knew that American Vision—Reconstructionist publisher of Gary DeMar's popular workbook *God and Government*—was able to produce a quality product in record time. Printing schedules dictated that the entire book had to be written in one week, with millions of copies in the warehouse by the end of the following month. So American

Vision got the contract. And then American Vision called me.

I live in Tyler, Texas, as part of a growing Reconstructionist "think tank" here. Through the combined efforts of Westminster Presbyterian Church, Geneva Divinity School, and the Institute for Christian Economics, we publish more than a dozen periodicals and a goodly number of books and tapes on such subjects as law, government, economics, education, and social action (one of our recent works was a 900-page, two-volume set on "The Theology and Tactics of Christian Resistance," which has become popular reading in Louisville, Nebraska during recent weeks). American Vision knew that we could produce good work under a tight deadline, and that the theological focus would be in keeping with its own Reconstructionist perspective.

We got the job done on schedule. The book was published in October, the ad campaign picked up momentum, copies began flying around the country, and everybody seemed pleased. But in December we started hearing rumors that the DeMoss Foundation was considering the idea of destroying the remaining copies of the book and printing a completely new book under the same title. Our requests for an official statement were met with stony silence.

In January some of the rumors were confirmed. Copies of a new, "revised" edition, assigning full and complete authorship to Charismatic writer Jamie Buckingham, began appearing in mailboxes—accompanied by the same glowing letter from Mrs. DeMoss. Much of the material was the same, but no credit was given to any of the writers. American Vision, the publisher, was not mentioned even once. There had been some publicity about the fact that *Power for Living* had been authored by Reconstructionists; apparently, DeMoss Foundation leaders were angered and embarrassed by this, and therefore authorized the publication of the Buckingham book, which presents a theological viewpoint utterly opposed to the Reconstructionist position.

And so—completely unknown to the commercial-watching public—there are two *Power for Living*'s, seemingly identical, but actually in ideological combat with one another. It reminds me of the old charge that certain European bankers financed both sides of the American Civil War: the DeMoss Foundation has subsidized conflicting sides in a theological war over some of the most basic issues of the Christian faith. Publishing two books with one title is so preposterous that some of us have wondered if it represents some sort of laboratory testing of competing doctrines, to see whose "combination of active ingredients" works best. Were the American people being experimented on?

From a broader perspective, the existence of two versions of *Power for Living* highlights an important aspect of latter-day evangelicalism which has gone largely unnoticed.

In particular, it brings into the open a conflict which has been raging for years in the background of the Charismatic movement (as well as in the more mainline churches). It also reveals some surprising developments in the relationships between Charismatic and non-Charismatic evangelicals.

As second-edition author Buckingham has acknowledged to at least one reporter, the changes he made were not primarily stylistic; rather, they reflect serious theological differences. On the one hand is a theology which is self-consciously Augustinian and Reformed, a theology which (for reasons that will become clear) may be termed a Theology of Ethics. On the other hand is a theology which, I believe, has its roots in Platonic philosophy—a Theology of Metaphysics.

### Ethics vs. Metaphysics

Even at first glance, the theological conflict between the two versions centers on the question of ethics. In the first edition, the chapter by Michael Gilstrap ("How to Handle Life's Problems") was straightforwardly based on biblical law. In each of the problems he discussed—fear, guilt, anger, depression, and so on—Gilstrap set forth clear directives from the objective word of God, the Bible. Each issue was uncompromisingly confronted with the absolute authority of Scripture. "Christians must stop living on the basis of feelings and start living on the principles of God's Word," wrote Gilstrap (p. 54). That conviction pervades every line of his essay; it is inseparable from it. In the nature of the case, the essay could not have been "adapted" or "revised" to promote a rival theology: the entire work would have had to be rewritten. Instead, it was completely dropped.

Now, this strikes us as strange. From the outset of the project, we were of the understanding that the "Problems" section constituted the heart of the book. This impression was based, not only on our conversations with American Vision, but also on the ad copy supplied us by the advertising agency. (That's right. I know it's a bit backward, but it's true. This book was such a rush job that *we wrote the book to conform to the promises in the advertising campaign.*)

The point is that what was pitched to both the authors and the public was a book that would help people overcome their problems. We believed that if those who ordered the book were to read any single chapter, they would turn to this one. In terms of the advertised purpose of the book, it was clearly the most practical section. Yet, although the advertising was left intact, the revised version of the book failed to include this central chapter. Why?

I think the reason can be guessed by looking at the significant changes that were made in the other chapters in the book. I wrote the chapter on Christian growth. Like the other authors, I stressed the importance of following the explicit dictates of Scripture. We believe that the process of Christian growth is not some sort of mysterious process carried on by fits and starts or glassy-eyed reveries, but through sustained, increasing, disciplined conformity to the commands of God's word.

This meant, for example, that my discussion of prayer included biblical *rules* for prayer, citing such verses as John 15:7, Ps. 66:18-20, and Prov. 28:9, on the requirement of obedience in order to have our prayers answered. I pointed out that the biblical command to pray "according to God's will" (1 John 5:14-15) does not require a search for God's hidden purposes (Deut. 29:29), but rather a recognition that God has *revealed* His will in Scripture. Our prayers must be in terms of the Bible. As a model of this kind of God-honoring, biblical prayer, I included a brief exposition of the Lord's Prayer.

None of this was revised for the new edition of *Power for Living*. It was simply dropped.

Now, the new edition does have a brief section on obedience, because it follows the same general outline I used in writing the chapter in the first place. But the actual discussion of obedience is kept to a bare minimum. Five sentences of what I originally wrote were kept fairly intact, but the rest slipped down the Orwellian Memory Hole.

I had written that the proof of loving one's brother is obedience to God's law (1 John 5:2-3; Rom. 13:10; Matt. 22:37-40). I had written that, although we are not justified by our obedience, the Christian life nevertheless is characterized by good works according to the commands of Scripture (Matt. 15:3; Eph. 2:8-10; 1 John 5:3). And, I had written that church membership is a fundamental command, for the body of Christ grows *collectively*, and the individual's growth is inseparable from the growth of the church (Eph. 4:13-16; Heb. 10:23-25). All this was deleted as well. In its place was what I regard as a mushy, standardless approach to sanctification, one which encourages us merely to listen for the "still, small voice of the Holy Spirit," and goes on to equate that voice with what "we sometimes call . . . our 'conscience'" (pp. 82-84).

This kind of ideological change is evident throughout the book. Consider the difference between the following two statements, and ask yourself *why* this particular change would be made, and what purpose it could serve:

*Chilton, 1st edition:* This doesn't require you to become a prude, wear strange clothes, and be unable to have a good time. It doesn't mean you must carry a Bible around all day, either. It simply means you take your standards for your thoughts and actions from the Word of God, rather than from those around you. (pp. 90-92)

*Buckingham, revised edition:* This doesn't mean you have to become a prude, wear strange clothes, and be unable to have a good time. It doesn't even mean you have to carry your Bible around all day either. It simply means you stay attached to Jesus at all times. (p. 86)

Was the change made in the interests of clarity?

On the subject of witnessing, I encouraged a diligent study of Scripture, to acquire a solid understanding of both the objective gospel and the biblical worldview—so as to communicate the Christian message as clearly and accurately as possible, with sensitivity and wisdom, to people with diverse backgrounds and needs. I pointed out the necessity of being "prepared to give an answer" (1 Peter 3:15). This, too, was "revised out." In its place was the assurance that witnessing would come "naturally."

In some ways, the issues become most clear as the two versions discuss the Holy Spirit (in this section, not one word of what I had written was retained). My original showed that it was the *church* (not only the individual) which is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16-17; Eph. 2:19-22). I observed that the command to "be filled with the Spirit" has to do with *ethical activity* (see Eph. 5:18ff.), and that genuine Spirituality is related to practical obedience, just as rebellion against God is characterized by lawlessness (Rom. 8:7-9; Gal. 5:16-23). Moreover, I stressed that the Holy Spirit has been given to the church, not simply for the sake of the individual's personal comfort, but to enable the church to disciple the nations, teaching them to obey Christ's commands (Matt. 28:18-20; Luke 24:49; John 7:37-39; Acts 1:8). God's concern is with both the individual and the entire world, and these must not be separated in our thinking.

There is nothing of this in the revised version. The focus is radically different. It starts out by claiming that for the Christian "every day can be an exciting adventure." This may seem like a fairly innocuous statement (and, indeed, it is made every day in what passes for "evangelism"), but I

regard it as coming close to the heart of some very basic theological differences between the two competing theologies. It is not simply that it is a cheap advertising gimmick—on the whole, a cheap gimmick that *works* is better than an expensive gimmick. But it is *false* advertising. The burden of the New Testament is on *following Christ*, not on exciting adventures. Often, the Christian life involves painful drudgery and sacrifice, or simply faithfulness in plugging away at the same old God-given tasks, day after day, year after year. God promises stable growth into Christ's ethical image—not a rollercoaster ride on a whoopee cushion.

The revised version continually presents the work of the Holy Spirit as a *metaphysical*, rather than *ethical*, process. His power, according to Volume Two, surges through us as water through giant turbines, creating the spiritual equivalent of hydroelectricity (p. 93).

This is the theological basis for all the differences between the two books. The first edition presents sanctification in terms of ethics—the clear, indisputable commands of God in His inerrant word. The second edition presents sanctification in terms of an individual's exciting experiences, and (to put it mildly) de-emphasizes obedience. The first book is based on a recognizable ethical *standard* for living the Christian life; the second book is virtually content to describe the Christian life as epitomized by those "energetic, joyful Christians" who "smile all the time. . . ." (p. 76).

This fundamental perspective carries over into the section titled "Making the Bible a Part of Your Life," which is taken almost word-for-word from Ray Sutton's essay in the first book, "How to Read the Bible." I did say *almost* word-for-word, because there are, again, whole sections missing, apparently for the same reasons. Sutton spent several pages developing the idea that, throughout the Bible, "God uses a basic pattern in communicating to man. First, He gives a command or promise. Second, the Bible tells of man's response. Third, a word of evaluation is given" (p. 104). Sutton goes on to show how "this threefold pattern appears everywhere in the Bible" (p. 106). Clearly, this simple outline is practical and useful for Bible study and personal application. Yet, just as clearly, it insists on seeing the Bible and the Christian life in terms of God's ethical standards. This section has vanished from the newer version.

The remaining deletions of Sutton's chapter are those passages where he stresses objective study of the entire Bible, and where he upholds the self-attesting authority of Scripture: "The Bible is its own authority. There is no other book above the Bible. . . . So, use Scripture to understand (interpret) other Scripture. This is probably the most important rule in interpreting the Bible" (p. 109).

The intent of Sutton's essay was to teach people how to find out what the Bible objectively says, and to give them a means for applying that message to themselves and their world, in every area of life. The revised version scraps much of this, and suggests instead that people read "devotionally" (pp. 126f.)—which, in context, seems to abandon the objective meaning of Scripture. (Obviously, we wholeheartedly support the idea of reading the Bible with true *devotion*: a humble, prayerful, receptive attitude, ready to obey its every command. But that does not seem to be what is meant in the revised version of our book.)

Finally, Gary DeMar's original chapter, called "God's Perspective," was a brief explanation of the biblical worldview. It showed how the Bible applies to every area of life. It demonstrated that God's law is fully authoritative for thought and action at every point in human existence, covering both one's personal life and all institutions as well. "The only true world view is God's view of the world. . . . The Word of God is the standard before which all other standards of authority must bow" (p. 126). This entire chapter was dropped.

### Puritans and Charismatics?

At first glance, it might seem that the dispute is between stern, orthodox Calvinists and free-flowing Charismatics. That would be, I think, a very superficial judgment. In fact, the difference between the two books brings to light one of the most interesting theological and sociological lineups of recent times—coalitions which could well determine the shape of evangelical Christianity for decades to come.

In 1972, Francis Schaeffer wrote an incisive little book entitled *The New Super-Spirituality*. His thesis was that an important distinction was developing between what he called the old and the new Pentecostals. The old Pentecostals were concerned with doctrinal orthodoxy to a great degree; they taught much that was in agreement with what the church has always taught, in terms of basic doctrinal content. On the other hand, the new Pentecostals—by which Schaeffer meant the Charismatic Movement—tended to emphasize experience and feelings over truth. And, as Schaeffer pointed out, there were significant parallels here between the New Pentecostals and the anti-doctrinal stance of theological liberalism.

I think this was true when Schaeffer noticed it a dozen years ago. I can recall my own churning emotions when I first read it in 1972, feeling as if Schaeffer had been describing the ministries I had been involved in. Now, as a Charismatic who had turned Calvinist the year before, I recognized that the anti-doctrinal bias I had wrestled with in my own circles had characterized the movement as a whole.

(In 1971 I was ordained, along with several other young men, into the "Jesus People Church." One of the minimal requirements involved making a list of "the most important Bible doctrines." After compiling a fairly lengthy list myself, I glanced at the finished paper of one of the other candidates. His entire catalogue of doctrines read as follows: "Everybody should get saved and filled with the Spirit." We were both approved for ordination that day.)

Yet the distinction observed by Schaeffer was becoming obsolete even as he wrote—and in large measure, I should add, *because* he wrote. I was not an isolated case. Even those I broke away from in 1971 were avidly reading Schaeffer and Rushdoony by 1978, and the number is increasing all the time. I believe a *third* major split has come about, between what may be called the Old Charismatics (Schaeffer's "New Pentecostals") and the New Charismatics; so that Schaeffer's original thesis should be revised thus:

1. *Old Pentecostals*—characterized by fundamentalist pietism and doctrinal concerns; politically conservative, but emphasizing personal religion above social concerns.
2. *New Pentecostals/Old Charismatics*—characterized by an inclusivist, experience-centered worldview, with a minimal emphasis on doctrine; stressing individual piety to the virtual exclusion of biblical social transformation; politically retreatist and culturally irrelevant.
3. *New Charismatics*—characterized by a Reformational concern to apply the Bible to all of life; often influenced by Reformed and Reconstructionist thought.

Interestingly, those three stages roughly parallel the development of American Presbyterianism during the past century:

1. *Old Presbyterians*—characterized by commitment to biblical inerrancy; politically conservative, but lacking a comprehensive theoretical framework for a biblical economic and political order.
2. *Neo-Evangelical Presbyterians*—characterized by

an inclusivist, experience-centered worldview, with a minimal emphasis on doctrine; stressing individual piety to the virtual exclusion of biblical social transformation; politically retreatist and culturally irrelevant.

3. *Reconstructionist Presbyterians*—characterized by a Reformational concern to apply the Bible to all of life, seeing biblical law as the blueprint for both personal piety and social transformation.

One important corollary to all this is that *speaking in tongues isn't central anymore*. Of course, there remain technical theological and exegetical disagreements between Charismatics and non-Charismatics; but in practice, when evangelicals line up into opposing camps, the issues tend to group around much more basic concerns.

The DeMoss Foundation evidently decided, at some point, that the first edition of *Power for Living* was not to their liking. I don't understand why they did not commission someone from Campus Crusade or some similar neo-evangelical organization to produce the substitute book (or, for that matter, the first edition). The point, however, is that Jamie Buckingham's standing as an established Charismatic leader did not deter them from appealing to him to counteract the work of the Reconstructionists.

Nancy DeMoss and Bill Bright are non-Charismatic Presbyterians. The Reconstructionist leaders are non-Charismatic Presbyterians as well. Yet, where the rubber meets the road, DeMoss and Bright have more in common with Jamie Buckingham (representing the Old Charismatics) than with the Reconstructionists. Similarly, Reconstructionists have been developing close ties for years with such New Charismatic organizations as CBN/700 Club, Maranatha, and New Wine.

Consider the very real differences between the 700 Club and the PTL Club. These differences involve much more than merely hairstyles and amounts of makeup. For example, let me propose a simple test to anyone familiar with both shows. The following statement about the Incarnation was made on one of them: "God came to earth as a baby because He needed to be hugged and cuddled." Where did that little insight come from? (The answer should be easy: PTL.) For me, that statement seems to epitomize the difference between the two theologies—indeed, between an orthodox and a heretical view of God. The statement suggests a blasphemous concept: that God is, after all, just one of us, with the same needs and problems.

It's the old debate, the basic argument which has marked Christianity from its inception, and which will always form a major aspect of the boundary between orthodoxy and its numerous competitors. Ethics or Metaphysics? Metaphysical Theology says that the nature of salvation involves being *metaphysically connected to the being of God*. God and man are seen in terms of continuity of being—God being bigger, stronger, smarter, and "more real" than man, but the difference being essentially one of quantity. Man relates to God by using magic or manipulative techniques. Metaphysical Theology is man-centered, humanistic theology, or, more precisely, *anthropology*. This is why there is such an emphasis on individual experience, and why what goes on under the name of evangelism is often more concerned with the subjective feelings of the believer than with the objective gospel of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Peter's charismatic experiences led him to proclaim the universal Lordship of Jesus Christ (Acts 2, 3, 4), rather than dwelling on his own subjective feelings. I am not suggesting that one's own subjective feelings are unimportant in themselves. I am saying that they are *relatively unimportant*, and should not be used to *define* our relationship with God.

Ethical Theology teaches that my relationship with God is covenantal and legal; that my salvation has taken place objectively in Another, Jesus Christ. In salvation I am not metamorphosed into a higher level of reality; rather, God saves me from my sins and conforms me ethically to the image of Christ, so that I am restored to the purpose for which God originally created man: godly dominion over the earth. This means that the Christian life is *primarily* to be defined in terms of personal communication with God and obedience to God's word. Rapturous experiences are not discounted, but they must be recognized as of secondary importance. More than this, those subjective experiences must be interpreted in the light of the objective word of God, the Bible. No experience makes me anything more than a finite creature. I will *always* be a finite creature, and nothing more. Salvation is not deification.

The issue of tongues is not quite dead. But it is crucial to recognize that *both sides in the central debate regard tongues as institutionally irrelevant*, at least in the sense of being a divisive issue. Battle lines are being drawn in other places, for there is something much more fundamental at stake. I believe that this issue is at the core of the Christian faith, and that it will continue to divide the church well into the next century. Christians don't like divisions, and when you consider the utterly idiotic and trivial reasons for many divisions, it becomes obvious how sinful schism is. But it is important to remember too that the faithful church has always found it necessary, at some point, to divide over theology.

Up to now, much of the dividing over this particular issue has been on a more instinctive than explicit level. The conflicting perspectives have not always been articulated with clarity; side issues have distracted the combatants; and the lines have not yet become clearly drawn. But the division is a fact, and an increasing one. It was significant enough to cause a multimillion-dollar publishing venture to change horses in midstream. On that score, we can all be grateful to *Power for Living*—both versions—for bringing that fact out into the open.

If Campus Crusade and the DeMoss Foundation have a motto, it is this: *Reformation without confrontation*. At all costs—and they do mean *all* costs—ideological controversy must be avoided. From their perspective, the original version of *Power for Living* had to be gutted. For, while it was not polemical or negative, the book did set forth a clear, unmistakable standard for the Christian life. It was not offensive, but it was confrontational. With the Apostles, the Nicene Fathers, and the Protestant Reformers, the Reconstructionists believe that there is *no* reformation without confrontation. We take our motto from the most controversial figure in history, who declared:

Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword.  
For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.  
And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.  
(Matt. 10:34-36)

Herbert Schlossberg has captured the essence of the difference between the two perspectives, the humanist and the biblical versions of Christianity:

Civil religion eases tensions, where biblical religion creates them. Civil religion papers over the cracks of evil, and biblical religion strips away the covering, exposing the nasty places. Civil religion prescribes aspirin for cancer, and biblical religion insists on the knife.<sup>1</sup>

1. Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction: Christian Faith and Its Confrontation with American Society* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983), p. 252.

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