

## Progressive Christianity

By Ronald L. Dart

If there is a real and mortal danger for Christians, it is that we will try to make God over into our own image. This is not new. It has been so in every age of man. Paul was driving at that right from the start in Romans, when he spoke of men who “changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man.” Even in the psalms we find it. After a litany of sinful, slanderous behavior, God replies: “These things you have done and I kept silent; you thought I was altogether like you. But I will rebuke you and accuse you to your face” (Psalm 50:21 NIV).

But surely, we know better now, don't we? Well, some people want to make Jesus a person of color—a black Jesus. But while in the flesh, Jesus was a Jew. Gays want to say that Jesus was homosexual. He wasn't! Conservatives want to say Jesus was a conservative. Liberals want to say he was a liberal. Socialists want to make him a socialist. And the worrisome thing is that Christian leaders have not slapped all these ideas down. The arguments are silly at best, and destructive of faith. I am certain that God is not amused.

### How is this done?

While listening to some talking heads on television, I ran into an interesting example of how this is done. They were talking about something they called “progressive Christianity.” One stated flatly that Jesus was a socialist. I know how people get to that, but they missed a fundamental distinction which I will discuss as we go along. But first, it is worth noting that the word “progressive” is the latest label applied to leftist politics. Progressives used to be liberals, until liberal became a bad word. So how do political descriptions shed light on the Christian faith?

I went looking for “progressive Christianity” (PC for short) on the

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Internet. I found a site called The Center for Progressive Christianity. Their description included a subtitle: “An approach to Christianity that is inclusive, innovative, informed.” The Center included a statement of what that means, precisely, in eight points. They wrote: “1. By calling ourselves progressive, we mean we are Christians who have found an approach to God through the life and teachings of Jesus.”

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### **Double or Triple Your Gifts—with no cost to you. . .**

Did you know that Glenn Beck matches the gifts his employees give to charitable organizations? Yes, his and many other companies do, and your company might. If you work for a company that matches charitable gifts and you sign up for CEM to be the recipient, it costs you nothing while providing resources for the *Born to Win* broadcast to reach more people. Call us at 1-888-BIBLE-44 for a *FREE* brochure that explains how this works. You may be able to double or triple your donations because your employer may match or even exceed them.

## 2009 CEM Feast *One Your Friends Would Love*

By Skip Martin

It has been several years since I've heard the phrase "best Feast ever," but I heard it several times this year. I even heard it from folks who, to my knowledge, had not said it for many years. It was good to hear, especially since I agreed with them.

We again had a wonderful music program, a youth program, YEA classes that were second to none, sermons and seminars to edify and inspire, activities for all tastes, and plenty of fellowship activities. The freedom of the CEM Feast allows a person to stay as busy as they want, yet allows plenty of time for relaxing on the beach or patio.

The attitude at this Feast was one of love, service, and looking out for the other guy. An example of this occurred with the Family Picnic. The volunteers who manage the Feast, known as the Festival Association, have a history of thinking on their feet and adapting to any circumstance. It had been raining for a couple of days, and

was raining the day and night before the Family Picnic. It became apparent that the ground would be too soggy for the picnic even if it stopped raining. Rather than canceling the Family Picnic, the decision was made to move it inside. The Independent Church of God, Atlanta, had volunteered to manage the picnic, so they went to work. All outside plans were converted to inside plans. It was a joy to see those folks changing plans in order to serve their brethren. It was more of a joy to see the looks on the little ones' faces as they played in the bouncy house and got their faces painted by a "pirate." Some of the parents commented that it was better inside than it would have been outside. I have to say that seeing the "bouncy house" in ballroom three was a strange sight.

We've been working our way through the Festival Survey forms to get an idea of how the CEM Feast attendees felt about the Feast, recommendations for next

year, and things we could improve. The vast majority said they absolutely loved it. Here is one of the comments that sums up what the Festival Association strives to accomplish: "This is a unique Feast site. . . one we have searched/longed for, for many years. The hospitality and accepting attitudes to all backgrounds is refreshing. We FINALLY feel there is a safe place we can bring friends to." That sums up what the CEM Feast is all about. We may have as diverse a group of believers you will find at any Feast site. Yet the CEM Feast is carried out by an all-volunteer group of folks from all over the country.

CEM is planning to celebrate the 2010 Feast at the Emerald Coast Conference Center in Ft. Walton Beach, Florida, again. Of all the venues where we have celebrated the Feast, the ECCC, as we call it, is at the top of the list. We hope you will begin making plans to join us next year on the beautiful Florida Coast.

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## #1 Feast Youth Classes

By Allie Dart

Can we really say with confidence that YEA Feast classes are #1? Let's judge by their fruits. Every day excited kids streamed into their classrooms decorated to carry out the theme in their *FREE* YEA lesson book. A well prepared teaching staff smiled as they greeted each student. Kids between the ages of

3 to 20 bounced in, wondering what unique and fun thing would happen that day. An air of acceptance, warmth, and excitement permeated the classrooms. Being there was so important to each student that nearly 160 enrolled.

One mother wrote: "Our children loved Sabbath School

(YEA classes). They didn't love performing in the children's choir, I'm afraid, but apparently, that was not too high a price to pay to participate in the classes. We didn't hear a single complaint about getting up "early" and getting there. (Well, except that we wouldn't let

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At first blush, we might find no problem with that, and I don't want to be a nitpicker, but somehow that statement doesn't feel right. When I thought about it, I realized that the statement could fit a unitarian view of God; i.e., God and Jesus are not the same. I didn't come across a single reference to Jesus as the Son of God. Nor did I find a single citation of Scripture. But, who needs Scripture when you are making God in your own image? You are the standard of right and wrong, not some ancient book, right?

### **Relativism—are there no absolutes?**

So, where did they go from there? “2. By calling ourselves progressive, we mean we are Christians who recognize the faithfulness of other people who have other names for the way to God's realm, and acknowledge that their ways are true for them, as our ways are true for us.”

The term for this is relativism. Everything is relative, there are no absolutes. They do assume that there is a way to the Kingdom of God. To recognize the faithfulness of, say, a Muslim, to his road to the kingdom is one thing. Suicide bombers are faithful to the extreme. And I suppose I can acknowledge that their ways are true in their own estimation. But in reading this statement, I am led to think that the Center sees the suicide bomber's way to the realm of God as “true for him.” That is to say, it is not merely true in his own thoughts, but it actually is true for him: It achieves the desired result.

I do not want to make a man

an offender for a word, so I won't belabor the point. Maybe that is not what they meant. But let's be clear about this from a Christian perspective. If we have found an approach to God through the life and teachings of Jesus, here is what Jesus himself said. “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6 NIV).

### **How does the Jihadist see Jesus?**

I think it is fair to say that the Jihadist suicide bomber does not see Jesus as either the way or the truth, much less the life. So the only way I can take this statement by the Center is that the way of the bomber is true in his own eyes, not that it is the truth. Why? Because Jesus said that the Jihadi bomber can only come to the Father by Jesus Christ. This second of the eight points of “progressive Christianity” seems like muddled thinking to me.

Maybe the next point will help: “3. By calling ourselves progressive, we mean we are Christians who understand the sharing of bread and wine in Jesus's name to be a representation of an ancient vision of God's feast for all peoples.”

I know it is not very progressive of me, but I don't think so. The Passover was not for all peoples, but for Israel as they came out of Egypt. No one was allowed to take of it without the rite of circumcision. And the bread and wine they are talking about are the symbols of the blood and body of Jesus, which are only available to all peoples to the extent that they formally enter covenant with Jesus.

### **Should an agnostic participate in your church?**

Does it get any better? “4. By calling ourselves progressive, we mean we are Christians who invite all people to participate in our community and worship life without insisting that they become like us in order to be acceptable (including, but not limited to):

- believers and agnostics,
- conventional Christians and questioning skeptics,
- women and men,
- those of all sexual orientations and gender identities,
- those of all races and cultures,
- those of all classes and abilities,
- those who hope for a better world and those who have lost hope

If they mean by this that agnostics are welcome to attend church, then well enough. But if they are talking about full participation in the sense of ordination—taking communion, holding office—then not so well. We have come so far that some churches accept practicing homosexuals into the clergy. Are we going to go so far as to have agnostics and skeptics leading us? I presume this is what “inclusive” and “innovative” mean in the subtitle to this page.

Space doesn't permit a full discussion of all eight points, but I can send you a *FREE* CD of a program titled *Progressive Christianity* which goes through all of them and much more. Anyone should see a problem with this immediately. How can the Christianity of the first disciples of Jesus progress without further revelation from God? What they

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are talking about is an adaptation of the Christian faith to the modern political process. I'm sorry, but I think the modern political process would profit from adapting itself to the Christian faith. To get a *FREE* CD of this message that goes through this in great detail, just check the box on the enclosed card and return it to us.

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*#1 Feast Youth Classes  
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the oldest wear jeans on Holy Days. We are so old fashioned.)

So what makes the YEA Feast classes #1? Believe me, it's not done without plenty of hard work by many people, and a sizable investment.

YEA starts almost immediately after each Feast of Tabernacles preparing for next year's Feast classes. We estimate that we spend five months out of the year putting together age appropriate, full-color lessons books for five age groups, making decorations and purchasing supplies, and recruiting a qualified teaching staff with a passion to help children and teens become biblically literate as they turn to Christ, repentance, and baptism as early as maturity will allow.

Much attention is given to selecting themes that address issues each age group faces at their particular stage of development. We ask, how can we make each lesson fun, memorable, and effective? Since students in every class come from various parts of this country and sometimes other countries as well, they need to get acquainted and make friends. So, the first

lesson for each age group starts with an icebreaker game to insure that everyone in each class knows the names of their classmates. We strive to build lasting relationships among the students.

Each lesson includes an activity for students to do prior to class, and an object lesson or activity for the class to do as a group or in groups to help them long remember the lesson and bond with others. Object lessons or activities can be virtually useless if left to hang in midair. So, they are followed by "debriefing" sessions where students are invited to contribute, participate, and express their opinions in a nonjudgmental environment. The questions in the debriefing sessions are designed to cause students to think, analyze, and be led to see God's way is best. Teachers are trained to understand that students, especially teens, consider more than seven consecutive sentences by a teacher come across as being preachy, and teens don't like being preached to. Students learn, incorporate into their lives, and remember things they discover for themselves, better than those things a parent or teacher passes on to them.

Younger students have shorter attention spans. They need to move about. They need visuals to capture their minds and imaginations. Often, YEA incorporates a colorful puppet to help teach the lesson or ask the review questions. This has been found to be most effective.

Space does not permit a more lengthy explanation. But I think, by now, you get the picture of why YEA Feast classes are #1. The good news is that every child or

teenager between the ages of 3 and 20 can participate in the YEA program not only at the Feast, but all year long. YEA offers a full curriculum of lessons for five different age groups, spanning 17 years of a child's life. You owe it to your children, grandchildren, the children in your church to check out why the YEA Sabbath School lessons are #1. Call 1-888-BIBLE-44 and ask for a *FREE* YEA catalog to see for yourself why we say these lessons are #1.



## *Radio Update*

**Russellville, AR**  
KCAB 980 AM  
Sunday 11:00 a.m.

## **Retiring**

After 13½ years of working for Christian Educational Ministries, answering the phone, doing data entry, and other duties, Faye Brown will be retiring at the end of November. She and her husband, Buddy, are looking forward to traveling and spoiling their great granddaughter. CEM appreciates the service Faye has given and we pray God's speed.

## *Christian Educational Ministries*

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*That the man of God may be proficient  
and equipped for every good work.*