

antithesis



a manifesto for the emerging christian counterculture

As we enter the twenty-first century, in 2001, thoughtful Christians stand in awe of the tragedy looming all around us. The *real* cultural crisis, that is:

today's Christian culture is destroying Christianity.

By today's Christian culture we mean the vast network of people — ministries, businesses, bookstores, magazines, musicians, TV & radio programs and the like — who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ today.

While individual differences certainly exist among them, a consistent pattern is easily detected:

the culture it represents is indistinguishable from the world it seeks "to save." It is worldly at its very core.

Today's Christian culture so resembles the world, that standing *contra mundum* — against the world, in opposition to its culture — would amount to standing against *itself*.

Yet that is the state of things. And, what is most tragic, it has borne a multitude of misled, deluded "disciples" who are **scripturally illiterate** and **spiritually dull**.

How has this happened?

It is really quite simple:

in an effort to be influential, Christians have been trying to buy their own legitimacy from the surrounding culture by compromising the Christian world and life view.

Rather than sustaining a moral and intellectual **antithesis** to that culture, they have bought into it—almost completely. The result is a cascade of compromise on almost every front:

- compromising Scripture's unique authority;
- compromising the biblical gospel;
- compromising the call to Christian discipleship;
- compromising the nature of true spirituality;
- compromising the New Testament order of fellowship;
- compromising the ethics of the Kingdom of God.

(Ironically, this has not been lost on the surrounding culture. Christians sought to influence in the first place.)

So what must be done about it?

As Christians, we must turn from this posture of compromise and affirm the distinctive Christian world and life view set forth in Scripture.

At its core Christianity is a countercultural, revolutionary movement.

As such, "Christian culture" ought to stand against the corrupt culture of the world as "salt and light" (Matt 5:13-16). This will only be accomplished when today's Christian culture — so-called "Christian" ministries, businesses, bookstores, magazines, musicians, TV & radio programs and the like — begins to engage the truth seriously, practice the truth without compromise, and demonstrate the truth in real terms.

We must engage the truth seriously

We must bring a clear, well-defined, content-rich Christian message back into the orbit of our Christian culture, placing an emphasis on what is true as over against what is not true.

The key here is antithesis. If a statement is true, its opposite is not true. We must act upon, witness, and proclaim this fact: what is contrary to God's revealed propositional truth is not true, whether it is couched in New Age terms or traditional Christian terms with altogether new meanings. All the areas of our life, especially as we participate in Christian fellowship, must be affected.

The early church allowed itself to be condemned, both by the secular and religious authorities. They said, "We *must* preach, we *must* witness publicly; we *must* obey God rather than man." They did not succumb to pressure — to *accommodate* their message to please the culture around them. No, they practiced **antithesis**. How else would they maintain a credible witness?

We must practice the truth without compromise

This is the time to show a generation which thinks that the concept of truth is unthinkable that *we do take truth seriously*. This will only happen if Christians are living out what they confess to believe with integrity — what the Apostle John called, **walking in the truth**. ^{2 John 4}

This means that our fellowships must foster direct, open, honest, transparent dealings with God and with each other — the confessing of real, personal sins; the acknowledgement of weaknesses and temptations; the carrying forward of each others burdens — to promote the purity of our lives and fellowships.

We must demonstrate the truth in real terms

Our fellowships must be real communities: places in which others see our life together as something of beauty; something reflecting the beauty God intended for humanity at the beginning. Too many of our churches are really teaching stations and activity generators. The "sharing of life" in community has had little place.

We must maintain scriptural integrity, standing against those teachings and practices that undermine them. But if others cannot see something beautiful in our human relationships, if they do not see that upon the basis of what Christ has done our Christian communities have been transformed into **centers of radiating Gospel light**, then we are not living up to our calling.

We must demonstrate love. The world has a right to judge whether we are Christians or not on the basis of how we manifest *substantive* love to each other as Christians — and to all people, because they are created in God's image, deserving dignity and honor.

Our Manifesto

If Christians take these factors into account, then we may hope for the stirring of a **revolution** in our day. And, should our Lord delay His return, the century before us may be marked as a time when radical Christian proclamation went forth yet again — in the power of the Holy Spirit — turning the world upside down, forever altering the cultural landscape.

This is our manifesto, our burden, our prayer.

Ten Assertions About Today's Christian Culture

1 Today's Christian culture lacks a basic fear of God.

Christians are no longer thought of as *God-fearing people*. We fail to appreciate God's holy character — that we are to approach Him with reverence and awe— preferring romanticized, over-familiarity with God; treating Him as a friend who is always there for me. What today's Christian culture worships is largely a product of its own desires and "felt" needs — a god created in its image. Sadly, it falls far short of the God who is *actually there*. 1 John 5:21 | Rev 1-5 | Gen 20:11 | Ex 3:1-6, 20:18-21 | Job 42:1-6 | Ps 2 | Pr 1:7, 9:10 | Heb 12:28-29 etc.

2 Today's Christian culture is ashamed of the Gospel.

Christians no longer proclaim that men and women should turn from their sinful rebellion against God, in whole-souled commitment to Jesus Christ. The language of repentance and faith is considered a turn off to people; something to be avoided—or at least postponed. Today's Christian Culture prefers to sensitize *seekers* on their own terms, swelling the ranks of the deluded with a perverted gospel that leaves many on the broad road that leads to destruction. Matt 7:13, 21-27 | 1Th 2:1ff. | Romans 1-3 | Acts 26:20 | Titus 3:3-7 etc.

3 Today's Christian culture does not understand the saving work of Christ.

Christians no longer think of Jesus Christ as the one who saves them from the penalty of sin; from the wrath of God; from judgment in the life to come. We fail to grasp what is the essence of salvation: that the righteousness we desperately need is imputed to us — put to our account — through faith in Christ. Today's Christian culture has abandoned this biblical framework, preferring to offer a "personal relationship with Jesus by inviting him into my heart." Thus Christianity becomes yet another human attempt to satisfy our own sinful desires, and find inner peace. Romans 1-8 | 1 Cor 6:11 | 2 Cor 5:19-21 | Gal 3:6, 11 | Phil 3:9 | Titus 3:5 etc.

4 Today's Christian culture has been seduced by the allure of cheap grace.

Christians no longer view discipleship as essential to Christian experience. It is now optional; a way to "accessorize" the Christian life. The notion that a Christian must live a life of principled obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ, out of love for Him and gratitude for His saving grace, is caricatured as "legalism." Today's Christian culture pronounces anyone's free-will decision for Christ as being effectual to save them — regardless of how they subsequently live. It is cheap grace: belief without obedience, hearing without doing, and intellectual assent without life commitment. Matt 7:15-27, 28:19-20 | Luke 9:57-62, 14:25-35 | John 6 | Acts 20:21 etc.

5 Today's Christian culture promotes a false concept of spirituality.

Christians no longer view spirituality as primarily concerned with how we live our lives: the content of our character, the way we think, how we make decisions, how (and whether) we care for the concerns of others, how we raise our families, etc. The fact that being spiritual, in the biblical sense, is something one should *observe* seems foreign to many. What today's Christian culture calls being spiritual — spirit-led, spirit-filled, spirit-baptized — is often little more than an emotional, content-void, self-absorbed, mystical flight of presumptuous human imagination. It has more to do with personal experience than being spiritual, at least in any *biblical* sense. Romans 8 & 12 | Gal 5:1-6, 10 | Eph 4:17—6:18 | Col 3:1—4:6 | 1 Thess 1:4-7 | James 3:9 etc.

6 Today's Christian culture denies the inherent goodness of God's creation.

Christians no longer have a scriptural view of Creation, and its relationship to the fall of mankind. Having embraced a kind of Gnostic-dualism, Christians have forgotten that the Holy Spirit comes, in sanctifying power, to war against what we are *as sinners* — the tragic consequence of our *moral* rebellion against God. He does not come to war against what we are as *humans* created in the *image* of God. By forbidding or discouraging the appropriate use of things God has given us to enjoy freely, today's Christian culture, is guilty of legislating a morality that is largely rooted in cultural taboos. 1 Cor 10:31 | 1 Tim 4:1-5 | Col 2:20-23 | Ps 104:14-15 etc.

7 Today's Christian culture suffers from last days madness.

Christians are no longer content to embrace the simple message of hope found in the New Testament. Rather, they have heaped up for themselves teachers to serve a constant stream of end-time speculations and scenarios which have never come to pass. The awareness of Our Lord's soon return is always a call for believers to study holy living — not prophetic schemes. 1 & 2 Th | Matt 24 | Luke 21 | Acts 1:11 | 2 Peter 3 etc.

8 Today's Christian culture avoids careful study and teaching of the Bible.

Christians no longer find the careful study and exposition of the Bible a vital component of their lives and fellowships. Today's Christian culture shuns teaching that is careful to expound the God-intended meaning of Scripture, preferring careless sermons and Bible expositions that are mostly autobiographical, aimed to entertain rather than edify. 1 Cor 3 | Eph 4:11ff. | 2 Th 3:6 | 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus | Heb 5:12 | James 3:1 etc.

9 Today's Christian culture enables church fellowships to function as religious cults.

Christians turn a blind eye to church fellowships that function much like religious cults: a mass of followers led by some impressive and gifted leader who hand-picks his subordinates (a board; a staff) and rules as "Senior Pastor" (chief shepherd). The only "senior pastor" in the Bible is Jesus Christ: all others are usurpers of His unique authority. 1 Peter 5:1ff. | 3 John 9-11 | Acts | Phil 1:1 | 1 Th 5:12 | Titus 1:5 | Heb 13:7 | James 5:14 etc.

10 Today's Christian culture has little to offer the world, because there is little to distinguish it from the world...

...only our culturally irrelevant, compromised, so-called "Christian witness" that has lost its ability to turn the world upside-down. As Jesus said, *Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.*

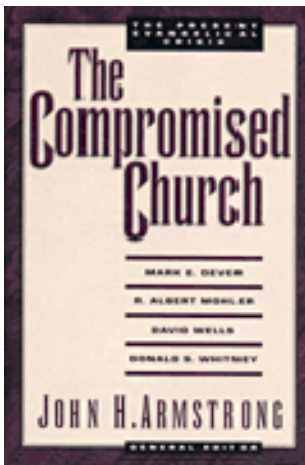
Luke 14:35 | Matthew 5:13-16 | Jeremiah & Lamentations | Revelation 3:14-22

For an expansion of these TEN ASSERTIONS, or to comment, go to <http://www.antithesis.com/conversations/assertions.html>

our ten picks challenging today's Christian culture



1



The Compromised Church Edited by John Armstrong

Though many observers believe the evangelical church is still going strong, some are concerned that it is in dire need of theological reformation and spiritual renewal. These thought-provoking essays from some of evangelicalism's leading voices deal with the present state of the Christian church, particularly in the areas of ecclesiology, worship, and doctrine.

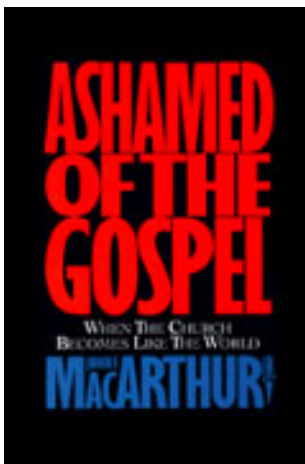
Published by Crossway Books @ \$19.99 (330pp/harcover)

YOUR PRICE: \$13.99

[🛒 purchase this book](#)

[? learn more](#)

2



Ashamed of the Gospel

When the Church Becomes Like the World

John F. MacArthur

The signs of compromise are all around us: Numbers have become more important than our message. Churches are offering up “Show-Time” religion instead of the “Old-Time” religion. Pastors have turned to the marketing industry to help them draw people in rather than relying on the sovereign power of God...

Published by Crossway @ \$12.99 (254pp/large paperback)

YOUR PRICE: \$9.99

[🛒 purchase this book](#)

[? learn more](#)

3



Getting the Gospel Right
The Tie That Binds Evangelicals Together
R. C. Sproul

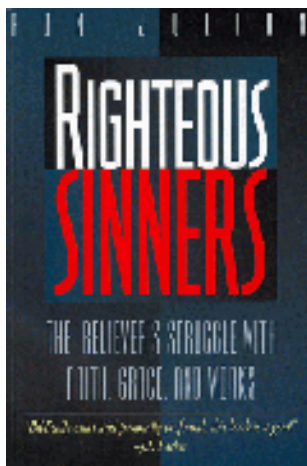
As Sproul explains, unity in the gospel touches the soul of the church itself and all of its members. To remain evangelical, we must recognize the importance of the gospel and of keeping it biblical. “To be faithful to the Great Commission,” Sproul concludes, “we must get the gospel right.”

Published by Baker @ \$16.99 (208pp/hardback)
YOUR PRICE: \$10.99

[purchase this book](#)

[learn more](#)

4



Righteous Sinners
The Believer's Struggle with Faith, Grace
Ron Julian

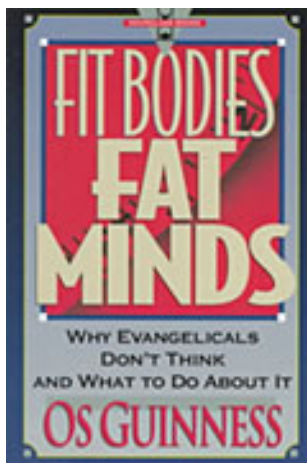
If you've ever struggled with your own moral weaknesses, if you've ever looked in the mirror and wondered whether a believer was staring back at you, if you've ever felt a twinge of terror while reading “Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven,” then this book is for you.

Published by NavPress @ \$12 (208pp/paperback)
YOUR PRICE: \$7.99

[purchase this book](#)

[learn more](#)

5



Fit Bodies Fat Minds
Why Evangelicals Don't Think and What to Do About It
OS Guinness

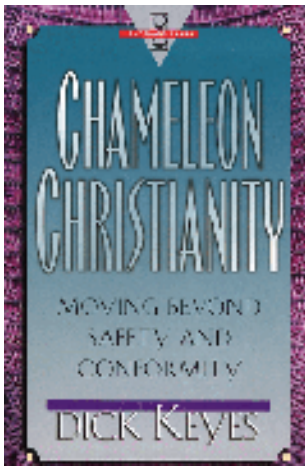
Anti-intellectualism has become the scandal of evangelicalism. OS Guinness boldly confronts this “besting sin” — calling upon Christians to engage their minds for the sake of truth.

Published by Baker @ \$7.99 (160pp/pb)
YOUR PRICE: \$5.99

[purchase this book](#)

[learn more](#)

6



Chameleon Christianity
Moving Beyond Safety and Conformity
Dick Keyes

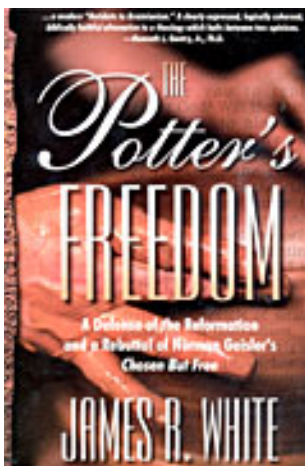
“Dick Keyes has given us a sure-footed and judicious analysis of why we must be in our postmodern world but not of it.” David Wells

Published by Baker Book House @ \$10.99 (120pp/paperback)
YOUR PRICE: \$7.99

[purchase this book](#)

[learn more](#)

7



The Potter's Freedom
A Defense of the Reformation
James R. White

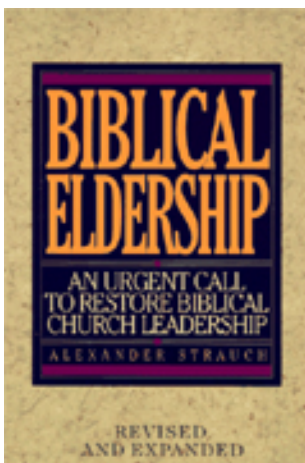
Written as a reply to Dr. Geisler's *Chosen But Free*, James White's new book gives us so much more: it is a defence of the very principles upon which the Protestant Reformation was founded. Indeed, it is a defence of the very gospel itself!

Published by Calvary Press @ \$15.95 (352pp/paperback)
YOUR PRICE: \$10.99

[purchase this book](#)

[learn more](#)

8



Biblical Eldership
An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership
Alexander Strauch

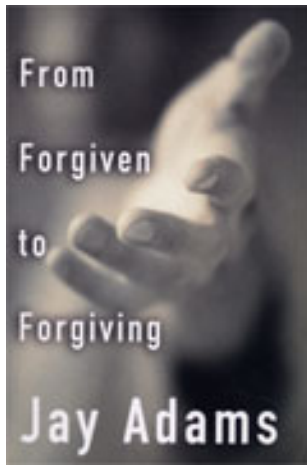
This book sets forth the bible-based leadership structure found in the New Testament itself: local fellowships overseen by a number (a “plurality”) of ELDERS.

Published @ \$14.99 by Lewis & Roth (338pp/paperback)
YOUR PRICE: \$9.99

[purchase this book](#)

[learn more](#)

9



From Forgiven to Forgiving Jay Adams

Today's Christian culture has imbibed unbiblical and "worldly" notions about forgiveness. The result: our fellowships and relationships with others are marked by superficiality, avoidance, and denial. We simply don't deal with things. (And many are taught so!) Jay Adams offers excellent biblical directives here — real help for real people in real situations.

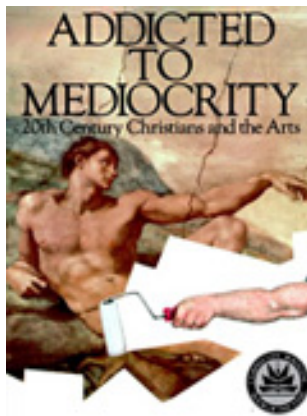
Published by Calvary Press @ \$11.95 (176pp/ paperback)

YOUR PRICE: \$7.99

[purchase this book](#)

[learn more](#)

10



Addicted to Mediocrity *20th Century Christians and the Arts* Franky Schaeffer

Schaeffer shows how Christians today have sacrificed the artistic prominence they enjoyed for centuries and settled instead for mediocrity.

Published by Crossway Books @ \$9.99 (128pp/paperback)

YOUR PRICE: \$7.49

[purchase this book](#)

[learn more](#)

[home](#) | [help](#) | [e-mail](#)

©1999-2000 The Discerning Reader