

Protestant Church Pushes Billboard Quoting God's Approval on Gay Rights

A church in New South Wales is attracting international attention with an unconventional sign and its views on homosexuality.

Father Rod Bower of the Anglican parish of Gosford announced his support of gay rights in 2011 with an outdoor sign that read, "Supporting marriage equality." Now a photo of a recent sign has gone viral.

Bower posted a photo on the church's Facebook page of their sign, which reads, "Dear Christians / Some people are gay / Get over it / Love God," on July 23. It has gotten nearly 7,500 likes and more than 4,000 shares.

"Normally one of my posts might get a few thousand views, but nothing like this," Bower said in an article from Australian newspaper *The Telegraph*.

"This has gone international now—there are people liking it all over the world, and it is just a little sign in Gosford."

There have been a handful of negative responses, but Bower says reactions were overall positive.

"I have had a number of phone calls and ran into people who have said, 'Good on you; this is really great,' also," he commented. "I think it shows that it's an important issue and that a lot of people have spiritual questions that are not being met by traditional forms of Christianity."

Still, some are concerned about the church's support of the homosexual lifestyle.

“We live in scary times when a church supposedly under the banner of the bible rewrites Gods word in a manner that it appears to come from God himself,” Tiffany McClymont Braund wrote in response to the photo. “What is even more baffling is how they can make light of a situation that God saw serious enough to sacrifice his own Son for atonement of such immense sin.”

Matt Hendricks commented, “I don’t agree with the sign, Not because of me but what the bible says. Yes we can help them but we meant to lead them to Christ and they must repent and live a new life. No longer in sin.”

The Anglican priest says he put the sign up to show the community there is more than one way to approach gay rights.

“The conservative view is not the only view,” he explains. “Marriage equality is a hot issue at the moment, and it seems the church is struggling to get over this issue.”

After Trayvon Martin Tragedy, Pastors Vow To Drive Reconciliation

I’ve written numerous times about the tragic death of Trayvon Martin, who was killed 2.3 miles from my office. So this is personal to me.

In the aftermath of the verdict in the trial of George Zimmerman, an amazing thing has happened. While there has been racial unrest all over the country, there has been none in the city of Sanford, Fla., where the incident occurred.

I repeat—no violence, no looting and no arson, despite the strong feelings here and the fact that violence was predicted.

I believe one of the reasons is because pastors and other Christian leaders met and prayed and formed relationships and worked together to keep the peace.

On Wednesday, I had the privilege of hosting a group of these pastors in a four-hour meeting in which we discussed these issues and talked about what's ahead. We believe Sanford still has problems and that there is deep institutional racism in our city and in the country. But we also believe something good has happened with the relationships that have been formed and the progress that has been made.

We also issued the Sanford Declaration, which you can read below.

We are now inviting you to participate in a movement across the country to get churches and pastors involved in learning to be racially sensitive and to end injustice and institutional racism wherever it exists. That's because this problem is not a political problem. It's a sin problem. It's spiritual in nature and must be dealt with in the spiritual realm.

Please read the Sanford Declaration below and sign it, and encourage others to sign it here.

The media has taken notice of our efforts. Our meeting was on the front page of the *Orlando Sentinel* and was covered by nearly all of the local television outlets. Now we are asking leaders from around the nation to initiate meetings just like this. Leaders from Atlanta, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., Denver, Colorado and Toledo, Ohio, attended to see our model and have committed to hold similar meetings in the next few weeks. We have a vision for meetings in New York, Chicago, Dallas, Houston, St. Louis, Boston, Seattle, San Francisco and many other cities where there is a similar need.

A young Sanford pastor, Derrick Gay, who was part of our April 2012 documentary, *Sanford: The Untold Story*, is leading this effort with the help of other local leaders. If you want to be a part of it, you can email him at @.

We call on Christians around the country to meet and develop statements for their own communities. We also encourage clergy and individual Christians to sign the Sanford Declaration, a covenant of racial reconciliation, relationship and Christian cultural reformation. Sign your name as supporting these principles. Together we can show the world that Christians care and that we want to deal with the spiritual roots of racism in our culture.

Special note: Can you help us in this effort for racial understanding in America? As this movement develops, there will be costs involved. We are working with our non-profit partner Christian Life Missions to make these meetings happen. We need partners to stand with us financially to cover these costs in the future.

Please send a check of any size to Christian Life Missions, 600 Rinehart Road, Lake Mary, Fla., 32746. Mark it for racial reconciliation. You can also pay by phone during business hours at , or by PayPal by clicking here.

The Sanford Declaration: A Covenant of Racial Reconciliation, Relationship, and Christian Cultural Reformation

In the aftermath of the George Zimmerman verdict, and the need to address racism as a spiritual problem, a diverse group of Christian ministers and leaders drafted the following declaration in Sanford, Florida.

Today this group of ministers and leaders stands as representatives of the gospel of Jesus Christ and His church. We see racism as a threat to the Body of Christ and our mission to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19). The focus of our collective activities the next few years is to

form relationships in order to end expressed racism within the church and society. By doing so, we will lead the way for the rest of our nation to rise above the crippling specter of racism in our culture. Our scriptural guideline for these activities comes from the Apostle Paul's words in Ephesians 4:15 read as follows: "Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ."

We believe that God has gifted us and millions yet to be called to minister for Him in this regard. We believe that God works in the lives of chosen men and women. Further, we believe that the Lord uses His appointed leaders to transform history. We believe that the key to ending racism in the United States and in other nations lies in Christians developing and promoting genuine relationships among each other – just as it is being done in Sanford, Florida since the spring of 2012. As a result, Sanford did not experience the rioting, looting, and violence that other regions did after the July 2013 George Zimmerman not guilty verdict. Additionally, Christians should develop intentional relationships that will result from "living life together," thereby manifesting in some of the following:

1. Pulpit exchanges between Church families
2. Joint leadership and family retreats.
3. Cross-cultural evangelism of other races.
4. Multi-racial church planting and development.
5. Cross-cultural home mission projects in the local metropolitan areas to assist in
 - Lifting families out of generational poverty.
 - Motivating at risk black, white, Asian, and Hispanic youths (especially males) in developing a sense of personal respect, destiny and worthwhile goals.
 - Developing minority, university scholarship programs and

entrepreneurial opportunities

6. Other creative local programs that will be developed locally.

7. Lay a foundation for change with prayer and intercession.

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Chinese Underground Church Leader Samuel Lamb Dies

Every Sunday after the service, Chinese pastor Samuel Lamb (also known as Samuel Lam) invited foreign guests into his office and immediately began to tell the story of his life, which he summarized in the one “holy principle” of “more persecution, more growth.”

He experienced Communist oppression and spent more than 20 years in prison. He also experienced God’s response: an amazing growth of the church in China, now estimated at 80 million. Lamb became a hero of the Christian faith for millions of believers inside and outside China.

He passed away on Saturday at the age of 88.

Lamb (*Lin Xiangiao* in Chinese) was born in a mountainous area overlooking Macau. His father pastored a small Baptist church, and he was raised as a Christian. Lamb was arrested during one of the first big waves of persecution in Mao’s China and was

held in prison from 1955 to 1957.

The Chinese authorities sentenced him a second time in 1958. He spent 20 gruesome years in labor camps, where he mostly worked in coal mines. Despite the harsh punishments, Lamb continued to teach.

The main reason Lamb was targeted by the government was his refusal to merge his illegal house church into the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, the state-led Protestant Church. The government used to forbid Christian leaders to preach about the second coming of Christ and to teach minors under 18 years old. China basically made the state church evolve around the state and not around God.

In 1979, Lamb restarted his house church in 35 Da Ma Zhan in Guangzhou. Attendance grew quickly, and he moved his congregation to a bigger building in the same city. Now his urban house church is still unregistered but tolerated by the authorities. The church has over 4,000 attendees each week with four services.

Lamb's theology challenged the government, the attendees of his church as well as other believers inside and outside China. He taught that Christians should obey the government unless those leaders directly oppose God with their law enforcement. "The laws of God are more important than the laws of man," he said.

Suffering played an important part in many of Lamb's sermons. He repeated "more persecution, more growth." That phrase had not only to do with numbers of believers, but also with spiritual growth.

"I can understand Job's victories and Job's defeats," he often said. "It taught me that grumbling does not help—not against God and not against those who persecuted me. My dear wife died while I was in prison. I was not allowed to attend her funeral. It was like an arrow of the Almighty, until I

Influenced by Western Funds, Suggests Anglican Archbishop

Retired Archbishop Desmond Tutu's recent comments in support of the gay agenda have drawn fire from colleagues, including a statement by an African archbishop that Tutu may have accepted gratuities to do so.

Anglican Archbishop Yinkah Sarfo of Ghana strongly condemned Tutu over his comments, in which Tutu declared he would not worship a God who is homophobic, adding, "I would refuse to go to a homophobic heaven. ... I mean, I would much rather go to the other place [hell]."

The Anglican archbishop was speaking at a United Nations' Gay Rights Campaign function in Cape Town, South Africa, recently.

"Archbishop Tutu is respected in the Anglican church and around the world, but this time he has misfired, and all Anglican bishops from Africa, Asia and South America condemn his statement in no uncertain terms," Sarfo told Ghana's *Adom News*.

Sarfo said Tutu's comments were not the stand of the entire Anglican communion, which is increasingly led by traditionalist voices from the global south that adhere to a more conservative theological perspective.

"We [other African bishops] suspect that retired Archbishop Tutu may have collected some moneys from some of the Western governments or from gay rights activists to do their bidding, but the Anglican Church condemns gay practice," Sarfo said.

Tutu is not the first South African Anglican bishop to make statements that are not in accord with more traditional Christians. In a 2008 Christmas message, archbishop of Southern Africa Thabo Makgoba infamously declared, "Jesus is

like a ‘bucketful of God’”—a statement seemingly at odds with church teaching about Christ being the exact imprint of God’s character in whom “the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.”

Jeff Walton, the Anglican program director for the Institute on Religion and Democracy, also condemned Tutu’s statements.

“Tutu’s declaration demands that God operate on his terms,” Walton says. “Tutu’s god is one that many will recognize—an idealized version of ourselves times 2 or 3. God operates on a whole different standard of holiness beyond this self-constructed deity.

“Tutu never speaks for the majority of Anglicans in Africa. The center of Anglican leadership on the continent has moved to countries like Nigeria and Kenya. Apart from Tutu’s dismissiveness, African Anglicans are very interested in spending eternity with God and want their neighbors to share in that, too.

“African Anglicans have quickly become the majority voice in the Anglican communion. They focus on evangelism and discipleship, seeking to win souls for Christ rather than prioritize earthly political ambitions.”

How ‘World’s Hottest Porn Star’ Found God

Jenna Presley was known as the world’s hottest porn star, with starring roles in more than 275 movies. Now, a year after accepting Christ, she is using her real name—Brittini Ruiz—and talking about her journey.

Ruiz, now 26, was in the adult film industry for seven years. At the height of her success, she filmed up to three sex scenes per day. She eventually turned to drugs and alcohol to cope with her tumultuous life and career, and even attempted suicide several times.

In a video from XXXChurch, Ruiz sits down with church member Rachel Collins—whom Ruiz had met at pornography conventions—and explains how she began her career at 18, how she started to spiral downward, and what led to her transformation in Christ.

A Prayer for a Nation in Rebellion

Father God, Son and Holy Spirit, Maker of heaven and earth, You are the First Cause of these United States of America. You are the Author of all that is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy.

Nearly 2 1/2 centuries ago, our American founders declared earthly independence. By Your prompting, they determined it necessary to “dissolve the political bands which [had] connected them with another, and [assumed] among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God”—Your laws—“entitle[d] them.”

They further held “these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator”—endowed by You—“with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

In the same breath, they both declared independence from every

world power and acknowledged, with crystal clarity, that this great nation was, is and forever shall be dependent upon Your providential blessings and mercies.

The time is once again at hand, King Jesus.

Please hear our prayer.

Lord, today we reaffirm both our temporal independence—our national sovereignty—and our eternal dependence upon You and Your supreme sovereignty.

You are the great I Am. You spoke into being the heavens and the earth and all that exists therein.

Today we reject the globalist temptation to become unequally yoked, while at once declaring, yet again, that our United States can continue to flourish solely at Your pleasure.

We echo Benjamin Franklin's request for prayer after the first Constitutional Convention reached a perilous impasse. "[T]he longer I live," he observed, "the more convincing proofs I see of this truth—that God Governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his aid? We have been assured, Sir, in the sacred writings, that 'except the Lord build the House they labor in vain that build it.' I firmly believe this."

We firmly believe this.

Father, rebuild this house upon Your rock.

For America labors in vain.

As surely as Your benevolent fingers hold together the fabric of the universe, it is by Your grace and Your grace alone that a nation in rebellion can endure.

We are a nation in rebellion.

How, then, shall we endure?

For You are just.

And Your justice demands judgment.

We have entered judgment.

This is just.

We have sown seeds of wickedness, Lord Jesus.

And for this we repent.

We confess our national sins and entreat Your forgiveness. We confess our arrogance. We confess our selfishness. We confess that we have broken—and continue to break—the laws of nature and of nature's God. We have rejected Your laws and have embraced our own fallen impulses and called them laws.

We confess that we, the church, have abdicated our duty to care for those who cannot care for themselves. We have surrendered this sacred calling to Caesar—to a woefully ill-equipped and wholly inept federal fiefdom.

Kyrie Eleison. (Lord, have mercy.)

We confess we have shed blood en masse. The blood of the innocents runs in our streets. We have violated Your commandments. We have slaughtered tens of millions of Your children—woven together by Your perfect hands—and called this evil “choice.”

Kyrie Eleison.

We confess we have perverted Your design for human sexuality. We have taken sins that You deem “abominable” and called them “equality.” We have mocked marriage, spurred divorce, scorned purity, glorified promiscuity, sexualized our children, belittled our stay-at-home mothers, stunted natural reproduction and called it all “liberation.”

Kyrie Eleison.

Your Word tells us that “the wages of sin is death.” Indeed, as died many once-mighty, hard-fallen nations before us, justice demands we reap a yield most destructive.

And we may yet.

Even still, we implore You to suspend sentence. For these and manifold sins, hitherto unnamed, of both act and omission—individual and corporate—we beg Your forgiveness, Lord Jesus.

Because though we are not, You yet remain faithful. You have promised: “If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (2 Chron. 7:14).

America was called by Your holy name.

Though the hour is late, we now fall to our face, humble ourselves, pray and seek Your face.

Lord, though our public policy may lag behind, we nonetheless turn from our wicked ways.

Hear us from heaven, oh Lord.

Forgive us our sins.

Please heal our land.

We declare, once again, America’s dependence upon You, King Jesus.

Kyrie Eleison.

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Atheists Demand US Remove Lincoln's 'God' Quotes From US Passports

When an angry atheist group like the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) goes after something like the Holocaust memorial because it includes a Star of David, they do it because they hate anything to do with our Judeo-Christian heritage and to get in the public spotlight.

When groups like the American Atheists pile on with an anti-Semitic diatribe, for example, telling Fox News, "It's important that we not give the Holocaust to just the Jews," they do it for the same reason—to grab a piece of the spotlight.

But as soon as they have that spotlight, they rush to the absurd (as if that's not absurd enough). Their answer to everything they don't like or that offends one of their members is to make as if it never existed. If two intersecting steel beams were discovered in the midst of a national tragedy and really brought solace to real people, they say you have to hide it from the public and pretend like it didn't happen—that it doesn't exist. (See the Ground Zero Cross.)

If a memorial was raised by World War II veterans six decades ago to resemble statues that actually meant something to these war heroes as they fought for freedom across Europe, they say tear it down; the fact that it happened hurts their feelings. (See the WWII memorial in Montana.)

The FFRF's newest target (using its renewed infamy to delve deeper into the bizarre) are quotes from famous people. That's

right. Abraham Lincoln shouldn't have mentioned God in his speeches. Thomas Jefferson's lauded quotations need to be whitewashed of their religious references. And Martin Luther King Jr.—well, you had better cross out his references to God. The logic is unfathomable.

The quotes in question are apparently found on U.S. passports. Here are a few examples:

- “That this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom.” —Gettysburg Address by Abraham Lincoln
- “The God who gave us life, gave us liberty at the same time.” —Jefferson Memorial, Thomas Jefferson
- “We have a great dream. It started way back in 1776, and God grant that America will be true to her dream.” —Martin Luther King Jr.

You can't make this stuff up.

FFRF is demanding that the U.S. State Department remove these quotes—which were actually said by real national heroes at historically significant moments about pivotal events in our nation's history.

This is the apex of absurdity. If a person mentions God, we have to remove what they said from history?

These angry atheists' attempt to whitewash history belies logic; it teeters on insanity. Yet their attempts cannot be ignored. As Orwell said, “Who controls the past ... controls the future.”

Sadly enough, we predicted these groups would go after each of these things. When we compiled “The Complete Idiot's Guide to Protecting American Atheists” two years ago, we listed nearly 40 iconic, historically significant memorials, inscriptions and references to our religious history as a nation. In fact, we listed quotes from the Gettysburg Address, the Jefferson Memorial and the MLK memorial now under attack.

These angry atheist groups are as predictable as they are wrong.

The First Amendment is not a mandate to whitewash history. The Constitution is not a manual for the cleansing and expulsion of religious references from public life.

FFRF's co-president Annie Lauri Gaylor inaccurately asserts, "The United States is governed under a secular and godless Constitution," as if the Constitution itself were an atheist manifesto. The Supreme Court has long debunked this premise, specifically holding that to follow that legal argument "would be to find in the Constitution a requirement that the government show a callous indifference to religious groups. *That would be preferring those who believe in no religion over those who do believe*" (emphasis added).

The Constitution requires no such thing.

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Is African Charismatic Christianity a Counterfeit?

For the last several weeks, I have been asked for my response to an article posted on the Grace to You website by Conrad Mbewe, pastor of the Kabwata Baptist Church in Zambia and one of the speakers at Pastor John MacArthur's upcoming Strange Fire conference. According to the article, which is entitled "Why Is the Charismatic Movement Thriving in Africa?" this movement is not a powerful visitation of the Holy Spirit.

Rather, "We need to sound the warning that this is not Christianity."

Not Christianity? Really?

Now, had Pastor Mbewe said, "I praise God for the wonderful things that He is doing throughout Africa by His Spirit, but there are serious errors that need to be addressed," I would have said, "Amen," to many of his concerns. In fact, charismatic leaders in Africa are addressing these problems as well.

Unfortunately, Pastor Mbewe, just like many other anti-charismatic leaders, fails to see the extraordinary forest because of some very bad trees.

He distinguishes the modern charismatic movement in Africa from "the old conservative form of Pentecostalism once represented by the Assemblies of God churches," claiming that the new movement is spreading like wildfire because it "has not challenged the African religious worldview but has instead adopted it."

But this is a gross overstatement. Rather, as noted by J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, Ph.D., professor of contemporary African Christianity and Pentecostal/charismatic theology in Africa at the Trinity Theological Seminary, Accra, Ghana, "Pentecostalism is a response to ... cerebral Christianity and wherever it has appeared the movement has defined itself in terms of the recovery of the experiential aspects of the faith by demonstrating the power of the Spirit to infuse life, and the ability of the living presence of Jesus Christ to save from sin and evil.

"The ministries of healing and deliverance have thus become some of the most important expressions of Christianity in African Pentecostalism. Much of the worldviews underlying the practice of healing and deliverance, especially the belief in mystical causality, resonates with African philosophical

thoughts.”

As expressed to me by evangelist Daniel Kolenda, Reinhard Bonnke’s successor, “The Western brand of stale, cold, theoretic and purely cerebral Christianity that Africans have been offered by many of the [Western] evangelical denominations is laughable to them. For Africans, their faith must have real-world consequences or it is worthless.”

Put another way, since Africans see the spiritual realm and natural realm as one, and since they don’t need to be convinced about the reality of demonic spirits, if Jesus is really the Savior, then He also saves from sickness and demonic powers.

At the same time, Pastor Mbewe is absolutely right that many traditional, worldly practices and mindsets have been incorporated into African charismatic Christianity. What he fails to mention, however, is that some of these same errors are found in African evangelical churches as well—although, to be sure, the vast majority of evangelical churches in Africa practice the spiritual gifts as well—and, as noted by Kolenda, “Many of those who are speaking the loudest against these heresies are the Pentecostals and charismatics!”

What, then, are some of the most serious abuses? Pastor Mbewe claims that in “the African Charismatic circles, the ‘man of God’ has replaced the witchdoctor,” endued with special powers and breaking through the barriers of the demonic world and ancestral spirits, which “is also why the heresy of generation curses has become so popular.”

Although somewhat overstated, this is a real problem, and so when the people are not experiencing divine blessing, they run to the “man of God” to pray for them, giving these leaders a stranglehold over the people. It is the man of God who can bring the “breakthrough,” because of which, Pastor Mbewe points out elsewhere, this form of Christianity threatens the

important New Testament teaching of the priesthood of every believer.

Another charismatic minister involved in Bible school training in several African nations pointed out to me that “the preachers started to live like kings while the people that attend the churches live in abject poverty. Being a preacher became an occupation, not a divine calling. And now some even have private jets whilst their people are burying their dead because they couldn’t afford a doctor.”

But to repeat yet again, these abuses are being addressed by many charismatic leaders as well, and they are the loud, ugly, glaring exceptions rather than the general rule.

They should absolutely be addressed and exposed and corrected, but they should not be taken as an indictment of African charismatic Christianity as a whole, God forbid, nor should they distract from what God is doing in Africa. (Remember that Paul didn’t reject what the Spirit was doing among the Corinthians. Rather, he praised them for excelling in the gifts and then corrected the errors in their midst.)

As for the so-called “heresy of generation curses,” this teaching can obviously be exaggerated and exploited, but the Scriptures do teach that generational curses exist (see, for example, 1 Samuel 2:27-33), and in a continent like Africa, which is full of ancestor worship, it is not farfetched to think that certain demonic, generational curses need to be broken off of people’s lives. Is it right to brand this a heresy?

There’s something else we need to consider, and that is the extent to which we have baptized Christianity into our own American culture, equating size and prestige with spiritual success and running the church like a business. (Another distinctly American Christian error is mistaking patriotism for the kingdom of God.)

And just as some African charismatics have morphed the witchdoctor into the “man of God,” we have morphed the megachurch pastor into the CEO and superstar, the almost infallible guide whose every word is to be followed and who does most of our scriptural thinking for us. So much for the priesthood of every believer! (It has been pointed out that preachers in the Reformation, wearing robes and ascending their lofty pulpits, did not sufficiently break with the Roman Catholic model of ministry.)

Turning back to Africa, Pastor Mbewe writes that “prayer in the modern Charismatic movement in Africa is literally a fight. In fact, the people praying are called ‘prayer warriors’.” And that’s why so much time is spent in the prayer meetings rebuking Satan and demons in Jesus’ name, with people shouting and praying fervently. Yes, he writes, “This is nothing more than the African traditional religious worldview sprinkled with a thin layer of Christianity.”

Again, it is certainly a serious error to focus on Satan as much as (or more than!) God or to be more demon conscious than Jesus conscious (even remotely so), but it is also true that there is a time for intimate fellowship with God as well as a time for fervent, even warring prayer, in keeping with verses that speak of spiritual warfare and of striving in prayer (see, for example, Ephesians 6:10-19; Romans 15:30; Luke 22:44; and 2 Corinthians 10:3-4). And what’s wrong with the concept of “prayer warriors”?

Pastor Mbewe also claims that the main leaders in the movement “survive on a few, well-worn, tortured verses. ... There is absolutely no effort to properly exegete Scripture. Rather, by chanting phrases and making people drop under some trance, in witchdoctor fashion, they are holding sway over the popular mind.” He wonders why others are not seeing this or sounding the alarm, stating, “For the love of crowds, we have allowed African traditional religion to enter the church through the back door.”

And so he states emphatically, "This is not Christianity. It does not lead to heaven. It is a thin coating over the religion that has been on African soil for time immemorial, which Christianity was meant to replace. We have lost the Christian faith while we are holding the Bible in our hands and using some of its words. This is really sad."

As for the "men of God" who lay hands on the congregants every week, he says they "are imposters and must be rejected with the contempt they deserve."

Really, it is blanket statements like this that are so dangerous and inaccurate, leading readers to make their own, equally erroneous statements, such as: "How tragic that the church people of Africa have been duped into apostasy." Or this: "I think the charismatic movement should not waste their time debating cessationists, but rather take the time to fix the devastating effects they have had on Africa as a whole." (These comments were posted on the Charisma News and Grace to You websites.)

In reality, as noted in a Pew Research report, "The share of the population that is Christian in sub-Saharan Africa climbed from 9 percent in 1910 to 63 percent in 2010."

This is absolutely extraordinary and represents one of the greatest advances of the gospel in history, and almost all of this growth is charismatic in nature. Yet because of some abuses, many of which reflect the immaturity of the movement, this glorious work of God that has resulted in tens of millions of Africans coming to faith in Jesus is being rejected and scorned.

As for the very real weaknesses that do exist, as one of my colleagues heavily involved in African ministry expressed, how much better it would have been had Pastor Mbewe recognized, "If we have the gift of teaching, we should lovingly serve those who need it, instead of alienating them when they are

giving God the best they know, and they have some real strengths too.”

And perhaps we in the West could learn from some of their strengths.

As Kolenda notes, “Some of the finest, strongest and most sincere Christians I have ever met anywhere in the world are in Africa. I personally know families who have lost family members who gave their lives as martyrs because of their confession of Christ. Many of the Africans Christians that I know have a faith in Christ so strong that it would put most Western Christians to shame. Their faith, humility and love for the Lord is an indictment of the indifference and unbelief so prevalent in the Western church.”

One of my American friends hosted a pastor from Ghana who was visiting for a few weeks, and after attending several church services—after which the people inevitably went out for a meal together—the pastor said, “Now I see why nothing is happening in your churches! You spend all your time feasting; we spend ours praying and fasting.”

Some of the finest students we have ever trained in our ministry schools have been African charismatic believers, marked by their devotion to Jesus, their passion for the lost, their willingness to sacrifice for the gospel, their solid lives of prayer and their hearts for holiness.

As noted by Professor Asamoah-Gyadu, *“The foremost theological emphasis of Pentecostal/charismatic Christianity is ... the transformative encounter with God who is holy and who is spirit.* In the African context, participants in Pentecostalism keenly testify not only about their new life, but also the transition often made from resorts to traditional religious resources in order to be sincere Christians believing in God alone.”

Jesus is doing the transforming work!

Again, there is no denying that this rapid spread of the gospel throughout much of the continent of Africa bears all the marks of a new, often immature movement, but rather than rejecting it as un-Christian, God is pleased when we recognize His work and help bring it to maturity.

In the words of Kolenda, "If we are going to point out the negatives of the charismatic church in Africa, let's be fair and also point out the many, many positives. Without the 'charismatic' church in Africa, Islam would have taken the continent over and there would be very little gospel influence at present. Waves of salvation have swept across entire nations," and millions have responded to a clear gospel message of salvation through repentance and faith in Jesus alone.

And so, while it is likely that those attending the Strange Fire conference who hear Pastor Mbewe speak will come away with an entirely negative view of African charismatic Christianity, the perspective of Professor Asamoah-Gyadu is far more accurate: "African Pentecostal/charismatic Christianity is complex. It is alive. It is thriving. And it must be a major focus for Christians around the world who are involved in evangelism, missions and the state of the global Church."

In sum, quoting Kolenda once more, "Many of these African Christians are the first generation of their tribe in history to become Christians. They will have to work through many traditional, tribal and cultural issues (just as our ancestors did in the West when the gospel first came to them), but we should not underestimate the power of the gospel and the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. We should thank God for the unprecedented harvest that is taking place and continue to contend for the integrity of the gospel."

Can I hear an amen?

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Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Talks: Blah, Blah, Blah

Like most Israelis, I am an eternal optimist. Living day to day in our neighborhood and faced with continued threats to our legitimacy and even our existence, what choice do we have?

That being said, I am extremely pessimistic about the latest round of peace talks that have been initiated in Washington, D.C. There is no shortage of reasons why I should be skeptical, but what worries me most are the personalities involved in these talks and the faulty premises they represent.

Almost 20 years after the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin attempted to conjure arch-terrorist Yasser Arafat into a worthy partner for peace, it seems that we have not learned the lessons from the past. As the peace process continued to hit bumps along the way, Israel and our American allies attempted many different variations, which all led to the same failed result.

We initiated staged withdrawals and implemented unilateral disengagements. At times we included the Europeans and our Arab neighbors in the process, while at key points we negotiated secretly without any third party involvement. The

European Union was used to monitor border crossings, and donor countries were asked to invest in an “economic peace.”

Let us be brutally frank: None of this worked in changing the dynamics of the conflict or convincing the Palestinians to completely abandon hatred and violence and recognize that the Jewish state is here to stay.

Perhaps the problem with Israeli-Palestinian conflict negotiations lies not with the process but with the people involved in representing the parties at the table. In most professions, when one fails at his job and leaves the project in question in chaos and complete disarray, he is most definitely not asked to keep working on the task at hand—again and again and again. In fact, he is usually fired. Not so when it comes to the “peace process industry.”

Saeb Erekat is the main representative for the Palestinian delegation. He has held this position in one form or another since 1991. Despite the hours logged with his Israeli counterparts and the countless interviews he has granted to Western media sources where he extols peace and reconciliation, Erekat has not brought the Palestinians even one inch closer to peaceful existence with Israel.

More troubling, it is clear that he never really revised his radical views about the Jewish state. During the second intifada, Erekat appeared on live international television to accuse Israel of massacring 500 Palestinians in Jenin while completely ignoring the facts showing that one-tenth of that number had been killed, and most of those were armed terrorists. Further, as recently as 2007, Erekat is belligerently on record as denying the possibility of the Palestinians ever recognizing Israel’s existence as a Jewish state.

Representing the United States at the latest round of talks is former ambassador Martin Indyk. Like Erekat, Indyk has also

been a major player in the peace industry since the early 1990s, and he also can point to zero achievements in bringing peace and prosperity to our region.

On the contrary, when Indyk served as the American ambassador to Israel during Prime Minister Netanyahu's first term, he was known for his disparaging attitude toward the democratically elected government of Israel. Since leaving public office, Indyk has publicly revealed his true political leanings. Until his recent appointment by Secretary of State John Kerry, Indyk chaired the International Council of the New Israel Fund (NIF).

Over the past few years, NIF has become notorious for refusing to stop funding groups that call for a boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign against Israel and for actively aiding organizations that provided false details to the Goldstone Commission.

Finally, we are left with the chief negotiator on behalf of the state of Israel. Compared to Erekat and Indyk, Justice Minister Tzipi Livni is a relative newcomer to peace negotiations. Nevertheless, she too has endured countless hours of negotiating with the Palestinians.

Most troubling, her views do not represent a majority of the current government and are most definitely at odds with the average Likud voter, not to mention the Israeli public, which sharply spurned her in the recent elections. While serving under Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Livni offered the Palestinians more than 95 percent of the historic Jewish heartland of Judea and Samaria and the unprecedented division of Jerusalem—an offer that was ultimately rejected by Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and Erekat. It is a fair assumption that she will try to up her offer in the latest round of talks to succeed where she abjectly failed to surrender in the past.

As a father of three small children, there is nothing I want more than to believe that the latest round of talks will lead to true and lasting peace in Israel. On the other hand, we all know that the definition of insanity is the endless repetition of the same experiment in the hope of obtaining a different result.

If this is the case, I call on all sides to end the insanity and appoint negotiators who have not failed us all in the past and who truly represent the best interests of the people they aspire to represent in this area.

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For the original article, visit .

Why Pray for Our Schools?

The worst massacres we've seen in this decade have happened at schools. The most recent is the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting that left 26 people dead, 20 of whom were 6 to 7 years old. Officials are still trying to wade through the onslaught of questions, such as why Adam Lanza committed the crime on Dec. 14, 2012.

If that one crime isn't enough, there are facts such as the dramatic rise of bullying. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, about 28 percent of students ages 12 to 18 reported being bullied during the school year. Instead of anticipating meeting new friends or wearing new school clothes, most students return to school under a cloud of fear and dread.

With safety being a major issue and more schools closing or shutting down programs because of a lack of funding, the only hope we have for a turnaround is prayer.

A music teacher in England, Michael Philip, began a prayer movement in England because of the widespread vandalism on school grounds. The children began to pray about it, and the vandalism stopped immediately.

If you're still not convinced your school needs prayer, here are more facts and statistics from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC):

- In 2010, there were about 828,000 nonfatal victimizations at school among students 12 to 18 years of age.
- Approximately 7 percent of teachers report they have been threatened with injury or physically attacked by a student from their school.
- In 2009, about 20 percent of students ages 12 to 18 reported that gangs were present at their school during the school year.

School-associated violent deaths are rare, according to the CDC, but 17 homicides of school-age youth ages 5 to 18 occurred at school during the 2009-2010 school year.

My son Alex was verbally bullied at school when he was in the third grade. He dreaded going to school. He didn't tell us until he was more than halfway through the school year. When he told us, I immediately called the principal and his teacher. With that response, Alex learned to not be afraid to come to me with any of his fears. He learned his parents would act quickly on his behalf.

The student was confronted, but we increased our prayers for the school. Every night before we went to bed, we prayed for the teachers, the safety of the school and that God would give the principal wisdom in leading and dealing with student

issues. We saw results of that continued prayer with a safer school atmosphere.

With that in mind, I'm encouraging everyone to pray for three things as we transition into a new school year. And I've started a page on Facebook where you can post the name of your school so your school can be covered in prayer. If you would like to be a prayer partner, please join the page and post your desire to be a prayer partner.

Here are three things you can pray for your school:

1. Protection

Declare over your children, "This I declare about the Lord: He alone is my refuge, my place of safety; he is my God, and I trust him. For he will rescue you from every trap and protect you from deadly disease. He will cover you with his feathers. He will shelter you with his wings. His faithful promises are your armor and protection" (Ps. 91:2-4, NLT).

Then pray: "I declare that school will be a place of safety! God will protect the school, teachers, staff and students from every deadly disease. Our school will not have to shut down because of the flu. I pray that God would be an armor and protection for the teachers, the staff and the children. I speak protection over my school. No child will be harmed, and no teacher or staff person will experience danger. My school will be one of the safest schools in the district."

2. Provision

Declare that your child will not lack in any good thing they need at school. No vital program will be cut because of funding: "And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19, ESV).

And then pray: "We ask for provision for our schools. We declare no lack for fine arts, technology or sports programs

for our schools. We thank You that You give good gifts to your children (Matt. 7:11)! We ask for provision for our staff and teachers, that they will not have to pay out of their own pockets for needed school supplies. And we ask for provision for our students, that they will have the supplies they need to go to school.”

3. Peace

Pray the following: “I pray that the Christians that work and teach in schools would be carriers of the peace of God, that the peace of God would reign over the schools. John 14:27 states, ‘I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don’t be troubled or afraid’ (NLT). We pray against fear and speak peace over our schools.”

Let’s believe for a 2013-2014 violent-free year for our schools. Pray and decree these Scriptures as a pre-emptive strike against the plans of the enemy for our schools.

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