

The  
Master's Perspective  
on  
**CONTEMPORARY  
ISSUES**

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**ROBERT L. THOMAS**

general editor

**The Master's  
Perspective  
Series**

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Volume 2

Foreword by

**John F. MacArthur Jr.**

The Master's Perspective Series

Volume 2

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on  
CONTEMPORARY  
ISSUES

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Grand Rapids, MI 49501

*The Master's Perspective on Contemporary Issues*

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## Foreword

My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you, so that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding; yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. (Proverbs 2:1–5 NKJV)

The grand promise of that passage is that the Eternal God has a storehouse of wisdom which He reveals to the “godly” so that they may know what is the time and right “course” of life in every circumstance. The responsibility of that revelation is the Scripture which, when carefully examined and clearly understood, establishes the path for every believer in every place and time.

Understanding that cause fulfills the will of God in providing Scripture. Such fulfillment, however, demands skilled interpretation and discernment.

Paul commanded the church to engage in such thoughtful and careful interpretation: “Examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thess. 5:20–21 NASB). That is the clearest call in the New Testament to discernment and a necessary admonition in every age, particularly this one.

The place of biblical discernment has been largely ignored and its priority placed last because of several current evangelical perspectives: (1) depreciation of doctrine and the place of sound theology; (2) disdain for any teaching that is perceived to divide Christians; (3) disregard for antithetical thinking that separates what is true from all false interpretations regardless of who it offends; (4) displacing of careful exegesis with mystical, intuitive, and personal approaches to understanding Scripture and God’s will; (5) dominance of personalities and organizations that lack solid doctrine, scholarly skill and depth, but have wide exposure for their teaching.

These are more than trends. They are established features of contemporary evangelicalism that militate against clear explication of the Word of God on the issues of our time.

In *The Master's Perspective on Contemporary Issues*, scholars from The Master's Seminary who have honed their skills in discerning the meanings of God's Word, by experience through many years of searching the depths of Scripture, address some of the most crucial issues of our day with clarity.

I am grateful to share some grace with these men and confident their work will help you to "discern the fear of the LORD, and discover the knowledge of God" (Prov. 2:5 NASB).

John F. MacArthur Jr.



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## Introduction

Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, “I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part, I believe it. For there must also be factions among you, in order that those who are approved may have become evident among you” (1 Cor. 11:18b–19). As it was in Corinth, so it has been with the body of Christ throughout the centuries of the Christian era. “Peculiar opinions” have arisen and continue to arise causing divisions within the body. Deviations from sound doctrine have occasioned repeated responses from those who cherish the inspired Word of God above all else.

*The Master’s Perspective on Contemporary Issues* has selected a number of such peculiar opinions to respond to, in hope of setting the record straight for Christians who find the mixed signals they are receiving confusing. The issues dealt with include the following:

1. How the integration of psychology with the Bible has misled Christians regarding principles of Christian living.
2. How the proposal about fallible prophecy in contemporary Christianity has misinterpreted the New Testament.
3. How a respected scholar has misrepresented a dispensational system of thought.
4. How theologians have proposed an early dating of Revelation to preserve their postmillennial scheme of eschatology.
5. How a former cessationist has switched to noncessationism and now sharply attacks cessationists.
6. How present-day Christians have misunderstood the legitimacy of Christian involvement in Freemasonry.
7. How evangelical feminist proponents have misconstrued grammatical-historical principles of interpretation.
8. How respected Christian leaders have sent the wrong signal about rapprochement between evangelicals and Catholics.
9. How Progressive Dispensationalism has departed from dispensational principles of literal interpretation.



10. Why evangelical attempts to respond to the extremism of the Jesus Seminar have been fruitless.
11. Why those who place limitations on God's love for humanity have misread the Bible.

Each chapter measures one of these issues by biblical standards and attempts to clarify what is a proper perspective.

The resolving of each question is the proposal of the contributor and does not necessarily represent the opinion of The Master's Seminary, its administration, or its faculty. Each one, however, is a solution that is recommended for consideration by readers of this volume.

English translations used in this volume are those of the authors of individual chapters unless otherwise indicated.

I want to express my thanks to Mr. Dennis Swanson for his help in compiling the indexes for this volume.

Robert L. Thomas  
Editor

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## About *The Master's Seminary Journal*

For those unfamiliar with *The Master's Seminary Journal*, a word of introduction is in order. *TMSJ* began publication in 1990 with the following statement of purpose:

With this issue, *The Master's Seminary Journal* launches its career as a medium for the publication of scholarly articles dealing with the biblical text, Christian theology, and pastoral concerns. As you have noted, or will note, it also contains reviews of current and significant books and, occasionally, of articles, relating to these issues. With these emphases in mind, technical articles dealing with such issues as the philosophy of religion, linguistics, or archaeology will not be included unless they clearly, directly, and significantly contribute to the understanding or application of God's written revelation—the Holy Bible. The editors desire that all articles be understandable, not only by seminary professors and other professional scholars but also by pastors and, indeed, by any serious students of Scripture.

While most of the articles will be contributed by the faculty members of The Master's Seminary, the editors will solicit articles and reviews from recognized evangelical scholars, will evaluate voluntary contributions for possible inclusion, and will occasionally include outstanding historical selections from the public domain.

It is our fervent prayer that our Lord Jesus Christ will be honored and exalted, either directly or indirectly, on every page of this publication, and that every article and review will contribute to the understanding or application of the Holy Scriptures as we await His return. (Excerpted from "Editorial," *TMSJ* 1, no. 1 [1990]: 1–2)

The *Journal* has continued without interruption since that time, endeavoring to fulfill the purpose established at its beginning. Those interested in a subscription to *TMSJ* may contact Professor James F. Stitzinger, *The Master's Seminary Journal*, 13248 Roscoe Blvd., Sun Valley, CA 91352, or by e-mail at the address [jstitzinger@mastersem.edu](mailto:jstitzinger@mastersem.edu).

To the following pages of *The Master's Perspective on Contemporary Issues*, volume 2 (1991) of *TMSJ* has contributed two chapters (chaps. 1 and 2), volume 3 (1992) has provided one chapter (chap. 3), volume 5 (1994) was the source of four chapters (chaps. 4, 5, 6, and 7), volume 6 (1995) has furnished two chapters (chaps. 8 and 9), and two of the chapters (chaps. 10 and 11) appeared in volume 7 (1996).

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Psychology

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## The Psychology Epidemic and Its Cure<sup>1</sup>

John F. MacArthur Jr.

*The church's right to counsel from the Bible has been reconfirmed in court rulings of recent times. Yet in many instances the church has surrendered that right and responsibility because of the "professionalization" of the counseling ministry among Christians. This is tragic because the behavioral sciences are not, as is commonly believed, scientific. Neither have they proven effective in changing the human heart. "Christian psychology," with its claim of a secret knowledge about dealing with people, has made deep inroads into the church, but it is no more than a duplication of its secular counterpart with Scripture references occasionally interspersed. A reliance on Christ, the "Wonderful Counselor," and God's sufficient Word as dispensed by spiritually gifted Christians to one another is the church's only solution in meeting the spiritual needs of its people.*

\* \* \* \* \*

In 1980, Grace Community Church became the object of a lawsuit charging that the pastors on staff were negligent for trying to help a suicidal young member of the church by giving him biblical truth. It was the first clergy malpractice case ever heard in the American court system. The secular media had a field day as the case dragged on for years. Some nationally aired tabloid-type programs even alleged that the church had encouraged the young man to kill himself, teaching him that suicide was a sure way to heaven. Of course, that was not true. He knew from Scripture that suicide is wrong. We urged him to let the Word of God lead him to intimate knowledge and appropriation of the resources available in the One who wanted to heal his troubled mind. Tragically, he refused our counsel and took his life.

One of the key issues the case raised was the question of whether churches should have the legal right to use the Bible in counseling troubled people. Many would argue that giving someone advice from Scripture is a simplistic approach to counseling. The Bible may be fine as an encouragement to the average person, they say, but people who have *real* problems need the help of a psychological expert.

Therefore, this lawsuit contended, church counselors are required to refer seriously depressed and suicidal people to the mental-health professionals. To attempt to counsel these troubled people from the Bible amounts to irresponsibility and negligence for which church counselors should be held morally and legally culpable.

The truth that came out in court received little or no coverage on the network news. Testimony showed that this young man *was* under the care of professional psychiatrists. In addition to the biblical direction he received from the pastoral staff, he had sought psychiatric treatment. Moreover, the staff had seen to it that he was examined by several medical doctors to rule out organic or chemical causes for his depression. He was receiving every kind of therapy available, but he chose to end his life anyway. We did all we could to help him; he rejected our counsel and turned his back on his spiritual sufficiency in Christ.

Not only did the courts view the issue as a First Amendment right of religious freedom into which government should not intrude, but all three times Grace Church won the case, the judges also expressed the opinion that the church had *not* failed in its responsibility to give him proper care. Their judgment was that the staff had more than fulfilled their legal and moral obligations by trying to help this young man who had sought our counsel. Eventually the case was appealed all the way to the United States Supreme Court. The High Court refused to hear it, thereby letting stand the California State Supreme Court's ruling, which vindicated the church. Most important of all, the case affirmed every church's constitutional right to counsel from the Bible, establishing a legal precedent to keep secular courts from encroaching on the area of counseling in the church.

## THE PROFESSIONALIZATION OF THE COUNSELING MINISTRY

Unfortunately, the privilege of counseling people with biblical truth may be in jeopardy anyway, not because of any legal barrier imposed from outside the church, but because of the attitude toward Scripture within the church. During the trial, a number of "experts" gave testimony. Most surprising were the so-called Christian psychologists and psychiatrists who testified that the Bible alone is not sufficient to meet

people's deepest personal and emotional needs. These men were arguing before a secular court that God's Word is not an adequate resource for counseling people about spiritual problems! What is truly appalling is the number of evangelicals who are willing to take the word of such "professionals" on this subject.<sup>2</sup>

Over the past decade a host of evangelical psychological clinics have sprung up. Though almost all of them claim to offer biblical counsel, most merely dispense secular psychology disguised in spiritual terminology.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, they are removing the counseling ministry from its proper arena in the church body and conditioning Christians to think of themselves as incompetent to counsel. Many pastors, feeling inadequate and perhaps afraid of possible malpractice litigation, are perfectly willing to let "professionals" take over what used to be seen as a vital pastoral responsibility.<sup>4</sup> Too many have bought the lie that a crucial realm of wisdom exists outside Scripture and one's relationship to Jesus Christ, and that some idea or technique from that extrabiblical realm holds the real key to helping people with their deep problems.<sup>5</sup>

True psychology (i.e., "the study of the soul") can be done only by Christians, since only Christians have the resources for understanding and transforming the soul. The secular discipline of psychology is based on godless assumptions<sup>6</sup> and evolutionary foundations and is capable of dealing with people only superficially and only on the temporal level. The Puritans, long before the arrival of godless psychology, identified their ministry with people as "soul work."

Scripture is the manual for all "soul work" and is so comprehensive in the diagnosis and treatment of every spiritual matter that, energized by the Holy Spirit in the believer, it leads to making one like Jesus Christ. This is the process of biblical sanctification.

It is reasonable for people to seek medical help for a broken leg, dysfunctional kidney, tooth cavity, or other physical malady. It is also sensible for those who are alcoholic, drug addicted, learning disabled, or traumatized by rape, incest, or severe battering to seek help in trying to cope with their trauma.

Certain techniques of human psychology can serve to lessen trauma or dependency and modify behavior in Christians or non-Christians equally. There may also be certain types of emotional illnesses where root causes are organic and where medication might be needed to stabilize an otherwise dangerous person. Such problems are relatively rare, however, and should not be used as examples to justify the indiscriminate use of secular psychological techniques for essentially spiritual problems. Dealing with the psychological and emotional issues of life in such ways is *not* sanctification.



Dispensationalism

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Who Is Wrong?  
A Review of John Gerstner's  
*Wrongly Dividing the Word  
of Truth*<sup>1</sup>

Richard L. Mayhue

*Dr. John H. Gerstner, a recognized scholar with impressive credentials, has issued a call for dispensationalists to admit the glaring gaps between their system and orthodox Christianity. However, his presentation of dispensationalism contains shortcomings that necessitate this special review article to point out some of these and to challenge dispensationalists to publicize a greater clarification of their position. Many of the assumptions that undergird Dr. Gerstner's case against dispensationalism are in error. These faults are magnified by a number of major weaknesses in his argument. A review of the book shows how the author's treatment of his subject deteriorates even more through ten representative theological misstatements. The work is of such a misleading nature that a retraction of some kind seems to be in order.*

\* \* \* \* \*

General Anthony C. McAuliffe, commanding officer of the 101st Airborne Division at Bastogne, found his troops surrounded by the Germans early in the famous World War II Battle of the Bulge (December 1944). The opposing Nazi general, sensing quick victory, sent word to surrender immediately. McAuliffe replied with what is now one of the most famous one-word responses in military history, "Nuts!" In love, that also is our response to Dr. Gerstner's call for the surrender of "dispensationalism."

This strong retort, borrowed from WW II, answers R. C. Sproul's (President of Ligonier Ministries and a disciple of Dr. Gerstner) initial comments in the Foreword (p. ix).

This bomb—unlike missiles that suffer from dubious guidance systems and are liable to land on civilian populations wreaking havoc indiscriminately—is delivered with pinpoint accuracy into the laps of dispensational scholars.

According to Sproul,

Gerstner would prefer torture or death to intentionally distorting or misrepresenting anyone's position. . . . If Gerstner is inaccurate—if he has failed to understand dispensational theology correctly—then he owes many a profound apology. But first he must be shown where and how he is in error. This is the challenge of the book. If Gerstner is accurate, then Dispensationalism should be discarded as being a serious deviation from Biblical Christianity. (p. xi)

Dr. Gerstner delivers his "Surrender!" demand in the Introduction and elsewhere in the book:

Dispensationalism today, as yesterday, is spurious Calvinism and dubious evangelicalism. If it does not refute my charges and the charges of many others, it cannot long continue to be considered an essentially Christian movement. (p. 2)

Dispensationalism . . . is in constant deviation from essential historical Christianity. . . . (p. 68)

Since Gerstner believes so strongly that soteriology determines eschatology, one could expect that the President of The Master's Seminary, John F. MacArthur Jr., would be the first to wave a white flag. Gerstner affirmingly quotes him (without documentation or obvious connection to his point) as saying, "There is no salvation except Lordship Salvation" (p. 2). Gerstner finds this strongly reformed view of salvation incompatible with his understanding of dispensationalism. This convincingly illustrates the most obvious *non sequitur* in the book, i.e., Dr. Gerstner's assertion throughout his book that Reformed soteriology necessarily eliminates dispensational ecclesiology and eschatology. He labors for more than half the book—chapters 7–13—to prove that dispensationalism should surrender because it is unbiblical (pp. 105–263).

He seems to debate from the following basic syllogism, though he never states it so succinctly as this:

- Premise 1: Calvinism is central to all true theology.  
Premise 2: Dispensationalism does not embrace Calvinism.  
Conclusion: Dispensationalism is a "spurious" and "dubious" expression of true theology (p. 2).

Thus, he strongly calls for dispensationalism's quick surrender.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND HIS WORK

Dr. Gerstner, Professor Emeritus of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, is Associate Pastor of Trinity (PCA) Church in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, and currently serves as theologian-at-large at Ligonier Ministries. He also lectures on the Bible at Geneva College. Gerstner has been a Visiting Professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School since 1966 and is Adjunct Professor of Theology at both Reformed Theological Seminary and Knox Theological Seminary. He holds a B.A. from Westminster College, an M.Div. and Th.M. from Westminster Theological Seminary, and a Ph.D. in Philosophy of Religion from Harvard University.

Dr. Gerstner has published many books, audio and video tapes, plus numerous articles in theological journals and magazines. He was a pastor for ten years and a professor of church history at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary for thirty years (1950–80). He is best known for his lectures and writings on Jonathan Edwards.

In describing the author, R. C. Sproul writes glowingly about his mentor (p. ix):

As a world-class historian, Gerstner has done his homework. The book is a result of years of careful and painstaking research. Gerstner has examined in the minutest detail the works of the most important historic dispensational theologians. He has canvassed scholarly journals and Ph.D. dissertations. He has been in repeated dialogue and debate with contemporary dispensational scholars. The current publication is the crystalized essence of over one thousand typescript pages of Gerstner's research and conclusions.

J. I. Packer declares that this volume clarifies "the issues more precisely than any previous book has done."<sup>2</sup> The publisher suggests that "Dr. Gerstner . . . presents the most extensive and systematic study of Dispensational theology ever published."<sup>3</sup>

## SYNOPSIS OF DR. GERSTNER'S THINKING

Dr. Gerstner divides his volume into three sections:

1. Historical Sketch of Dispensationalism (pp. 7–72).
2. Philosophy and Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism (pp. 73–101).
3. Theology of Dispensationalism (pp. 103–263).

### *Dispensationalism Historically*

The author's sketch of history looks back to the early church, the middle ages, the Reformation, and post-Reformation periods (pp. 7–20). The dispensationalism of nineteenth-century England receives attention (pp. 21–36) with special mention of John Nelson Darby (pp. 23–27). Next, he reviews American dispensationalism ranging from C. I. Scofield to E. W. Bullinger (pp. 37–56). Finally, he looks at dispensationalism in relation to American Reformed churches of the late nineteenth and early-to-middle twentieth centuries (pp. 57–72).

He notes in his brief historical survey of twenty centuries (66 pages) that dispensationalism “has a new theology, anthropology, soteriology, ecclesiology, eschatology, and a new systematic arrangement of all of these as well” (p. 18).

Dispensationalism is a theology of persons holding to a deviation from the Christian religion. Just as truly as a proper premillennialist would resent being called a Jehovah's Witness because Jehovah's Witnesses also are premillennialists, or a Mormon because Mormons also are premillennialists, so also, a premillennialist should resent being called a dispensationalist because dispensationalists also are “premillennialists” (though I do not infer for a moment that Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons are orthodox trinitarians at the heart as are *all* dispensationalists). (p. 69)

### *Dispensationalism Philosophically and Hermeneutically*

Gerstner first looks at the philosophy, epistemology, and apologetical method of dispensationalism (pp. 75–81). Then he turns to dispensational hermeneutics (pp. 83–101). He concludes that dispensationalism is essentially anti-philosophical and without a proper philosophy (p. 75), devoid of an articulated epistemology (p. 78), but generally adhering to Gerstner's own “classical” approach to apologetics associated with the theology of Old Princeton. However, he asserts that dispensationalists hold a “weakened form” of this method (p. 79).

## The Master's Perspective on **CONTEMPORARY ISSUES**

These are not just "contemporary issues." They are among the most divisive controversies facing the church on the edge of the twenty-first century. Is God giving new revelation to today's Christians? How far must we go to promote Christian values in secular society? Should evangelicals champion feminist principles? The contributors, all leading Bible scholars, explain the development of these issues and found their answers on in-depth Bible exposition.

Chapters by such notable scholars as F. David Farnell, Eddy D. Field II, Eddy D. Field III, Paul W. Felix, John F. MacArthur Jr., and Richard L. Mayhue include:

- "The Psychology Epidemic and Its Cure"
- "Theonomy and the Dating of Revelation"
- "Freemasonry and the Christian"
- "The Hermeneutics of Evangelical Feminism"
- "Evangelical Responses to the Jesus Seminar"

"In *The Master's Perspective on Contemporary Issues*, scholars . . . who have honed their skills in discerning the meanings of God's Word by experience through many years of searching the depths of Scripture, address some of the most crucial issues of our day with clarity. I am . . . confident their work will help you to 'discern the fear of the Lord, and discover the knowledge of God' (Prov. 2:5 NASB)."

—John F. MacArthur Jr.  
from the Foreword

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**Biblical Studies**

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