STATEMENT DP520

The Masculine Journey of Promise Keepers

HERE'S A THREE-QUESTION QUIZ:

1. Promise Keepers represents an effort of...
□ Angry men trying to reclaim the power they lost to the feminist movement.
□ Timid men trying to feminize their churches.

2. Promise Keepers is an unprecedented mass movement that...
□ Unites evangelicals regardless of church background around basic Christianity and concepts of masculine integrity.
□ Unites gullible evangelicals with Catholics and Mormons, emphasizing "unity over truth."

3. As a men's phenomenon. Promise Keepers...
□ Both echoes and supersedes the secular men's movement of the late 1980s.
□ Revives the sensitivity groups of the 1970s.

The answers depend entirely on who's holding the pencil.

Why do those answers matter? Because a parachurch movement that began with 72 praying men in 1990 surpassed attendance of half a million at 13 conferences by 1995.

To say Promise Keepers attendance has grown exponentially is almost an understatement: 4,200 men attended the first meeting in 1991: 22,000 1992: 50,000 filled Folsom Stadium in Boulder, Colorado, in 1993: and 278,600 men attended PK meetings at seven sites in 1994.

Promise Keepers hopes to attract 75,000 pastors to a conference in Atlanta in 1996, and to draw a million men to Washington. D.C., in 1997.

The Promise Keepers staff has grown from 22 people only two years ago to 250 this year, and its budget has multiplied eight times over from $4 million in 1993 to $64 million in 1995. (PK enjoys lucrative sales of books, music, clothing, golf paraphernalia, and even a small bronze statue of warriors standing back to back — a favorite PK theme.)

In 1992, Promise Keepers recruited 230 volunteer "Point Men" and "Ambassadors." Local pastors appoint Point Men (flow "Key Men") who act as liaisons with their churches: PK recruits Ambassadors to spread the word about Promise Keepers in local areas. In 1995, PK hopes to recruit a total of 65,000 Key Men and Ambassador.

Promise Keepers *affirms* a five-point statement of faith common to many evangelical churches (including classic Trinitarianism, an inerrant Bible, orthodox Christology, active ministry of the Holy Spirit, and literal creation/fall). Since 1994, the organization has used its "Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper" as its guiding principles, and the PK mission statement is a simple sentence: "Promise Keepers is a Christ-centered ministry dedicated to uniting men through vital relationships to become godly influences in their world."

Adding to the movement's credibility are such high-powered evangelical celebrities as Bill Bright, James Dobson, Jack Hayford, Howard Hendricks, E. V. Hill, Luis Palau, and Chuck Swindoll, who have endorsed Promise Keepers and taught at its rallies.

Skeptics and Heresy Watchers. Despite its broad base and noble aims, the movement has met with skepticism since its earliest days. Homosexual activists have never forgotten that Promise Keepers founder Bill McCartney, speaking as head football coach at the University of Colorado-Boulder, said that "homosexuality is an abomination to Almighty God."

Secular feminists have suspected Promise Keepers of encouraging men to reclaim domestic power. (Promise Keepers generally teaches a modified view of spiritual headship, emphasizing the oft-neglected scriptural charge to husbands to love their wives even as Christ loved the church.)
Not all the critics are from the secular left, though. Members of the evangelical group Christians for Biblical Equality have long expressed disappointment that Promise Keepers is essentially a men-only event, while also maintaining hope that Promise Keepers may someday welcome women to its rallies.

But since 1994, the movement's most determined critics have been a band of Christian heresy watchers whose methods and conclusions range from just off the mainstream to the fundamentalist fringe. Their charges against Promise Keepers run the gamut, from compromising with secular psychology, to surreptitiously hiring Mormon staff members, to laying the groundwork for a Nazi-style revival complete with "group hysteria." Among the most visible are Martin and Deidre Bobgan's PsychoHeresy Awareness Ministries, Al Dager's *Media Spotlight* newsletter, and Berean Call rounder Dave Hunt.

An Explosive Book. The *bête noire* of these critics is Robert Hicks, professor of pastoral theology at the Seminary of the East in Dresher, Pennsylvania, and author of *The Masculine Journey* (NavPress, 1993). Promise Keepers distributed 50,000 copies of Hicks's book to the men who attended the PK rally in Boulder, Colorado in, 1993. Since then, Hicks book has exemplified what many PK opponents see as a movement that's feminizing the church, diluting teachings on homosexuality, and encouraging men to engage in coarse discussions of their overly active sexual imaginations.

The Masculine Journey bears the subtitle "Understanding the Six Stages of Manhood." Drawing on Hebrew terms, Hicks defines the six stages as creational male (*adam*), the phallic male (*zakar*), the warrior (*gibbor*), the wounded male (*enosh*), the mature man (*ish*), and the sage (*zaken*). The PK-sponsored study guide for *The Masculine Journey* offers a map that represents the six stages as Adam's Township, Phallicornia, Warrior Land, Woundedville (Enosh City), Ishtown, and Sagebrush.

Hicks's proposed six stages may sound like a sanctified and expanded version of Robert Moore's *King, Warrior, Magician, Lover* or the late Catholic author Patrick Arnold's *Wildmen, Warriors, and Kings*, but his critics charge a more New Age connection; psychotherapy theorist and occultist Carl G Jung.

Hicks responds that his six stages of manhood bear no resemblance at all to Jung's concepts of mother, rebirth, spirit, and trickster, as identified in his book *Four Archetypes*. He also writes of challenging a Jungian psychotherapist during a panel discussion.

"I have known men who have started down that road of the psychic-feminine within, only to find that it led nowhere, or to the discovery of something they already knew — that they were men!" Hicks writes, "So the Jungian definition of manhood doesn't work for me."

William Spencer. Who critiques the men's movement in the book *The Goddess Revival*, believes Hicks suffers an unfair charge in having his six stages described as Jungian in origin or style.

"Hicks distances himself from Jung early on in the book," Spencer says, Jung's concept of archetypes involved a collective unconscious and inherited memory common to all people, both men and women. Robert Moore proposed archetypes that are ever present to men as four components of the male psyche.

Hicks proposes six stages, through which he says some men move successfully, while others get stuck in earlier stages.

"Hicks has read thoroughly from the men's movement, and there are a lot of undigested ideas from that movement in the book" adds Spencer, who is an adjunct professor of theology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

Phallic Worship? One passage in Hicks's book has generated especially intense controversy. He writes:

I believe Jesus was phallic with all the inherent phallic passions we experience as men. But it was never recorded that Jesus had sexual relations with a woman. He may have thought about it as the movie *The Last Temptation of Christ* portrays, but even in this movie He did not give in to the temptation and remained true to His messianic course. If temptation means anything, it means

Christ was tempted in every way as we are. That would mean not only heterosexual temptation but also homosexual temptation! I have found this insight to be very helpful for gay men struggling with their sexuality.

The Bobgans summarize that passage with the subhead "Jesus: A Phallic Kind of Guy?" "What Hicks does not reveal is that the blasphemous book on which that movie was based includes a detailed fantasy, not what the Bible would call mere temptation," the Bobgans write in their "Promise Keepers and PsychoHeresy" booklet. "The 'last temptation' was more than a suggestion. It more resembled 'lusting in the heart,' which Jesus called sin (Matthew 5:28). Thus Hicks's suggestion embraces the movie's blasphemy."

Hicks sees this point of contention as part of the Christian church's long-standing debate about the full meaning of Jesus' incarnation. In a lengthy interview with the JOURNAL, Hicks posed four questions related to that debate:

- What kind of human flesh did Jesus assume? "Is that flesh capable of sin?" Hicks asked. "What Christ did not assume, he did not save."
- Was Christ's temptation external only, or also internal? (Can such a distinction be justified biblically or psychologically?)
- Was Christ's temptation partial or whole?
- What did the early Church fathers hold on these questions of temptation?

Critics also take issue with Hicks's view that "we are called to worship God as phallic kinds of guys, not as some sort of androgynous, neutered nonmales, or the feminized males so popular in many feminist-enlightened churches."

"Thus the phrase 'a phallic kind of guy' brings forth images of Greek paganism rather than biblical manhood. And that is exactly the direction Hicks takes his readers," the Bobgans write.

Yet Hicks offers a clear definition of what he means by phallic worship: "We must learn to worship God with our sexuality. This means learning to honor God with our phallus in the context of the restraints He has prescribed. This is for our own good. It means, whether married or single, learning to sublimate and channel our sexual passion into things constructive and generative."

Honorable Wounds. Hicks repeatedly stresses that active homosexuality is sinful, but he also counts homosexual orientation among "honorable wounds." He writes:

Alcoholic fathers, dysfunctional families, divorce after one or two years of marriage, and multiple job firings are all wounding men at earlier ages. At men's conferences and retreats, more and more young men are coming up after my sessions and telling me their stories of abuse, aloneness, chemical dependencies, and inadequate relationships with women. Some take desperate leaps for young men and reveal their guilt and anxiety about being gay or being straight and addicted to sex or pornography....

My reply to them is, "Your wound is honorable; your wound is a normal part of male development. Life is not over. This wound may be the entry point for new wisdom and power; it may be the voice of God. Now we need to figure out what it means and how to move toward healing in order to keep you on the masculine journey. We need to help you find a way out of your inappropriate response to some abnormal event or circumstance in your past." It's but a momentary stop on the map of manhood.

Spencer agrees with the conservative critics' worries that Hicks defines wounds in an overly broad manner.

"He really downplays the concept of sin!" Spencer says, "He'll list being shot in a war, along with committing adultery, along with being from a fatherless family — all under the concept of 'honorable woundedness.'"

Promise Keepers distributes an eight-page letter signed by Pete Richardson, its vice president of communication services, which defends the book and study guide.

"At Promise Keepers we recognize that our responsibility is great when we endorse any resource," Richardson writes. "We also realize that, by endorsing a resource not fully created by Promise Keepers, the resource will not communicate a comprehensive definition of the ministry. In conclusion, we feel that *The Masculine Journey* is a valid resource for men to grow in Christ, but it does not encompass all of the values and distinctives of Promise Keepers."

Despite Richardson's qualified defense, Promise Keepers no longer sells the book, says PK spokesman Steve Chavis.

That leaves Hicks frustrated and wondering if, by breaking its contract with him and NavPress, the Promise Keepers organization is modeling the promise-keeping it urges on participants. "They're having to deal with things on the run, and they're not giving a lot of thought to anything," he says.

Other Theological Concerns. Although Hicks's book has generated the most heated criticism of Promise Keepers, both opponents and sympathizers note other controversial areas.

Various observers have voiced concerns that PK materials for its small groups promote an encounter-group model to break down men's inhibitions about discussing issues such as sex.

Critics excoriated the first version of *The Masculine Journey Study Guide* for proposing that men ask each other, in ice-breaking game called "People Bingo," if they had made love with their wives during the past week. The new version the study guide still offers such "People Bingo" speculations about participants as, so-and-so "is wearing boxer shorts or bikini briefs," "has a sister in the feminist movement," "resembles the Marlboro Man," or "has had circumcision, vasectomy or prostate operation."

Al Dager and the Bobgans press allegations that Promise Keepers has fashioned a movement attractive to Roman Catholics and Mormons.

At first glance, it appears that some Mormons have indeed caught the Promise Keepers vision. "The movement's 'Seven Promises' are like something straight out of the men's priesthood manual for the [Mormon] church," attorney Chip Rawlings told the *Los Angeles Times* in May. Rawlings and other Palos Verdes, California Mormon leaders "are urging members of the Latter Day Saints to participate in the movement," the *Times* reported.

And while such evangelists as Greg Laurie preach vigorously on sa1vation themes on the opening night of Promise Keepers, dissatisfied critics remain convinced that those messages are not explicit enough.

"If you're going to preach the gospel and it's so broad that it won't bother Catholics, LDSers [Mormons] or RLDSers [Reorganized Latter-day Saints], then there's something wrong with that gospel," Martin Bobgan told the JOURNAL.

"Once the gospel has been compromised by psychology, it's easier for it to be compromised by ecumenism to this degree," added Deidre Bobgan.

PK spokesman Chavis emphatically disputes the notion that Promise Keepers is soft on any evangelical essentials. "PK's evangelism messages on the Friday night of the conference are clear: Ye *must* be born again."

Attackers — and Defenders. Chavis sees the summer's controversies as frustrating diversions from the real work of Promise Keepers.

"Unfortunately, many of our 'accusers' have never contacted PK directly for clarification on the issues they bring up. Others seem bent on debate, and PK has neither the time nor the resources to respond to those issues. PK knows what its call is: to see a generation of godly men, who love Jesus Christ, come forth and become living, breathing 'promise keepers' — not to an organization, but in their real world.

"Some might say, 'PK is so popular, something must be wrong.' But we're barely hanging on to the demand for the Truth coming from men all over the country. The more conferences we have, the faster they sell out. And these men don't want their ears tickled. They want the truth," Chavis says.

We will continue to prayerfully, faithfully do all we can to point men to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and the government of His church. If it be of God, glory to His name. If it is not of God, may it end this minute."

In a July 21 editorial responding to Promise Keepers' assorted attackers. Evangelical Press News Service director Doug Trouten wrote that "the simple truth is that critics of Promise Keepers don't know what they're talking about. They're speaking out of ignorance, and missing the point of the conference.

"Promise Keepers is about forging a vision of what it means to be a Christian man in today's world. It's about realizing that there are thousands of other men in your community who will support you in your efforts to be the best husband and father you can be. And it's about living in such a way that when your family and friends look at you, they see Christ.

“When men do that, their wives and children will naturally come to honor and respect them. Maybe those tricky Promise Keepers are up to something after all.”

— Doug LeBlanc