



Books in Review

7 TOXIC IDEAS POLLUTING YOUR MIND

by Anthony Selvaggio

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In a day in which we are inundated with inaccurate and distorted interpretations of the “strongholds” which Paul metaphorically instructs believers to pull down (2 Corinthians 10:4), it is refreshing to read a sound exposition of the apostle’s prescript. Far too often — by popular and best-selling authors — we are told these strongholds are any evil and every sin (from immorality to drunkenness to unrighteous anger). Anthony Selvaggio’s book combats seven critical concepts which exalt themselves against the knowledge of God.

The seven “toxic ideas” which Selvaggio addresses are *technoploy*, the lure of modern technology; *neophilia*, the passion for new and innovative goods and ideas; *egalitarianism*, the desire for equality (by repudiating authority, hierarchy, and order); *individualism*, the idol of a self-absorbed life; *materialism*, the presupposition of naturalism or the reduction of humanity to a soulless entity (a view espoused by the new atheists); *consumerism*, attaining personal happiness at any cost; and *relativism*, the belief that morality and truth are subjective and relative to the people who embrace them. These distinctive, yet at times amalgamated, ideas tear at the fabric of culture, but more importantly, stifle the church and the mind of the Christian. “These seven ideas,” Selvaggio says, “are akin to the golden calf that Israel crafted in the wilderness. They are opportunities for idolatry” (pg. 14).

While these concepts are to be expected to be disseminated from government chambers, university lecterns, and the media, the tragedy is that they are being spread from pulpits and into the lives of Christians. Therefore, as Selvaggio tells us, believers must be aggressive, not passive, in their struggle. We cannot underestimate our enemy for he is “crafty” and he has a “tremendous foothold on the mind-set of this world” (pg. 15).

In the chapter on *neophilia*, we are instructed that progress is moving us away from a biblical worldview and from the preservation of the faith once entrusted to the saints. This danger is prevalent and germinates

within the soil of postmodernism. Here Selvaggio informs that “neophilia has had a profound negative impact ... in the realm of education” (pg. 44). And the extreme danger, we are told, is “The neophilia that runs rampant in modern education is a powerful tool in the hands of our adversary because it involves our children. Just as a lion searches through a herd of antelope for the youngest among the herd, so our adversary seeks to prey on our children” (pg. 45).

And Selvaggio warns, “The church has not been immune to the pernicious power of unbridled neophilia. The church also seems to have an insatiable passion for the new. The church in our day is not enamored of the faith once entrusted to the saints; rather, it is more interested in being culturally relevant and genuine. Nowhere can the present power of neophilia be seen more clearly than in the emerging-church movement” (pp. 45-46).

The chapter on *individualism* dramatically spells out the methods and effects of how the church and its authority are severely crippled by self-indulgent narcissism. “The focus of the church is undermined by individualism because it has led church members into believing that the reason the church exists is to meet their individual needs and desires” (pg. 77). This mind-set also affects both music and preaching: “Much of contemporary worship music is riddled with first-person pronouns. We sing much more about ourselves than we do about God. ... Many sermons are devoid of objective truth about God and instead are filled with subjective points meant to demonstrate personal relevance to the listener” (ibid.). This individualism also plays out in the matter of church discipline: “In the face of correction from a church body, many choose to simply leave and find another church rather than submit to the correction of their elders” (pg. 76).

The book’s back cover says discussion questions are included to identify and deal with these toxic ideas in the reader’s own mind. These questions are absent and would have been useful. Nonetheless, it’s a very helpful volume that is insightful and penetrating. The book is quickly read and easily perceived. It unmasks the worldliness that perilously takes captive the minds of believers and ends up shaping their behavior. But reader beware: If you’re compulsive about the latest high-tech gadgetry or invest far too much time social networking, you may not make it past the first few chapters.

—MKG

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