



STATEMENT DP080

THE POTTER'S HOUSE

History

The Potter's House (known also as The Door, Victory Chapel, Christian Center, Crossroads Chapel, De Puerta and Christian Fellowship incorporated in Prescott) was begun in Prescott, Arizona, in the early 1970s by Wayman Mitchell. By 1985 over 250 churches were established (all directly related to the Prescott church) around the globe. Mitchell is a graduate of L.I.F.E. Bible College (affiliated with the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel) who had a falling out with the Foursquare Church concerning certain procedures in ordaining men into the ministry. Consequently, Mitchell dropped his ordination with them and became licensed through the church he established in Prescott.

The Potter's House grew out of Mitchell's determination to establish what he perceived to be a New Testament church. Many of those attending Potter's House churches are converts who came out of the counterculture of the 60s and 70s and were influenced by the Jesus Movement which reached its peak during that same time period. Mitchell seized the opportunity to provide what many of these individuals were lacking: direction in life, a personal dynamic experience with Jesus Christ, and an opportunity to exercise real commitment to a local church body.

Beliefs

The Potter's House is a Pentecostal denomination which claims to hold to the same doctrinal distinctives as the Assemblies of God (a mainstream Pentecostal church). Although the Potter's House has not published a public "statement of faith" or doctrinal statement outlining their particular theological views, they do adhere to the teachings espoused in Duffield and VanCleave's *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology* (published through L.I.F.E. Bible College). The Potter's House appears to hold to essential biblical doctrine (i.e. the Trinity, the deity of Christ, salvation by grace alone, etc). In non-essentials, they hold to a pretribulational rapture and a premillennial return of Christ. Because the Potter's House is Pentecostal, the exercise of "spiritual gifts" plays a major role among Potter's House fellowship. Speaking in tongues and gifts of healing are a common place in their worship services. (Tongues are exercised in prayer and praise as well as prophecy in a congregational setting.) The emphasis on "gift" ministries stems from the fact that Mitchell was influenced at an early age by such men as William Branham (who denied the Trinity and was very influential in the early stages of the "Latter-Rain" Movement) as well as by A. A. Allen, another early "Latter-Rain" preacher who emphasized a five-fold ministry in the church. Although Mitchell rejected the excesses of Branham and Allen, he did, however, hold on to some of the concepts which arose out of what became known as authentic "gift" ministries.

Organization/Ministry

The thrust of the Potter's House has been primarily to focus on street evangelism. Consequently, many of those attending the Potter's House are new converts between the ages of 18 and 35. Because there are relatively few older "saints" in the body, there tends to be an imbalance where spiritual leadership is concerned. (We are told, though, that there seems to be a trend towards establishing an older, mature congregation in the church which will help correct this imbalance.)

The Potter's House is "governed" by the Pastor along with a group of elders (referred to as the church council). As each church is established, the pastor involved in setting up a new church is responsible for the leadership in that church. (This responsibility includes monitoring the financial, doctrinal, and moral accountability of the church in question.) The Potter's House is governed overall by the Bylaws established by Wayman Mitchell and others at the initial incorporation of the church.

The Potter's House is a very active church with programs throughout the week. Some church activities include men's leadership classes, street evangelism, outreach to the Spanish community, music ministries, and other outreaches of the church. We have

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been told that church involvement is a necessary deterrent designed to keep young converts from their former "immoral and ungodly" activities before conversion.

The Potter's House appears to be reaching out by and large to many of the minority groups as well as to street people searching for meaning in life and is extremely evangelistic which accounts for the rapid growth of its churches.

Concerns

Though we feel that the Potter's House is doing an invaluable service in reaching lost souls, we do have a few concerns which should be recognized. They are as follows: 1) its structural authority and accountability; 2) its aberrant view of tongues and healing; 3) its steady hyperactive atmosphere which could result in potential "burn-out" for some members; 4) its lack of a strong healthy doctrinal statement; and 5) negative reports from ex-members and others alleging mind control and conditioning over its members by the leadership of local churches.

STRUCTURAL AUTHORITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY -- Though the Potter's House has made some effort in setting up a structure of authority, those chosen to be on the "church council" with the pastor are relatively young men who have little or no biblical training and who are very young in the Lord. Church boards should consist of men who have walked with God for some time having developed spiritual maturity and discernment over the years. Without the governmental element of older godly men and women, a church can suffer very weak spiritual counsel. Biblical guidelines for eldership in the church can be found in 1 Timothy 3, and Titus 1 and 2.

BALANCED VIEW OF TONGUES AND HEALING -- The Potter's House churches believe in and practice the "gifts of the Spirit" in a congregational setting.*

However, their exercise of certain gifts do not follow the biblical pattern as set forth in I Corinthians 12 and 14. In a typical Potter's House worship service, tongues are exercised in unison by the entire congregation generally with no interpretation following. The Scriptures teach, on the other hand, that biblical tongues in a congregational setting must be followed by two or three interpreting for the sake of the edification of the body of Christ and as a sign for the unbeliever (1 Cor. 14:22-33). As with the Assemblies of God, the Potter's House teaches that tongues is the "initial evidence" of the "baptism of the Holy Spirit."

The Potter's House has an aberrant view of healing as well. A "come get your miracle" mentality exists which creates an expectancy level which, when not met, is devastating to the young Christian who expected God to meet his needs and is let down hard.**

CHURCH ATMOSPHERE -- Though members are not required to attend the various activities of the church, there is an expectancy and general urgency about participating. These kind of expectations can give a person a mental burden of having to "be there" or one misses out on what God is doing. It can also cause early "burn-out" for some who just can not keep up with the ever-continuing activities of the church.

LACK OF A STRONG DOCTRINAL STATEMENT -- Though we are told that classes are taught on Sunday mornings pertaining to "sound doctrine," there is of yet no outline or positional paper of the Potter's House particular theological beliefs. While it is true that a doctrinal statement is not always as revealing as it looks, it does indicate that the particular church in question adheres to a formal set of doctrines and removes most doubt as to whether they are "orthodox" concerning essential biblical teaching.

NEGATIVE REPORTS BY EX-MEMBERS AND OTHERS -- Since our preliminary report of March 3, 1988, new developments have occurred which should be included in this report. In September of this year, the "Geraldo Television Show" did a segment which included an expose' of the Potter's House in which "exit-counselor" Rick Ross alleged that the Potter's House was cultic and dangerous. Others, many ex-members, allege that the leadership exercises strong control over its members (a form of the shepherding doctrine); that leaving the church would result in the judgment of God; that members are ostracized from their families; that tithing is essential to be in proper or right relationship with God and strongly enforced by the leadership; that women attending the Potter's House are subjugated; and that ex-members are shunned or hated and considered lost until they come back to the Potter's House. While many of these allegations came from ex-members in the Prescott area, some have come from other parts of the country which indicates that there may be some truth to the allegations at least with some Potter's Houses.

This researcher has spoken with Rick Ross, ex-members, and a number of pastors representing the Potter's House all of which gave conflicting reports. Whether the allegations are true and can be substantiated or not is something which we at CRI are not prepared to comment on publicly at this time. However, because of the severity of the reports and controversy involved with the

Potter's House denomination we cannot at this time recommend that Christians choose the Potter's House as a viable place of fellowship. While the Potter's House cannot rightly be called a non-Christian cult, if the allegations are true, one could properly say that the movement is at best aberrant, and at worst a church containing cultic elements or practices.

For an overview of the history and development of the Potter's House, the reader is invited to read *An Open Door* by Ron Simpkins (Prescott, Arizona: Potter's Press, 1985).

* CRI's position on the gifts of the Spirit are that the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable -- spiritual gifts are here today and should be exercised accordingly to the outlines given in Romans 12:4-8 and 1 Corinthians 12 and 14.

** CRI's position of divine healing is that God can and will heal if He so chooses and that the believer may seek God for healing (James 5:14,15; 1 John 5:14,15) but there is no guarantee that He will heal.