

# Thou Shalt ~~NOT~~ Question Authority

**D**oes anyone really know what goes on behind the closed doors of a church? Is it really all smiling faces, people gathered around singing and clapping hands, faces bowed in humble prayer or friendly folks lined up to shake your hand?

by Kimalee Finelli

**Does anyone really know what goes on behind the closed doors of a church?**



**At first, when you attend their services a few times, you are made to feel welcome. Then you are watched. Soon after, you are followed.**

At Golgotha Independent Baptist Church of New England, (not its real name) this is what they'd like you to think when you first walk in the door. I grew up in this church. I even remember the first time I visited the church with my parents when I was age six. At first, when you attend their services a few times, you are made to feel welcome. Then you are watched.

Soon after, you are followed. Before long, you are pressured to "repent of your wicked ways" or just simply join in church membership if you have already made your profession of faith.

Once the novelty of no longer being a visitor wears off, you are then expected to follow the "example" set by the Reverend and those directly underneath his leadership. Regular church

attendance is encouraged. Tithing is requested. Gossip is discouraged. Sound just like any other church out there? You're right. Except for one thing: *Questioning anything the Reverend says or does is forbidden.*

## **Reverends Who Must Be Revered**

It all begins with Reverend Lucard (not his real name), a master of manipulation and intimi-

dation—he preaches sermons dictating his agenda while cleverly camouflaging them as the gospel of Christ.

For example, there was a time when the church's Christian school was having some financial difficulties. Enrollment was down. A new gymnasium had been constructed and with it came a hefty price tag. Debt was rising.

And with it also came a sermon. Reverend Lucard began with the usual prayer and scripture reading. He presented a touching picture of Christ instructing his disciples in groups. He spoke of Christ teaching the multitude in the feeding of the five thousand. He expertly maneuvered the minds of his wide-eyed congregation by showing how Jesus' example of teaching in group settings meant that it was God's will that every school age child should be taught in a classroom environment and not home-schooled.

He pulled Scripture out of context and shaped it to fit his own agenda. He heaped guilt on parents in the church who home-schooled their children. After all, wasn't the Christian school a ministry of the church? Wasn't the church a ministry of the Pastor? Wasn't the Pastor placed directly in the church by God himself? His stony eyes dared his congregation to question him.

One woman actually did. She was very emotional and went right up to him after the service as he stood in the foyer doorway with his arms folded across his large chest. Wiping her eyes, she asked the Reverend why he did not believe in home-schooling. Shocked onlookers watched the scene in horrified silence. Had a woman actually spoken to the man of God in such a manner?

The Reverend did not answer her. As I stood near the door I saw the hard lines of his jaw tighten. His cold eyes seemed to want to pierce her very soul.

Reverend Lucard barely glanced sideways towards the chief elder of the church standing next to him. The elder immediately stepped for-

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**Why wouldn't anyone stand up to the Reverend? These questions and more haunt all of us who were a part of this place at one time or another. The answer is actually quite simple—fear.**

ward and ushered the sobbing woman away. It was not long before the woman received her punishment in the mail. She was to remain silent in the church for a period of two months. She could speak to no one.

### **Donna's Story**

A woman named Donna (not her real name) was a struggling single mother who had made some poor decisions in her life but was eager for a fresh start. She was invited to visit the church and before long became "saved." Everyone was quite pleasant to her in the beginning. She was even offered a few odd jobs by some of the church members, which she was happy to accept. As time went by, she was "counseled" on a few things that were brought to the attention of the Reverend and the elders. These included smoking, taking the Lord's name in vain, proper church attire and drinking beer.

At first, Donna made a remarkable effort to correct these issues. Except for the smoking, she was doing wonderfully. She even scraped up enough money to put her son in the Christian school (where he was tormented by classmates for not having a father). But, the smoking continued. There were even times when Donna would get frustrated with things and the Lord's name would slip. Of course, this was immediately brought to the attention of the Reverend.

Donna received more and more "counseling," but it was stronger each time, and she was beginning to feel as she did before. Old feelings of bitterness and despair began creeping back. For a while, Donna didn't even come to church.

"She has backslidden," members would say, using their favorite term to describe one who was slipping back into sinful ways. Donna's son was ridiculed at school even more now.

No one called her. No one visited her. No one asked to see how she was doing or if anyone had seen or heard from her. After all, it was a

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small town. But Donna had backslidden into her sinful ways again. Members were to separate from her until she repented.

About a year or so later, with her son long gone from the school, Donna was heard from again. The headline in the obituary didn't say much except that a local woman was found dead in her apartment with a bullet hole in her head and a gun in her hand.

Not much was said about it in the church. No one ever heard from or saw Donna's son again.

How did this happen? How is it that a woman all alone in this world begging for help was cast aside and left helpless and alone? Why wouldn't anyone stand up to

as his vessel to speak to the church. Therefore, questioning anything the Reverend said or did was actually questioning God—and this was a sin that needed to be repented of immediately.

The fear of punishment—shame, dishonor, embarrassment and God's wrath—was why no one stood up to the Reverend and his elders. After all, the congregation desired to be "good followers of Christ." Anything against the preacher went against God, so they said nothing.

It took many years before my family and other families were able

Our hearts filled with pain, but we prayed for their eyes to one day be opened as ours were.

Currently, Reverend Lucard's church still remains in existence. However, I heard that the Reverend died not long ago of a sudden heart attack. As time went on, my family and those that left the church with us continued to learn more and more about a loving and forgiving God, and in this we experienced true freedom in Christ. My



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### The Sin of Authoritarianism

Reverend Lucard instilled into his congregation that he was the leader of the church and not to be questioned. The pastor is to be revered and honored because he has been sent directly by Christ. Anytime the Reverend spoke, it was because God was using him

not easy for us to leave a place we had always known and people we thought were our friends. It was a difficult journey before we realized that we were worshipping a man, not Christ. It took much prayer and even a broken heart before we could leave and let the healing begin.

Those of us who left were preached against and cast out of the fellowship. People we knew for many years would see us in the grocery store and turn the other way without acknowledgement.

mother continued to home-school my youngest sibling.

And our babysitter, Donna, will remain in our hearts to this day. Now that we can see clearly, we see many hurting Christians who just need to be encouraged a little and shown the love of Christ by our living examples to them. □

*Kimalee Finelli grew up in a cult setting just like the one in her article. She left the church as a young adult. She was cast out of the fellowship as a result, and folks she knew most of her life never spoke to her again. She feels led by God to write about her experience and is working on her first novel. Kimalee lives in Florida with her husband and young son.*