

## **Preaching “The Gospel”: A comparison of style and substance between the WCG and COG aic.**

Since the death of Herbert Armstrong, there has been a continuing dispute about what God's “gospel” or “good news” is, and how His people should present this message to the world. Despite claims to the contrary, it is becoming increasingly clear that the COG aic, via Vision, is not really preaching God's gospel. To examine this thoroughly and objectively, I'm comparing Visions's message (via the Vision suite of materials) with that of the WCG (via the Plain Truth and other literature).

Before comparing, we have to know what we're looking for. Here is the criteria of the gospel as God presents it in the Bible.

Two examples should give us enough information to go on:

### **1. Christ**

**Mar 1.14-15: Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."**

Christ preached the good news about God's Kingdom. This implies everything about that kingdom, including its government, ruler, territory, constitution, culture, character, goals, and all other things that define it. Notice some important points He mentioned:

- \* He used the words “Kingdom of God” directly. This tells us that it is a literal kingdom, and that it is ruled by God.
- \* He instructed people to repent. This is a direct statement that things and people must change.
- \* He instructed people to believe. This tells us that what He was talking about is not yet fully visible or naturally understandable (i.e. people would not normally figure it out or believe it). It requires specific description by the messenger and a “leap of faith” (so to speak) by the hearer.

### **2. Paul**

**Act 17.18, 22-31: Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, "What does this babblar wish to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities"— because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. ... 22 So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. 23 For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. 24 The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, 25 nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. 26 And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, 27 that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, 28 for "'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, "'For we are indeed his offspring.' 29 Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. 30 The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, 31 because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."**

Paul here gave a great summary, in plain language (non “church speak” directed at people mostly unfamiliar with God's way), of God's plan and good news. While he used common language and referenced secular authors, he did not leave out any elements of the plan:

- \* God exists and is creator of all (“The God who made the world and everything in it...” )

- \* God cares greatly for all humanity (“he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything”)
- \* God has a plan for humanity and wants a relationship with all (“that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him”)
- \* God is building a family (“‘For we are indeed his offspring.’ Being then God's offspring...”)
- \* The way this world operates is wrong and must change (“The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent”)
- \* God will enforce this change at the return of the Messiah, who will bring God's Kingdom to rule this earth (“he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed”)
- \* God has provided the way for humanity to change and have eternal life by the acceptance of Christ's death as penalty for our sins, and letting Him live in us by the power of the Holy Spirit (“he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection”).

### **Example 1: The Plain Truth**

Now that we see what we're looking for, we can move on to the comparison. First, let's take a sample article from the December 1981 Plain Truth (available at [http://www.herbert-armstrong.org/Plain%20Truth%201980s/Plain%20Truth%201981%20\(Prelim%20No%2010\)%20Dec.pdf](http://www.herbert-armstrong.org/Plain%20Truth%201980s/Plain%20Truth%201981%20(Prelim%20No%2010)%20Dec.pdf)), entitled “The World Is an Armed Camp” (page 31). The overall topic is the worldwide arms trade, and how there are more and more weapons available and used in conflicts around the world. The article cites many statistics proving these points. Notice, however, the final conclusion of this article, in the final paragraph:

*In the World Tomorrow, which we announce in the pages of this magazine, security will not be a concern of nations. Jesus, the Messiah, governing from Jerusalem, will guarantee the peace, by supernatural means. Today's costly trade in arms will be totally banished. “Neither shall they learn war any more” (Isa. 2:4).*

This article clearly presented the facts about God's Kingdom that were pertinent to the topic at hand:

- \* Jesus is Messiah.
- \* Jesus will return to govern this world from Jerusalem.
- \* Jesus will enforce worldwide peace with supernatural power.
- \* The above is the only solution that will stop current human wars and violence.

Notice also the overall purpose for which the Plain Truth is written. This comes just inside the front cover (quoted from the same issue as above, but is generally the same in all issues):

*The Plain Truth has no subscription or newsstand price. This magazine is provided free of charge by the Worldwide Church of God. It is made possible by the voluntary, freely given tithes and offerings of the membership of the Church and others who have elected to support the work of the Church. ... Those who wish to voluntarily aid and support this worldwide Work of God are gladly welcomed as co-workers in this major effort to preach and publish the gospel to all nations. ...*

The Plain Truth was written specifically to preach the gospel, and speaks unabashedly about doing the work of God (as an aside, it mentions support via tithes specifically).

### **Example 2: Vision**

Next, let's take a sample article from Vision, compiled into the book “Big Questions, Straight Answers”. The article's title is “Of Weapons and Warfare” (page 6 of the pdf e-book). The topic is nearly identical to that of the Plain Truth article

above – worldwide arms production and trade. The statistics and facts are slightly different in presentation and time reference (since they are written over 30 years apart), but the gist is generally the same. However, the connection to God's truth and His kingdom is not the same.

Although not clear, the conclusion seems to be the last three paragraphs of the article. The first of these is a series of questions that are never answered:

*Does that mean peace can never come? Hanson [Hanson? Who cares what he says?] would say not as long as we have human nature. But what did the prophet mean when he wrote, "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore" (Micah 4:3)? [I don't know, why don't you tell me?] Is this just senseless idealism? [I don't know, is it?] Or was he reflecting a divine imperative? Is it possible that a time is yet ahead for the planet when the end of war will be a reality—when people will simply not learn war? [I don't know, why don't you tell me?]*

The next paragraph quotes a few scriptures, but never speaks to the truth of God's intervention, Christ's return, or His Kingdom. It merely mentions a future time of "regeneration" but never elaborates on exactly what that means:

*Jesus of Nazareth came with a clear message of a coming time of universal peace on earth, when human nature would undergo transformation. He spoke of a future time of "regeneration" (Matthew 19:28). The apostle Peter made reference to a time of the "restitution of all things" (Acts 3:21, King James Version); and calling on the older prophets, Paul wrote of the mind that is set on "the things of the Spirit," which are "life and peace" (Romans 8:5–6). It was the prophet Jeremiah who had recorded God's words concerning the answer to human nature's downside: "I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts" (Jeremiah 31:33). This is the way of transformation for the human heart, and it alone can lead to peace that is from then on willingly self-generated.*

And now the final paragraph:

*Can anything be done in the meantime? Like so many other problems common to humankind, the best place to start is at home, with you and me. The human mind can be individually renewed and made peaceful now. How? In the way that has been known for thousands of years. The same prophet that speaks of swords being beaten into tools of peaceful production explains, "He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8). That same God tells us, "The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace" (James 3:17–18).*

Nothing of the gospel is discussed here. There simply is no mention of the need to transform humanity by the power of the Holy Spirit, or the need for Jesus the Messiah to return to enforce peace via God's literal Kingdom ruling the earth. In fact, the implication is that we can start changing any time if we just read these scriptures. Maybe we just need more people holding signs with these scriptures instead of John 3:16 at public events, and people will realize that they all just need to drop their weapons and hug each other </sarcasm>.

Finally, Vision's overall goal is also questionable:

*What makes Vision truly unique, however, is that it examines these topics through the wisdom of an ancient source—the Bible—while stripping away preconceived notions about what that source actually says. We believe that the principles contained in the Bible are still relevant and can be applied to help solve the global, national and personal conflicts we all face. We do not proselytize or promote conversion to any specific denomination or religious belief. Our only goal is to reestablish the Bible as a credible voice in the discussion of ideas.[Big Questions, Straight Answers inside back cover]*

*Vision is dedicated to highlighting the challenges that face society today. We examine and research the complex*

*social, moral and philosophical issues of our world from a biblical and historical perspective. Our aim is to bring insight and knowledge through this research, and to present the Bible as a credible source of solutions to the problems humanity faces in the 21st century. [Fall 2013 issue of Vision]*

“Our only goal is to present the Bible as A credible source” to solve our current problems? Just one out of many good ideas? This is an epic failure. Vision mentions nothing about seeking to do God's work or speak His message of good news about His coming future Kingdom. It just wants everyone to know that the Bible has some good ideas in it, and we should maybe consider them in solving our problems – alongside other good ideas of course.

### **One More Comparison**

One final comparison relates to the flagship books of the WCG effort to preach the gospel that were advertised in every Plain Truth issue, and most of the other booklets. These include titles such as "Why Were You Born", "The Incredible Human Potential", "The Wonderful World Tomorrow - What It Will Be Like", etc. Without going into a prolonged analysis of each book, I think the titles speak for themselves as to the message that they presented.

The flagship book of the COG aic right now is "Big Questions, Straight Answers". Unhappily, the article analyzed above contains some of the most direct references to God's Kingdom. Of the remaining 15 chapters, only 4 actually mention God's Kingdom, even indirectly. There are several interviews that are presented with no additional commentary to steer people to the right answers (as the book would seem to imply is its purpose). Chapters 13-15 are entirely devoted to neuroplasticity (Mr. Andrews elaborated on this in his letter). The final chapter - the conclusion of the book - ends with this (chapter 16, page 57 of the pdf e-book):

*The apostle Paul wrote about this: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6–7, NIV).*

*This is your path to a quiet spirit, to a mind free of troublesome worry.*

### **Conclusion**

In summary, after making this comparison, I am disturbed to find that Vision actually preaches NOTHING of God's good news – and it doesn't even pretend to. I am disturbed about this because I didn't notice it sooner, due to the fact that I was reading my own bias into what was written. A person who has no idea of God's truth could not possibly do this.

I hope that I can contribute very soon to God's work of spreading His good news to this world. Perhaps Vision can become this, but it will require radical change.