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What's Inside:

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BABEL IN CAPE TOWN THE PARLIAMENT OF WORLD'S RELIGIONS - A POST MORTEM

By Robert R. Zins Jr

WITH MUCH fanfare, the interfaith **Parliament of the World's Religions** (PWR) met in Cape Town, South African from 1-8 December 1999. Their expressed purpose was to bring about a "just, peaceful, and sustainable future." To do so, the PWR endeavoured to promote **"a global ethic for the new millennium."** To quote Bishop William Swing from his book *The Coming United Religions* (which was distributed at the PWR) he said, "Once we have a law or a moral code, we have, indeed, defined right and wrong for ourselves."

As high sounding as the PWR claims may seem, Christians should realise that in spite of its expressed desire to promote peace, the PWR nonetheless rejects the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). It is a pity that Bishop Swing (an

Episcopal from California) and others also ignore the fact that the world has already been given a global ethic; the righteous standard of God's Law-Word as contained in the Bible. Supporters of the PWR repeat the Pharisees' error, for which Jesus rebuked them saying, "...laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men" (Mark 7:8). Only God has the authority to define right and wrong. When men reject right and wrong as defined by God, and then seek to define right and wrong on their own terms, they are most certainly in rebellion against God and set themselves up to be a god. That is idolatry.

Unity at the expense of truth

IT COULD BE SAID of most (if not all) of the PWR supporters that they were united by an

overarching Religious Humanism. In one session attended mostly by people identifying themselves as from the Roman Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant "traditions," all were in agreement on embracing a unifying vision for mankind. The facilitator, a Roman Catholic, quoted an esteemed colleague who once said in regard to obstacles to unity, **"the only problem that we have is our Scriptures."** At the PWR there was a willingness to put aside Scripture so that God's Truth would not interfere with man's attempt at unity. Having come to the position that "man is the measure of all things," they would then tolerate everyone having a little compartment in life called "personal religious tradition." Anyone is welcomed in the PWR interfaith circle so long as one doesn't allow his or her particular religious "tradition" to interfere with Religious

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Humanism. Religious leaders at the PWR prided themselves on not being held captive by their Scripture. Human Reason was lifted up as being supreme and all other distinctions were blurred.

Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve! During numerous sessions at the PWR, professing Christians prayed together with Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and those involved in witchcraft (both African Traditional and Witchcraft) ...all asked God's blessing on their efforts in facilitating world peace.

Should Christians be involved with the PWR in order to promote world peace in this way? Well, consider an example from the Old Testament. Most people would agree that a three-year drought is a pretty serious problem, especially in a society dependent on agricultural produce. Yet when Israel suffered a three-year drought during the reign of the ungodly King Ahab and Queen Jezebel, the prophet Elijah did not pray together with the prophets of Baal and Asherah. Elijah's God was different from the false gods worshiped by the prophets of Baal and Asherah. No, Elijah confronted them and opposed them (1 Kings 18). Drought is a serious problem, but drought was not the Israelites' most serious problem. Their most serious problem was **idolatry!** Now let's consider the Parliament of the World's Religions

and its goal of peace. Today, war is not man's most serious problem. Idolatry and rebellion against God continue to be man's main problem! As noble as the task of "promoting world peace" may sound to the natural man, Christians are not to compromise the truth of the Gospel even if they somehow think that it may be promoting world peace. Whatever peace might be gained through such efforts, it will be short-lived as God's judgement will hang over those people who have rejected Him.

Another Gospel

AT THE PWR, what was the theological slant of those who professed to be from a so-called "Christian tradition"? Dr. James W. Perkinson, a theologian from the United States, presented a lecture entitled, "Soteriological Humility: The Christological Significance of the Humanity of Jesus in the Encounter of Religions." Therein he put forth the proposition that when the Syro-Phoenician woman answered Jesus saying, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs under the table eat from the children's crumbs" (Mark 7:28) that she actually put Jesus in His place and instructed Him in some earthly wisdom which He somehow lacked! And Dr. Perkinson's application of the passage was that, if Jesus was sufficiently humble to learn from a Syro-Phoenician woman, perhaps Christians ought to be humble to learn from other religions today. During a period of open discussion, it became evident that nearly all the attendees embraced Dr. Perkinson's conclusions.

I asked Dr. Perkinson: as the title of his lecture had to do with "Soteriology" (the doctrine of salvation) and "Christology" (the doctrine of Jesus Christ), why did he neglect to address the mediatorial role of Jesus Christ as proclaimed by the apostle Paul, "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all..." (1 Timothy 2:5). Dr. Perkinson replied that he rejected the apostle Paul's interpretation of the Gospel. (It should be pointed out that enemies of the Gospel usually do begin their attack with the writings of the apostle

Paul). He said that it would be wrong to suggest that Paul's interpretation was the only right one. Dr. Perkinson denied that salvation is through faith alone, and said pertaining to obtaining salvation, what we do (works) is more important than what we believe (faith). I responded by saying that the sort of Jesus which he presented is one that the natural sinful man could easily accept, and such a view of Jesus would prevent man from coming to terms with the real Jesus of Scripture. I also asserted that "definitely one positive effect of holding to the apostle Paul's interpretation of the Gospel (as Dr. Perkinson called it), is that it prevents man from making himself God." Dr. Perkinson did not reply.

A Sleight of Hand

AT THE PWR it was often insinuated that to actively engage in proselytising (especially for Christians to do so) is something that is unacceptable. To speak of having been converted from a false religion, to faith in Jesus Christ, is something that is anathema to the interfaith movement. They would say, "We are not asking anyone to abandon or let go of their particular religious tradition. We just want everyone to embrace what the PWR stands for". Yet the over arching Religious Humanism of the PWR was very subtle. Consider this illustration: imagine holding your Bible with both hands. Someone says to you, "I'm not asking you to let go of your Bible, I'm just asking you to take hold of this rock." If you let go of the Bible with one hand in order to grab hold of the rock, well your hold of the Bible was compromised. For the Christian, to simply acknowledge PWR as a body with authority to formulate a "Global Ethic" is to compromise the faith. It is to reject Jesus Christ as the Lord.

"Why do the nations rage and the people plot a vain thing?" (Psalm 2:1). At a special three-day Parliament Assembly at the PWR, participants were to endorse a document entitled "A Call to Our Guiding Institutions," an ethical document to be delivered to all the nations of the world. The Parliament Assembly consisted of about 800

people who had been hand picked over the past three years. In effect it was a parliament within a parliament. At the time there was no way of even knowing who was in the Parliament Assembly as no listing was available. In the opinion of one commentator, the hundreds of lectures and symposia, the many delegates, and the parliament itself were a smokescreen, the real work being done by the Council of the Parliament of the World's Religions (CPWR).

"The Call to Guidance," approved in a closed session of the PWR, is a statement of goals for the future, to which all nations of the world are intended to conform. The PWR hopes to influence all areas of life with their "Call to Guidance" including Religious organisations, Government, Agriculture, Labour, Industry and Commerce, Education, Arts and Communications Media, International Intergovernmental Organisations.

"The Call to Guidance" is based on the earlier document, "Towards a Global Ethic" which was presented at the 1993 PWR. The 1993 document is said to have been based on four universal directives that are the basis for a "global ethic." They are: 1) do not kill, 2) do not steal, 3) do not lie, 4) do not commit sexual immorality.

Christians might be conned into thinking that there might be something good here. It appears that these four points coincide with the sixth, eighth, ninth, and seventh commandments found in Exodus Chapter 20. However it should be pointed out that the terms "kill," "steal," "lie," and "sexual immorality" as understood by the PWR differ from historical Biblical Christianity. Also it should be noted that the six remaining commandments from Exodus Chapter 20 are ignored. It is no wonder that the first, second, and third commandments are conveniently forgotten, as a number of the PWR participants falsely promote themselves as being Deity! Even though the PWR seems to embrace four commandments, their application falls short of the rendering in Exodus. For example: The global ethic says "do not kill," yet they see nothing wrong with the killing of the innocent unborn through abortion.

The global ethic says "do not steal," yet they promote socialism, which is legalised theft and stealing by proxy. The global ethic says "do not lie," yet they promote the lie that all religions are equally valid ways to God. The global ethic says, "do not commit sexual immorality," yet they promote homosexuality. Christians who join together with the PWR commit spiritual adultery, as it was also written of the Israelites **"For the spirit of harlotry has caused them to stray and they have played the harlot against their God"** (Hosea 4:12).

Interfaith Implications for South Africa?

IN A LECTURE entitled "Religious and Cultural Restoration in Post-Apartheid South Africa," Pundit D. H. Maharaj (a Hindu) made mention of how the European settlers brought with them Christianity and suppressed the traditional beliefs and practices of the African people. The Christians, he said, had an unacceptable attitude of religious superiority. He asserted that one shouldn't think that their religion is superior to another. So I asked him, whether he thought that his belief, that people should not think their religion superior to others, is superior to Christianity. No response. Then I asked him, in his view, was it wrong for the British to outlaw *sati*, the Hindu practice of widow burning. He brushed off the question saying that *sati* was not widely practiced!!! (Yet, no doubt it was significant to the hundreds of thousands of poor women who were burned alive.) Mr. Maharaj emphasised again that traditional beliefs and practices ought to be restored. This theme was repeated by a number of other speakers at the PWR.

I voiced my concern that in "the new South Africa" many laws are being implemented which are contrary to Biblical moral principles. The perpetrators usually justify their actions as their efforts to dismantle Apartheid. The problem is that, failing to distinguish between Christianity and Apartheid, they would do away with both. In effect, in "the new South Africa" we have a phenomenon that "the baby is being thrown out with the bath water." It would not be an

overstatement to say that, those in government who are also opposed to a genuine Christian faith, endeavor to use the interfaith movement to drive a wedge between the Gospel of Jesus Christ and black South Africans.

The 1999 Parliament of World's Religions did not go unchallenged. Christians all over the world were praying that the efforts of the PWR would come to naught. The overall character of the PWR was one of confusion; numerous meetings were cancelled or venues changed. The PWR marches were a flop, partly due to the fact that many of the participants had come from the Northern Hemisphere winter season to arrive in Cape Town at the beginning of summer. Yet cooler weather on Table Mountain discouraged other PWR participants from taking to the mountain to practice their idolatry. The beating of drums and a trance dance were cancelled. The PWR organisers anticipated 8,000 participants, yet only 4000 actually showed up.

Missionaries and staff of UCA member organisations were involved with literature distribution and personal evangelism along with dozens of other Christians from local churches. Thousands of Gospel tracts and Scripture booklets were handed out to delegates and passers-by.

False Prophets Speak

ON THE LAST DAY of the PWR the Dalai Lama addressed the plenary session audience numbering approximately 4,000. Behind him sat dozens of leaders from the various belief systems represented at the PWR. The Dalai Lama emphasised a new global ethic that he said everyone should promote. Where is this global ethic to be found? He said that good moral values are supposedly inherent within all people and that moral values must be taught outside the context of a specific religion. He said that as a Buddhist, he must not promote Buddhism, but rather this global ethic.

Yet as Christians, in submission to God's Word, we come to learn what is righteousness in the eyes of Almighty God. For the Christian,

ethics must be solidly rooted in the Law-Word of God as revealed in the Bible.

After the Dalai Lama spoke, a Jew, a Sangoma (an African witch-doctor), a Muslim, and a theologian from Chicago were asked to lead the assembly in prayer and to solicit God's blessings. Who would they pray to? The theologian from Chicago began his prayer with, "God! Our mother and our father..." By that time the entire interfaith abomination had carried on way too long. While positioned near the front row, I shouted at the theologian from Chicago, "Balaam speaks" (Balaam being something of a *prophet for hire* in Numbers chapters 22-24). Then to the blind spiritual leaders of the PWR I shouted, "Prophets of Baal." The PWR officials didn't take kindly to that and I was escorted out the front door. As Christians, while we have the freedom to speak the truth, we had better do so. If we don't, the day will come when our freedoms will be taken away.

How should Christians respond to the efforts of the PWR? First we

continue to make true disciples for Jesus Christ; men and women who hold fast to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, who are not ashamed of the Gospel, and who are faithful to obey all that Jesus Christ has commanded. As Christians, we must endeavour to apply God's Word to all areas of life, and to remain vigilant against anyone who brings "a different gospel."

Secondly we must expose the wolves in sheep's clothing who would lead their churches into the interfaith abomination. In South Africa the following churches were listed as co-sponsors of the 1999 Parliament of the World's Religions: Catholic Archdiocese of Cape Town, Church of the Province of Southern Africa, Methodist Church of Southern Africa, Moravian Church of SA, New Apostolic Church, and Rhema Ministries - as listed on page 10 of the 1999 PWR program booklet.) If you are in a church that supports the PWR, make your objections known to the leadership and work to get your church out of the abominable interfaith movement. If the denomination hierarchy refuses to separate themselves from the interfaith

movement, then Christians should separate themselves from the wolves in sheep's clothing.

"Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God...Come out from among them and be separate..." (2 Cor 4:14-17)

Sola Deo Gloria

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