

## THE PROMISE KEEPERS

The news last Sunday reported on a rally of about a million men belonging to Promise Keepers in Washington, DC. One of their chants is “We love Jesus.” Their programme aims to get men to renew their commitment to their role as husbands, fathers, church members, and members of their American communities. We ought to thank God for every effort to preserve moral standards.

However, we should have serious reservations about the movement. Albert James Dager bases this report on an article in Media Spotlight.

The movement has grown amazingly since Bill McCartney, a football coach, and a member of John Wimber’s Vineyard movement founded it in 1990. There is a strong influence of Wimber’s Vineyard among Promise Keepers’ leadership. The movement has the support of well-known men, including Gary Smalley, and Dr James Dobson (of Focus on the Family). Promise Keepers pledge themselves to seven promises, which include honouring Jesus Christ through worship, prayer, and obedience to God’s Word; committing themselves to vital relationships with a few other men in guardian capacities; spiritual, moral, ethical, and sexual purity; building strong marriages and families; supporting the work of their churches; overcoming racial and denominational barriers; and making an influence on their communities. One of the chief points their platform opposes is the frequent abandonment these days of home and church to feminine leadership.

It may sound carping to criticise a movement that talks so much about integrity and spiritual purity. Unfortunately, though some of their literature is Biblical, a good deal of it is based on humanist psychology and counselling. God is often “God as you perceive Him to be.” Much of the advice is based on what seems to work, and what makes a person feel good, rather than what God’s clear Word says. Self-acceptance is often regarded as acceptance by God.

The movement lacks discrimination and discernment. This is evident in its refusal to criticise points of doctrine that might be controversial; and members are encouraged to go back and be influential in their own churches, be they Fundamentalist, Mormon, Pentecostal, Charismatic, Catholic, whatever. They even welcome homosexuals to their events. They do not want to appear intolerant and unloving, and so refrain from judging them. They assume that all mankind, including men who do not profess to be Christians, are one spiritual brotherhood

Some of their techniques include New Age methods of visualisation, meditation, and self-actualisation.

A good deal of their literature has a low view of Scripture. One of their authorities, Hicks, even says that David was a manic-depressive, and Hicks does not believe that God inspired the Psalms.

The movement uses encounter groups, which encourage men to reveal intimate things about themselves and their marriages, in a context where failures are often seen as merely as evidence that men are human, and God’s Word is often not used to rebuke, or to lead to repentance. Their programme includes the belief that every man must have an older adviser, called a mentor, and a younger man to whom he can be a mentor. The manuals encourage leaders not to be judgmental and not to try to change men if they have been wrong. The manuals contain materials that pick and choose out of what is truthful and what is erroneous.

Even though the movement encourages men to assume leadership where it has been lost, much of the literature even seems to encourage men to be more effeminate. That may often be the reason why their wives also support the movement, even though it is a movement for men only.

One of their serious failings is their misrepresentation of Jesus. They depict Him as non-confrontational, feminised, “sensitive” Jesus, who accepts sin without asking for repentance. Some of their literature even suggests that Jesus harboured sinful thoughts.

Though much of what the movement says about opposing racial discrimination cannot be objected to, Promise Keepers is thoroughly ecumenical. Their literature rarely goes beyond the basics of the Christian faith. There is no doctrinal integrity. Men are encouraged to give credibility to other men with whom they do not agree. The movement encourages men of all denominations to come together, regardless of doctrine. It focuses on what they can agree on, and fails to condemn serious false doctrine. They discourage attempts to lead men out of their denominations even when they are blatantly wrong.

There are questions also about the effect the movement is having. It should not be measured merely by numbers, changes in life-style, or by even improved commitment by men to their families and their churches. For judgments should be based, not on “perceived results”, but tested by God’s Word. Otherwise, emphasis is on the ends, rather than on the means.

The lack of sound Biblically-based teaching is not helped either by the attempts to produce emotional

highs in their rallies, as of tens of thousands of male voices are raised in thrilling unison.