



Tampering with Truth

The New Left in the Lord's Church



David W. Hester

**Publishing Designs, Inc.
Huntsville, Alabama**





Publishing Designs, Inc.
P.O. Box 3241
Huntsville, Alabama 35810

David W. Hester
dwhest@bellsouth.net

© 2007 by David W. Hester

David W. Hester

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without written permission from Publishing Designs, Inc., except for the inclusion of quotations in a review.



All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version of the Bible.



Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Hester, David W. (David Wayne), 1965-
Tampering with truth : the New Left in the Lord's church / David Hester.
p. cm.
ISBN 978-0-929540-65-8 (alk. paper)
1. Liberalism (Religion) 2. Theology. I. Title.
BR1617.H47 2007
286.6'3—dc22

2007000023





Contents

Introduction	5
1. Was Jesus a “Scholar”?	17
2. How Shall We Interpret the Bible?	27
3. Among the Scholars—Again	37
4. Reflections on Current Problems among Churches of Christ: A Proposal	47
5. “Instrumental Music Is Not a Salvation Issue” —But We Will Have It, Regardless!	55
6. What About Contemporary “Christian” Music?	65
7. The Holy Spirit, Pope Benedict XVI, and the New Left	77
8. Restoration or Revisionist History?	89
9. The Jesus Seminar	101
10. Is Young Absalom Safe—In His Youth Group?	113
11. Do We Have the Right Kind of Love?	121
12. The Church Needs to Watch	129
13. Some Reasons for Hope	137





Introduction

The Lord's church is in the midst of its most serious division in a hundred years. Interestingly, while technology and mass communication have made tremendous advances, the division in 1906 with the Christian Church, and the current division are quite similar. A small but determined cadre of highly educated preachers and academics has pressed for radical change in congregations across the country. Gaining control of key papers and schools, these individuals have succeeded, to a certain extent, in getting their message out and making it stick in the minds of unsuspecting brethren. After gathering a sizable number of supporters, they then push the leadership of the congregation to change to meet their wishes—or face the prospect of division. In the meantime, the leaders of the movement speak in somber tones of their “extremist” past, how it supposedly mirrors the “sad, sad history” of churches of Christ, and how they are making a clean break with “sectarianism” to experience “spiritual freedom,” the “refreshing breezes of the Spirit.” In so doing, the church is divided and the Lord Himself is persecuted again.

In 1994 I wrote concerning these matters. *Among the Scholars* was my attempt to put into writing what I perceived then to be a serious challenge to the purity and unity of the body of Christ. I was not alone; others penned books and articles warning about the same danger, but approaching it from different angles. Our warnings did not go unheeded; brethren across the country listened to what we said, and in many cases took action to either prevent the danger from reaching their congregations, or else took a firm stand against error already present. However, the division that many feared would take place inevitably happened in too many areas.

The thesis of *Among the Scholars* was twofold: first, the leaders of the “New Left” largely came from the 1960s and retained the same destructive radicalism of the political leaders of their generation. Second, many of them also came from the “anti” wing of the brotherhood and retained the same divisive spirit, while rejecting their former beliefs. This was based more on a gut feeling, rooted in the speeches and writings of some of them. In the intervening years, much more has been said and written by the leaders of the New Left, which make their motivations even clearer. These statements and assertions beg to be examined in light of Scripture.

A Web site of a church in central Alabama is a case in point. This church resulted from a division of a well-established, doctrinally sound congregation. On its home page you may read these words:

Our congregation is a beautiful blend of previously unchurched folks and of Christians from varying religious backgrounds, including Church of Christ, Free Will and Southern Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, and Catholic. Each of us decided that it was time for a body of believers to come together and focus on the core tenets of the Christian faith without regard to denominational traditions and rituals that for too long have divided God’s people.¹

While at first blush such may seem innocuous, when one examines the site he immediately sees the meaning. This is nothing less than a call for open fellowship with all denominations. When one considers that this particular church has divided yet again, and that one of its former leaders has left churches of Christ altogether and has led a division in a denominational church, he sees the bitter fruit of drinking deeply from poisoned wells.

Consider also a Web site calling for “gender justice” among churches of Christ. On its home page, one can read this definition of the term:

In general, gender justice means recognizing that men and women are created by God, redeemed by Christ, and gifted by the Spirit truly without distinction or partiality. In Christian community, gender justice means encouraging both men and women to exercise their Spirit-given gifts in the church’s work, worship, and leadership,

1. <http://www.crossviewchurch.com/home.html>.



and celebrating the truth that the Spirit grants such gifts without respect to gender. *Concretely, gender justice in the Church of Christ includes opening traditionally masculine leadership roles and activities (deacon, elder, minister, worship leader, preacher, teacher, etc.) to women*, and encouraging men to discover and cultivate their gifts for activities traditionally performed by women.² (emphasis added-dh)

One of the links to this site is to the Cahaba Valley Church of Christ in Birmingham, Alabama. Billing itself as “an Ecumenical Church of Christ,” the leaders make it clear where they are:

One of the ways that we as a congregation have been challenged to live up to the mandate to follow the call of God is to allow God to change tradition. In the churches that most of us grew up in, it was assumed that women would never take a part in leading public worship. At the same time, it has become increasingly clear that cultural bias against women in general has often been a major factor in how both human culture and the church as well have talked about women and their ministries as disciples.

By 1984 we increasingly sensed God leading us to trust the work of the Spirit of Christ in individual believers, male and female, to live out the ministries inspired by the spiritual gifts that he grants to each believer. As a result, we began to have serious conversations about whether our practice of allowing only men to pray, serve communion, lead singing and plan worship was anchored in inherited tradition or reflected God’s will. In 1988 and 1989, we carried out very detailed study of the Scriptures, and after much prayer and searching, the elders of our congregation concluded that it was the work of the Spirit to assign the roles and gifts of each person and that, therefore, women would be invited, along with the men, to seek to identify their gifts and ministries, including that of being involved in the leadership of worship. Women were not required to participate, but they would have the same freedom as men to explore and use their gifts in light of their reading of Scripture and their own faith in God. Women were then invited to volunteer along with the men of our congregation.

As a result, women have come to participate in all aspects of our congregation’s life, from leading public worship to serving as deacons and to teaching adult Bible classes.³

2. <http://www.gal328.org/>.

3. http://www.cahabavalley.org/history_role_of_women.htm.

If one wonders where 1 Timothy 2 factors into this, the answer is that these individuals attempt to explain away the restrictions Paul placed on the role of women. In the case of Cahaba Valley, they claim that Paul did not pen those words; rather, they say, they were written in the second century by the leaders of the church. Additionally, they claim the passage was written to accommodate the culture of the day—implying that we do not have to follow it.⁴

Max Lucado is a talented writer, and a gifted speaker. His books consistently top the best-seller lists, and he has become a nationally renowned preacher. However, Lucado is also a false teacher. Indeed, the agenda of the New Left is clearly seen when one examines some of his statements and writings. Consider what he asserted on his syndicated radio program, “Upwards”:

LUCADO: You can be sure that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor ruling spirits, nothing now, nothing in the future, no powers, nothing above us, nothing below us, nor anything else in the world will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. You see, in God, by virtue of your adoption, you have a divine affinity, you have eternal security, and you have a golden opportunity. I cannot imagine an orphan turning down an opportunity to be adopted. With one decision, with one raising of the hand, with one agreement to leave the orphanage, that person all of a sudden goes from being abandoned to claimed, from having no name to a new name, no future to a new future, he leaves the orphanage, and enters the house of the father.

That’s what God offers you. There is no quiz, no examination, no charge. All you have to do is say “yes” to the Father. And many of you have done that. But I have a hunch that not all of you have. I have a hunch that there’s a few of you listening, even now, and God is using this to pull on your heart. The Holy Spirit is informing you of something that you have never really heard before—and that is, God is ready to be your Father. Maybe you never understood that the invitation was for everyone. Maybe you thought you weren’t worthy. Maybe now you do understand. God will make you worthy, and the invitation is for you. And all you have to do is call him Father. Just call him Father. Just turn your heart to him even right now as I am speaking. Call him your Father. And your Father will respond. Why don’t you do that?

4. http://www.cahabavalley.org/women’s_role_study_document.htm.



Introduction

9

[Instrumental music playing in background] “Father, I give my heart to you. I give you my sins, I give you my tears, I give you my fears, I give you my whole life. I accept the gift of your Son on the cross for my sins. And I ask you, Father, to receive me as your child. Through Jesus I pray. Amen.”

ANNOUNCER: And friend, if you prayed along with Max Lucado just now, here on UPWARDS, we want to welcome you into the family of God. We hope you will contact us and share your personal testimony. If you are already a believer, we thank you for praying for these new brothers and sisters in Christ . . . Now Max Lucado returns with a special word for those who received the gift of salvation just moments ago in prayer.

LUCADO [instrumental music playing in the background]: Today is the first day you’ve ever prayed a prayer like that. Could you do me a favor? Could you write me a letter? I don’t have anything I am going to ask from you. I do have a letter I would like to send to you. I’d like to give you a word about the next step or two. I want to encourage you to find a church, I want to encourage you to be baptized, I want to encourage you to read your Bible. *But I don’t want you to do any of that so that you will be saved. I want you to do all of that because you are saved.* You see, your Father has a great life planned for you, and I want to tell you about it. Give us a call, and drop me a note. And, thanks my friend, for making the greatest decision of your life⁵ (emphasis added-dh).

As stunning as this is, it’s not the only time Lucado has asserted such. In 2000 Word Publishing produced a tract entitled “He Chose the Nails.” In it, Lucado writes:

Would you let him save you? This is the most important decision you will ever make. Why don’t you give your heart to him right now? . . . Go to God in prayer and tell him, I am a sinner in need of grace. I believe that Jesus died for me on the cross. I accept your offer of salvation. It’s a simple prayer with eternal results . . .

I pray that you’ll accept this great gift of salvation. Believe me, this is not only the most important decision you’ll ever make, it’s also the greatest decision you’ll ever make. There’s no higher treasure than God’s gift of salvation.⁶

5. Max Lucado, Radio Station KJAK, Lubbock, Texas, December 1996, <http://users.abilene.com/~wgoforth/Luc3.htm>.

6. Lucado, *He Did This Just for You* (Nashville: Word, 2000), 50, 52.



The contrast between what Lucado asserts and what the New Testament actually teaches could not be clearer. Yet, he is not alone. Rubel Shelly asks:

For some, salvation is an event marked by what is commonly called “the sinner’s prayer.” For others, the critical moment at which one is saved is marked by the waters of baptism. For still others, the defining occurrence is a life-transforming experience of the Holy Spirit. Which is it? Have you ever seen a multiple-choice question on an exam with the option: “all of the above”? Or what about this very postmodern option: “none of the above—but a relationship that grows over time”?⁷

I was a freshman at Freed-Hardeman University in 1984, when Shelly was allowed to make a statement at Open Forum in order to clarify his views on baptism, which were just then coming under scrutiny. At that time, he asserted his belief that the purpose of baptism was for salvation, and that he had not changed. He could not now make such an assertion.

In September 1993, Magnolia Church of Christ in Florence, Alabama, had a joint worship service with a Methodist church; Magnolia’s preacher, Joe Van Dyke, downplayed doctrinal differences and said all churches should unite in spite of those differences. The following spring, Van Dyke delivered a sermon at Faith Tabernacle. What he said on that occasion at the close reveals much of the mind-set of the New Left.

Throughout the service, the instrument was used. Van Dyke declared they were standing “on holy ground,” and that this event had “been a dream of mine for a few years.” When he came to the end of his sermon, Van Dyke addressed a question that was being asked by many at the time. What if, toward the end of such a joint worship service, a man was to come forward and ask, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” One preacher replies as did Peter in Acts 2:38, while the other preacher gives a different answer. One says baptism is immersion, while the other disagrees. What then?

In addressing the question, Van Dyke proceeded to list a number of preachers in the audience. He then said: “Don’t you think that if

7. Rubel Shelly & John O. York, *The Jesus Proposal* (Siloam Springs, AR: Leafwood Publishers, 2003), 140.



somebody needs to respond this evening that we can all get together down here at the front and work something out that needs to be done?" The audience erupted in cheers, yells, and much applause. He then said, "We can work it out, brothers, we can work it out. If you need prayer, we can pray. If you want baptism, we can baptize. If you want—whatever it is you need tonight, there's some preacher here that can minister to you in the name of Jesus."⁸

The audacity of such an assertion is breathtaking. Think about the day of Pentecost. When those people said, "Men and brethren, what shall we do," how did Peter respond? According to Van Dyke, Peter should have said: "Well, we've got the Pharisees in the audience; we've got the Sadducees present; we've got the scribes and lawyers; we've also got the apostles. Don't you think that we can all get together on Solomon's porch and work out something that needs to be done?" How ludicrous!

We know how Peter replied: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38). But Van Dyke said, "Whatever it is you need tonight, there's some preacher here that can minister to you." Peter certainly did not give that kind of invitation.

Consider what Van Dyke said at the close:

We've got people coming to lead us in a time of response, and so I'm just going to issue the invitation. If you want to go where God wants you to go—be what God wants you to be—do what God wants you to do—without concern for who you are but concern only for who he is and where he wants you to go, if there's something missing in your life right now that you think a response in this assembly could supply, then [at that point, the music started—dh] we invite you to come right now. All of these ministers will be down here to receive you. If there's some spiritual need in your life, won't you come right now while we have some music together.⁹ [At that point, the music reached a crescendo and continued—dh].

This event was simply the culmination of what the New Left in the church wants to take place. This has been repeated many times, in

8. Joe Van Dyke at Faith Tabernacle, 1995, tape recording.

9. Ibid.



many places since it first happened. Those in leadership positions within the New Left have been working long and hard to make such meetings a reality. In so doing, the work of numerous brethren falls by the wayside and the cause of Christ suffers.

As we shall see in the course of this study, such positions as those taken by Lucado, Shelly, and Van Dyke affect one's views on fellowship. Given the practices of these men, it should come as no surprise that they are in open fellowship with the denominational world. How different this is from the great preachers of the past. In many cases they had come out of denominationalism and were calling on others to do the same.

This book is an attempt to shine the light of truth upon the New Left in the Lord's church. In so doing, we will enter a different world. It is one in which up is down, and down is up. Or as the great philosopher Humpty Dumpty once put it: "When I choose a word, it means what I want it to mean—nothing more, nothing less." Such seems to summarize the mind-set of the leaders of the New Left.

Each chapter is followed by discussion questions, which are designed to stimulate open conversation in a class setting.

- Chapter 1 asks, "Was Jesus a 'Scholar'?" That is, would He feel right at home among the academic Left—or would He rather speak out against it? What was His nature? How did He view Scripture? The chapter will address these concerns.
- Chapter 2, "How Shall We Interpret the Bible," looks at the nature of Scripture. Believe it or not, there are those among the Left who are questioning the inspiration and inerrancy of God's Word. In answering them, we will examine what the Bible says about itself, and how we should interpret it.
- Chapter 3, "Among the Scholars—Again," details my trip to the 1996 Christian Scholars Conference at David Lipscomb University. It was just as interesting, and enlightening, as my previous excursion to Harding in 1993.
- Chapter 4, "Reflections on Current Problems among Churches of Christ: A Proposal" is the text of what I presented on that occasion.





- Chapter 5 revisits a subject that led to a major division at the beginning of the twentieth century. “‘Instrumental Music Is Not a Salvation Issue’—But We Will Have It, Regardless!” examines the trend among some large congregations to introduce instrumental music in worship—in spite of clear New Testament teaching on the matter.
- Chapter 6, “What about Contemporary ‘Christian’ Music?” The same congregations that introduce the instrument are also employing contemporary “Christian” music in their assemblies, and encouraging all their members to buy and listen to CDs of the same style of music. Is it safe? Close attention will be paid to it.
- Chapter 7 seems to have a strange title, at first blush: “The Holy Spirit, Pope Benedict XVI, and the New Left.” How do they relate? Read the chapter and find out. The issue of how the Holy Spirit works is entwined in the agenda of the New Left. The positions the leaders take on the matter lead them into some curious conclusions. Space will be devoted to just how the Holy Spirit does work today, according to Scripture.
- Chapter 8, “Restoration or Revisionist History,” carefully examines the continuing practice of Leftist historians to revise the history of churches of Christ in America. As is the case with the political Left, the leaders of the current movement within the church have a definite agenda they are pursuing.
- Chapter 9, “The Jesus Seminar,” addresses an issue that is percolating within the religious world in general, and may yet affect the church in the near future—through the New Left. As will be described, the Jesus Seminar attempts to re-explain both who Jesus is and the nature of Scripture. What is currently significant is that the Left has been quiet about it. Could it be that the goals of both dovetail?
- Chapter 10 asks an unusual question: “Is Young Absalom Safe—In His Youth Group?” That is to say, can we continue to assume that all is well within youth groups in our congregations? Given the fact that too many of them are being taken to events that



employ unscriptural worship and that use false teachers, the question is all too relevant.

- Chapter 11 asks, “Do We Have the Right Kind of Love?” Love is important for both the child of God and the local congregation; however, it must be the right kind. The Scriptures instruct us on the kind of love we are to cultivate; it is the case that the New Left’s idea of “love” is far afield from God’s Word.
- Chapter 12, “The Church Needs to Watch,” is an exhortation to all Christians for renewed vigilance in all areas. God uses the analogy of a watchman in Ezekiel 3:17 and 33:7 to encourage the prophet; the principle still holds true today for all Christians. There are many areas that bear watching if the Lord’s church is to be successful in its mission.
- Chapter 13 ends the book on an optimistic note. “Some Reasons for Hope” details encouraging signs within the body of Christ over the past decade. The New Left has apparently not been as successful as it would like to be in transforming the church into just another denomination. While it has made advances, evidence abounds to indicate a note of desperation among the leaders of the movement.



As we begin our journey through the maze of the New Left, we must consider the motivation at work behind its leaders. One must not forget that both the political Left and the Left of the Lord’s church are strikingly similar. Thus, when one comes across the writings of former Leftist leaders of the 1960s who have since turned away from the movement, it is enlightening—simply for the fact that it also sheds some light on the Leftists within the body of Christ.

David Horowitz was a co-founder and editor of *Ramparts* magazine, a Marxist publication of the 1960s. Horowitz, along with others, was present at the inception of the political New Left, and helped to promote its agenda—opposition to the war in Vietnam, support of the Black Panther Party, and other extreme radical causes. However, in the late 1970s a series of events shook his beliefs and helped to begin a transformation. They were the communist Vietnamese government’s invasion of Cambodia, and the subsequent slaughter of two million Cambodians; and the murder of a close friend of Horowitz by





a Black Panther, and the lack of interest in prosecuting the crime. Consequently, in 1984 Horowitz—along with Peter Collier—issued a public statement announcing they were wrong in opposing the war in Vietnam, and called on other Leftists of that era who had “second thoughts” to do the same. For good measure, they announced their support of the re-election of Ronald Reagan—thus making their political transformation complete.

Since then, Horowitz has written a number of books further explaining his philosophical transformation and his take on current political trends—as well as his continued monitoring of his ex-friends of the Left. In 2000 he penned the book *The Politics of Bad Faith*. In it he included a letter addressed to a former mentor, Ralph Miliband, an English Marxist and author of *Parliamentary Socialism*. Notice what Horowitz says, in part:

Our choice of politics was never a matter of partial commitments. To choose the Left was to define a way of being in the world. (For us, the personal was always political.) It was choosing a future in which human beings would finally live as they were meant to live: no longer self-alienated and divided, but equal, harmonious, and whole.

Grandiose as this project was, it was not something we had invented, but the inspiration for a movement that was coterminous with modernity itself . . . This is the true self-vision of the Left: An army of saints on the march against injustice, lacking itself the capacity for evil. The Left sees its revolutions as pillars of fire that light up humanity’s deserts, but burn no civilizations as they pass.¹⁰

Such language well describes some of those at the vanguard of the current movement within churches of Christ. Theirs is a utopian vision—one that attempts to create “Heaven on earth,” while blinded to the damage it causes within congregations. Theirs is an extreme radical outlook. The word *radical* itself has several definitions, some of them positive; as it is used throughout this work, it has a decidedly negative connotation. The extreme change advocated by those on the Left is not scriptural. On the contrary, it is dangerous.

It is hoped that this book will help brethren understand and deal with the problems posed by the New Left. It is my fervent prayer that

10. David Horowitz, *The Politics of Bad Faith* (Touchstone, 2000).



more and more congregations successfully overcome it. In this way the Lord's church can pursue the true mission given by Jesus: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).

—David W. Hester
February 2007





CHAPTER TWO

Was Jesus a “Scholar”?

To ask the above question seems almost farcical. Our Lord, after all, is the Son of God. “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name” (Philippians 2:9). He is far superior to anything or anyone:

Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all (Ephesians 1:21–23).

As deity, He possesses all the characteristics of the other two members of the Godhead—including omnipotence.

However, it seems that some of the leaders of the New Left believe that Jesus is more in tune with academia than the “average” preacher, elder, deacon, or teacher. How often have those who are resistant to radical change in the church been denigrated as not having the spirit of Jesus? Indeed, Web sites abound which affirm that Jesus was Himself a “change agent”! Thus, those at the vanguard of the current movement attempt to co-op Jesus as being on their side; more sympathetic to academic seminars, papers, dissertations, and discussion groups than “out-of-date” gospel meetings in “backwater” congregations with preachers of no academic credentials.

What of it? Does Scripture give any support to such a view? To analyze this properly, one must look at the definition of the word *scholar*. Webster gives three meanings of the word: “One who attends a school of studies under a teacher; one who has done advanced study in a special field, a learned person; a holder of a scholarship.”¹

1. *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, 1991), 1051.