

A close-up photograph of a hand gripping a sword hilt. The sword is held vertically, pointing upwards. The background is a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. The title text is overlaid on the upper portion of the image.

In the Name of God...

Confessions of a Failed Evangelist

by Glen Moyer

I became a “born-again” Christian on the island of Guam in the late ‘70s while serving in the Air Force. I was 21. Those who led me to Jesus started me on a very clear “discipleship program.” This meant training me to follow a specific, narrowly defined path of what it means to be a Christian.

We acknowledged there were others who called themselves Christians but we didn’t believe they were true believers. Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6) We applied those words of Jesus to mean “We have the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to God except through us.”

It was a radical, life-changing experience for me. Immediately I started “leading others to Jesus” left and right and trained them to believe and do the same things we did. We became a well-oiled machine in the name of God and our ministry exploded from a handful of us to a couple hundred in just a year. We called it a revival. In the process I caught a vision of how to “evangelize” the world in the name of God and



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I finished my enlistment in Guam and spent the following summer in the Philippines with the pilot team that launched the now famous Jesus Film Project which has since shown the movie “Jesus” to more than two billion people. We took “Jesus,” which had just been translated into *Tagalog* (often called *Filipino*, *Tagalog* is the national language of the Philippines) to remote villages and barrios throughout the country using generators, reel-to-reel projectors and white bed sheets. Every night we drew open-air crowds of 500-5,000. Few had met white people and even fewer had ever seen a movie. After the movie those of us with speaking skills would, through an interpreter, preach to the crowds and give them an opportunity to receive Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior. Nearly all would respond. My team alone saw tens of thousands “get saved”

that summer. We felt we were writing a new chapter in the book of Acts in the New Testament. It seemed to us, God was blessing what we were doing in his name—the results proved it.

Revival in the United States?

I returned to the United States ready to evangelize my homeland as I had Guam and the Philippines. I ran on the same high octane evangelistic fuel I did overseas, but from the outset I didn’t see the same results. Sure I led people to Jesus but not the hundreds and thousands I expected to see flooding into the Kingdom of God. The truth was, most people weren’t interested in me, my tactics, my message or my God. Even those who did commit their lives to Jesus were spiritually unstable and required constant maintenance to keep them from “backsliding” to their pre-conversion status.

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Undaunted, I continued working my tail off, in the name of God. I invested seven years of time and money to get both Bachelors and Masters degrees in religion. I helped plant and pastor three churches and oversaw the planting of several others. I organized and led numerous citywide evangelistic meetings, prayer walks, training events and pastors’ conferences. I published thousands of columns in newspapers and magazines. I spoke countless times at churches, conferences, retreats, high schools and college campuses.

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Surely, it couldn't be us or our methods—the fruit of Guam and the Philippines proved that God was on our side and we on his. Furthermore, it couldn't be our brand of Christianity. My peers and I diligently studied the Bible and possessed the true knowledge of how God wanted us to practice our faith and proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ. We brought in speakers who told us about various hot spots in America where revival seemed to be happening. It seemed there were circumstances beyond us holding back God's blessings.

Three Reasons My Evangelistic Efforts Failed

After much reflection we identified three primary scapegoats (I mean explanations) for our fruitlessness.

1) The devil. *"The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God"* (2 Corinthians 4:5). We believed the devil and his army of demons wanted to get back at God by dragging as many people as possible into hell with them. We trained, put on spiritual armor, wielded weapons, launched offenses; we did everything we could to fight these unseen foes. Our main weapon against the devil was fasting with prayer. I led and attended countless local and national prayer meetings and fasted regularly; my longest was a grueling 40 day fast that left me looking like a holocaust survivor.

2) The godless pagans. Romans 1 says, *"They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they have no understanding, no fidelity,*

no love, no mercy" (Romans 1:29-31). We couldn't see the devil, but we could see individuals—and when they didn't respond to our efforts we assumed they were one of the "godless" standing between us and revival. Even when we gently told them this, most didn't seem to care—thus (from our perspective) bringing further judgment on themselves and the world.

3) Lukewarm Christians. Jesus warned Christians *"...because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked"* (Revelation 3:16-17). I became painfully aware that getting believers (those who generally agreed with my beliefs and practices) to remain devoted was a ceaseless job. It seemed they were constantly backsliding and thus bringing "sin into the camp"



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which in turn forced God to send his judgment, not blessings, upon the church.

No wonder we weren't seeing revival. The devil, the godless pagans and lukewarm Christians were making the world a total mess all around us. At least God couldn't blame us for how bad things were.

We Have Met the Enemy—He Is Us!

Yet, as the months became years and the years became decades, doubts about my methods, my theology, my worldview and my perspective of "others" began seeping into my mind. I couldn't help but wonder that if by blaming everyone and everything else I was actually missing the real problem—me. I reluctantly began to look in the mirror and ask some hard honest questions of the endless labor I was doing, in the name of God.

Did I really see revival in Guam and the Philippines? Turns out, merely a year after I left Guam, the "revival" had all but disappeared. Furthermore, when I tracked down the other key leaders I found many were no longer even involved in church.

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Were we “saving” people in the name of God? Or, were we converting them to our specific, narrow understanding of God and the Bible? It didn’t matter if someone was a Christian, Muslim or pagan; in our eyes, if they weren’t with us they probably weren’t with God.

all of the Filipino people to whom we showed “Jesus” were already Christians. Yes, they came *en masse* to see “Jesus” but they came *from* mass. Back then (and still today), 85% of the Philippine people were Catholics and 5% were Protestants. The Philippines was one of the most Christianized nations in the world—before we got there! Could it be we drew huge crowds simply because the people were excited to see their first motion picture ...shown by a group of white Americans? Could it be these Christians responded to our invitation to become Christians merely out of politeness, or ignorance? Either way, neither Guam nor the Philippines were true revivals. I cannot describe how calling them revivals and attempting to replicate them in America messed me up for years.

Were we “saving” people in the name of God? Or, were we converting them to our specific, narrow understanding of God and the Bible? It didn’t matter if someone was a Christian, Muslim or pagan; in our eyes, if they weren’t with us they probably weren’t with God. All who hadn’t converted to our way of thinking were, by default, the lost, the godless, the enemy. We didn’t see that as being egotisti-

cal or exclusionary; we honestly thought that was the way things were. It took me years to realize, with horror, that instead of “saving” people we were simply convincing them to believe and act like us. Our actual belief was that salvation was by us, to us and for us. God had little to do with it.

Were we loving others or judging them? We wanted everyone to believe like us because we were certain that was the only way they’d find God and avoid an eternity of torment in hell. We

believed that proclaiming this painful truth was our way of loving others, but it was impossible to not become judgmental toward them. They were screwing everything up for themselves, God and us. We made half-hearted attempts to love them because Jesus told us to and because we found we could convert more of them through acts of kindness than by preaching hell-fire at them. But inwardly we resented them and blamed them for the world’s problems.

Were we making disciples of Jesus or disciples of ourselves? Were we focused on God’s will or our works? Was our interpretation of the Bible the only true one? Were we really the only ones on earth whom God truly loved? Were we the only ones through whom God could work? The questions kept coming and coming and coming.

So I Was Wrong—So What?

“So what?” you might be asking. So what if we were misguided in what we felt we were doing in the name of God? So what if we were off track in our understanding of God, salvation, truth, missions, etc. So what?

Here’s what. Nearly all of the tragic events in Christian history

contained the same fundamental misguided elements in their belief systems as we did. The Crusades. The Inquisition. The episodes of anti-Semitism. The Salem Witch Trials. The persecution of reformers. The imperialistic mission efforts. The oppression of women. The Ku Klux Klan. The forced deculturalization of Native Americans. The list goes on and on with one common thread—those who did them believed they were acting in the name of God.

This list is in no way limited to Christianity. All religious movements have closets full of similar “in the name of God” behaviors. The near daily violent acts of fundamentalist Muslims are the most common but Hindi extremists in India, radical Buddhists in Sri Lanka and Zionist Jews in Palestine are all current examples of religion gone bad. Truth be told, numerous non-religious and anti-religious movements and governments have the same twisted elements embedded in their belief systems. They may not claim to act in the name of God but the results are the same.

You may still be thinking, “So what?” Apart from a few oddballs like the Westboro Baptist “God Hates Fags” folks and the annoying street preachers one finds in most towns; dangerous, intolerant and judgmental Christianity is pretty much a thing of the past, especially in America.

Is it?

During the early stages of the current Republican campaign for president, Robert Jeffress, pastor of the 10,000 member First Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas, endorsed candidate Rick Perry over front-runner Mitt Romney at the Values Voter Summit in Washington D.C. Primary among his reasons Jeffress said, “I think the decision for conservative Evangelical Christians right now is going to be, do we prefer somebody who is truly a believer in Jesus Christ or somebody who is a good moral person but is a member of a cult? And it’s not politically correct to say but it is true, Mormonism is a cult.”

“This is not some right-wing ex-



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tremist view," Jeffress said. "This is the view of the largest Protestant denomination in the country and the world."

If you're like me (with a religious background) you probably didn't even flinch at Jeffress' words. You may be wondering why his comments were plastered across the pages of newspapers and covered for weeks on the cable news networks. What's the big deal? Yet, it seems everyone else was seriously outraged. Across the board Jeffress was accused of practicing bald-faced religious bigotry. The outcry was so loud that even Governor Perry (I believe against his will)

had to say he didn't agree with Jeffress to limit the damage to his campaign.

As one who has walked in Jeffress' shoes, I know exactly where he was coming from. Heck, I've made similar public statements in my past. I'm quite certain he was more adamant in his stance against Romney and cults like Mormonism when the cameras weren't rolling. Religious conservatives take similar stands on Islam, abortion, homosexuality, gay marriage, war and military spending, stem cell research, inerrancy of the Bible, women in leadership, the



doctrine of hell, the Ten Commandments, President Obama in particular and Democrats in general—and the list goes on and on.

"So what?" you may still be asking. Christian religious folks tend to be good citizens whose motives are generally good. They aren't trying to hurt anyone; they are simply taking a stand for what they feel is God's will. What's wrong with that?

Take a moment and read Jeffress' comments again. If I just slightly tweak his remarks we get: "Do we vote for a true believer or a Jew?" "Do we vote for a true believer or a Muslim?" "Do we vote for a true believer or a Catholic?" (Of course, that last tweak was spoken by religious conservatives during John Kennedy's presidential campaign.)

Jeffress, and the millions he speaks for, are saying we should only elect people who have "true religion"; i.e. theirs! In their eyes, they and they alone are right. Their expectations of how everyone else must believe and act are right; and of course, their actions are right.

Though I used to be like Jeffress, I now stand with those who believe his religion is not right...it is dangerous. In fact, it is remarkably similar to religions Jeffress and his followers would say are evil. Let me demonstrate.

Some who identify themselves as conservative American Christians want to vote for a true follower of Jesus Christ who puts the Bible first. They want someone who first and foremost follows God's will. They want

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If I'm honest, I will admit that the seeds of religious oppression were embedded in my religion just waiting for the right political and social conditions which would allow them to germinate and sprout into something terribly wrong.

someone who is unashamed of their faith in Jesus Christ and freely expresses this faith both privately and publicly. They want someone who will make God's will the law of the land.

Some who identify themselves as conservative Muslims want leaders who are true followers of Mohammad who put the Koran first. They want someone who first and foremost follows Allah's will. They want someone who is unashamed of their faith in Mohammad and freely expresses this faith both privately and publicly. They want someone who will make Allah's will the law of the land.

What's the difference? The name of their god? Their sacred scriptures? The way they worship? Do any of those things really matter? No! In the end, both believe they alone are right. Both believe they alone speak for God. Both believe they alone can accomplish the will of God on earth. The only real difference is in which country they practice their religion.

Religious Christians in America are restrained by the constitution, the rule of law and the core value of individual liberty. Religious Muslims in Muslim-dominated countries control their governments and run roughshod over others in the name of God. Are we to believe that if the roles were reversed that the religious Christians would not be doing the same things that the religious Muslims are? The historical Christian abuses I cited earlier would beg to differ. Let us not forget, the first European settlers came to America to flee Christian religious persecution.

Religion Is Dangerous!

This brings me back to the "So what?" question. History demon-



strates that religion is indeed dangerous, regardless if it is Christian, Muslim or Hindi. What has been done in the name of God is shocking. My motives may have been good during my religious years, but my religion

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Whenever I think otherwise I remember a scene from one of my all time favorite movies, *Judgment at Nuremberg*. This 1961 movie recounts when an American court in occupied Germany tried four Nazi judges for war crimes.

At the end of this riveting movie the lead American judge Dan Haywood, played by Spencer Tracy, is summoned to the prison cell of the lead German judge Herr Janning, played by Burt Lancaster. There, Herr Janning says to Judge Haywood, "The reason I asked you to come...those people, those millions of people...I never knew it would come to that. You **must** believe it. You **must** believe it!" To which Haywood responds, "Herr Janning, it 'came to that' the first

time you sentenced a man to death you **knew** to be innocent." A whole chain of terrible events can begin by one seemingly small seed like Jeffress' comments regarding Mitt Romney—if the conditions are right. I'm so grateful for our

North American system of government. Things haven't been perfect, but historically our American and Canadian governments have helped prevent oppressive religious movements from gaining national control. Jeffress' comments didn't gain traction, in part because the religion within Christendom is being exposed for the fraud it is. There are actually organizations which are devoted to bringing to light the dangers of religion. I am so grateful to be affiliated with one of the best—Plain Truth Ministries. Plain Truth's motto is "Christianity Without the Religion." It is dedicated to keeping God's grace the priority for the very reasons I've outlined in this article. The gospel of Jesus Christ is beautiful and freeing as long as we keep Christ-less religion out of it.

A spiritual revolution is taking place. There are millions of people who have shared my journey out of religion. Membership in Christless churches is dropping.

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Whole denominations are shifting away from their oppressive histories and doctrines. Many conservative Evangelicals (my old hangout) are slowly changing course and sailing away from religion and toward grace. When I returned from Guam and the Philippines I worked non-stop for decades trying to promote a Christianity that looked more like a Christian Taliban than the Good News of Jesus Christ. I am so glad I failed and was eventually freed from that heavy religious yoke. I now declare, in the words of Martin Luther King Jr., "Free at last. Free at last. Thank God I am free at last." □

Amy-award winning writer, Glen Moyer, is a pastor and a gifted communicator of the gospel. Glen lives in Montana—he is a storyteller whose insights illuminate the depths of God's mercy and grace. Read more of Glen's work at www.Clothman.com.