

Bob and Gretchen Passantino: Witch Hunters?

(The following is excerpted from the book *Prophets of PsychoHeresy II* by Martin and Deidre Bobgan. The book, which is now out-of-print, critiques Dr. James Dobson's promotion of psychology and self-esteem.)

Bob and Gretchen Passantino believe that Dobson is a victim of slander and witch hunt. They are concerned about public criticism of Dobson and reveal their admiration for him. They say:

Dobson's ministry is a Christian ministry, based on essential Christian doctrine and emphasizing Christian family values such as the sanctity of human life, the integrity of nuclear families, marital fidelity, and Christian discipleship.

Although they admit that not everyone may agree with Dobson on some ideas, they declare that "by essential doctrine and by fruit, Dobson has proved that he and his organization are well within biblical orthodoxy." They say:

Most of the witch hunting accusations against James Dobson concern two main themes: (1) he is a "Christian psychologist," which is a contradiction in terms; and (2) he advocates "self-esteem," which contradicts the biblical teaching of the depravity (utter sinfulness) of mankind.

Bob and Gretchen Passantino are a good example of how devotion to an individual such as Dobson can influence thinking, conclusions, and even accusations. This couple has written a book titled *Witch Hunt*. Even though the Passantinos are not psychologists, they are an example of those who naively follow and support psychology. Based upon what they list as a background for their writing, the Passantinos lack the knowledge to be discerning in this area of psychology. Nevertheless, because of their commitment to a person, they proceed to confront individuals who have criticized Dobson.

The words *witch hunt* originally referred to searching out persons accused of witch craft. However, the current usage of the term generally refers to exposing and harassing those with unpopular views or beliefs or uncovering subversive political activities. Certainly Dobson does not have unpopular views; they are indeed highly popular among both Christians and non-Christians. The views of his critics, on the other hand, are highly unpopular, which raises a question of who is witch hunting whom? The ones who criticize Dobson or the ones who criticize the very small group of people who do not agree with his very popular psychological notions? There is no question here of subversive political activities, though the issue is certainly one of psychological ideas subverting the faith once delivered to the saints.

Passantinos' define *witch hunt*.

The Passantinos present their own specified definition of *witch hunt*. They say:

Witch hunting occurs when Christians, desiring to preserve truth, do not finish their work carefully and instead (1) misunderstand or misuse Scripture; (2) argue illogically; (3) misrepresent others; or (4) by their actions assume that the end (preserving truth) justifies the means (unfair accusations).¹

We will use the Passantinos' guidelines to evaluate their own writing.

(1) *Misunderstand or misuse Scripture*: In one section of their book the Passantinos defend Dobson's position on self esteem and psychology. They say:

Consistently throughout his ministry, James Dobson declares that his ministry is based on his understanding of the Bible's foundational truths. Some may disagree with his understanding, but it is witch hunting to accuse him of basing his ministry on secular psychology and of denying one's need of salvation in Jesus Christ.²

While we have never said that Dobson denies one's need for salvation in Christ, we have shown that his ministry is based upon secular psychology.

Even though Dobson repeatedly claims to have based it on the Bible, there is just too much evidence that demonstrates the heavy influence of secular psychology. The Passantinos' inability to see this emphasizes their possible ignorance of Scripture, psychology, or both. If they have made a sincere analysis of Dobson's use of secular psychology and come to this conclusion, it is because they themselves "misunderstand or misuse Scripture."

In their book the Passantinos refer to a radio interview with Martin Bobgan. On that same program, two psychologists make the following remarks:

¹Bob and Gretchen Passantino. *Witch Hunt*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1990, p. 27.

²*Ibid.*, p. 144.

The church is in the world to encourage one another. It's a social setting. I mean it's a place in which we interact as social beings to encourage growth. But there are people who for whom that is not enough, that they have special problems. And they've tried to pray. People have told them to pray. They've believed. And, it hasn't worked.³

I would respond that all the Christians (all the clients that I see are Christians) and that somehow, they were unable to get help. Some of them are ministers. Some of them are youth workers. Some of them have various functions in the church. They for the most part are very committed Christians, but somehow whatever they got in church, or didn't get, was not helpful enough.⁴

This is what we refer to as the **deficiency of Scripture view**. It justifies using psychology because prayer and the Scriptures supposedly haven't worked. Just because a person does not seem to get the kind of help he needs from the Bible, prayer, and godly counsel does not mean that true help must be sought outside of what God has provided according to His revealed Word. With that kind of misunderstanding of the power of Scripture, one could say that those who turned away from Jesus had good reason because what He said "hasn't worked."

Contrary to what those psychologists imply, there is nothing deficient about the Scripture. The Lord uses His written Word to reveal Himself, to present doctrinal truth, to convict of sin, to correct, and to instruct in righteousness (right living). 2 Peter 1:3-4 says: "His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue." And that knowledge comes through His Word as applied to the human heart. And that Word was given long before the advent of psychology.

To permit those two psychologists to say what they did without voicing disagreement shows the Passantinos' gross misunderstanding of the sufficiency and effectiveness of the Scriptures. In short, such statements divorce the Bible from the Lord Himself, as if it is a book of rules and principles devoid of the power, the presence, and the very life of God. (2) **Argue illogically:** A further example of witch hunting, according to the Passantinos, is arguing illogically. An excellent example of this is seen in the same radio interview with Martin Bobgan, which they discuss in their book. The Passantinos say:

The Bobgans state, "Nobelist Richard Feynman, in considering the scientific status of psychotherapy, says that 'psychoanalysis is not a science,' and that it is 'perhaps even more like witch doctoring.'"⁵

The Passantinos say, regarding Feynman: "But he was not an expert in psychology, psychotherapy, or the philosophy of science."⁶ Then they say:

Martin Bobgan stated on our Answers in Action radio program that Feynman's opinion was credible because he was a scientist stating that psychoanalysis was not scientific---his expertise was in science. However, Feynman was a physics scientist, not a scientific philosopher or historian, or even a specialist in the theory of science and science education. And even if he were, he has presented no working familiarity with psychoanalysis by which his judgment can be considered definitive. He won the Nobel prize in physics for his atomic research, not for his definition prowess.

If Hunt and the Bobgans wish to appeal to Feynman's opinions as authoritative because of his general knowledge or because he must be smart to get a Nobel prize, then why not accept Feynman's other opinions? What did he think about God and religion?⁷

The Passantinos are attempting to discredit Feynman by referring to him as a physics scientist, as if a physics scientist cannot tell whether another course of study is a scientific discipline adhering to strict scientific procedures and parameters.

The inference is that Feynman only knows enough about physics to comment on that, but not enough to comment as a "scientific philosopher or historian, or even a specialist in the theory of science and science education." The Passantinos have no knowledge of Feynman's knowledge of or expertise in any of the above. The Passantinos have no knowledge of the number and kinds of courses that Feynman may have had in any of those fields they claim he should not be trusted in. However, it may be that Feynman is as much an expert in these areas as the Passantinos are in the areas of "Religion, the cults, theology, and apologetics," which they list as areas in which they have researched and written.⁸

³Keith Edwards on "Answers in Action," Tape #206.

⁴John Carter on "Answers in Action," Tape #206.

⁵Passantino, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 255.

We see no degrees listed for the Passantinos at the end of their book. This does not concern us except that by their own standard and according to their own reasoning about Feynman, they themselves should be discredited. If Feynman is not to be listened to concerning whether psychology is a science, then by their own standards, why listen to the Passantinos on “Religion, the cults, theology, and apologetics”?

The Passantinos’ questions, “. . . then why not accept Feynman’s other opinions? What did he think about God and religion?” are silly in this context. If Feynman had a Doctor of Theology degree would they accept what he had to say “about God and religion”? Hopefully not! There is obviously no relationship between Feynman’s training in science and his opinions about religion. However, there is an explicit relationship between being a physics scientist and having an understanding of the philosophy of science and being able to determine what is and what is not science.

From an academic point of view and following the Passantinos’ reasoning, Feynman’s views on science and related areas are more reasonable to quote than the Passantinos’ comments about the areas in which they have written. But Feynman’s views on God and religion have nothing to do with the issue of his knowledge on what constitutes a science. In addition, the Passantinos attempt to discredit Feynman because he is an atheist, which has nothing to do with his stature as a scientist. They expect the reader to follow their logic and discredit him too. But their logic is illogical.

It is interesting that in their eagerness to defend Dobson the Passantinos are willing to condemn wrongly a statement by a Nobelist who is a known and highly recognized scientist. Yet they gladly accept Dobson’s teachings, such as self-esteem, which are derived from the nonscientific type of psychology that Dobson dips into. Also the men who originated this psychological nonsense and who are followed by Dobson are, in the main, just as atheistic as Feynman.

(3) Misrepresent others: The Passantinos’ Feynman illustration is an example of twisting the facts and misrepresenting others. It is a misrepresentation of what actually happened on their broadcast, since almost nothing was said by Bobgan about Feynman. Feynman’s name was introduced by the Passantinos. Bobgan said a lot about Sir Karl Popper’s views on psychotherapy and the underlying psychologies. Popper is considered by some to be the greatest philosopher of science of all time and he concludes that the kind of psychology that Dobson uses is not science. But no comment was made about this in the Passantinos’ hurry to concoct criticism of the Bobgans in order to support Dobson.

Another example of misrepresentation occurred on the same Answers In Action radio broadcast. They say, “We had as our guest Martin Bobgan, author of *PsychoHeresy*, representing the position that all psychotherapy is evil and unbiblical.”⁹ Please note that the Passantinos say that Bobgan represents the position that “all psychotherapy is evil and unbiblical.” No quote given and no footnote provided. We have never made such a statement! It was contrived by the Passantinos, attributed to us, and is a misrepresentation.

In reference to the other guests along with Martin Bobgan on that same program, the Passantinos say:

Our other guests were Dr. John Carter and Dr. Keith Edwards from the Rosemead Graduate School of Psychology (at Biola University), representing the position that some principles and techniques from psychology can be used successfully to help someone if they do not conflict with biblical principles.¹⁰

The Passantinos then quote a critic who complained about the program as saying:

Ninety-nine percent of clinical so-called christian [sic] psychologists use some Freudian and Jungian theory in dealing with past hurts. Freud was a God hating atheist and Jung was involved in spiritism and admits communicating with spirits in his later years. Yet Carter quoted these men as part of “God’s truth outside the Bible.”¹¹ (*Sic* inserted by the Passantinos.)

The Passantinos say:

Our critic condemned Carter unfairly by associating him with psychologists he characterized as anti-Christian. His reasoning went like this. Carter is a psychologist. Freud and Jung were pioneering psychologists. Freud was an atheist. Jung was an occultist. Therefore, Carter must be an atheist and/ or an occultist----or at least overwhelmingly influenced by such thinking!¹²

We ask the reader to read carefully what the critic says and then read carefully what the Passantinos say about what the critic’s reasoning must have been. In no way does the critic say, “Carter must be an atheist and/or occultist----or at least overwhelmingly influenced by such thinking!”¹³ That is drawing conclusions which are not there. The point the critic is

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 89.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³*Ibid.*

making is that “Carter quoted these men as part of ‘God’s truth outside the Bible.’”¹⁴ These examples only demonstrate how desperate the Passantinos are to defend psychology for the sake of Dobson and others. And they are examples of serious misrepresentation on their part.

(4) By their actions assume that the end (preserving truth) justifies the means (unfair accusations): The previous examples represent “unfair accusations.” We wonder how much of their “means (unfair accusations)” are the result of their obvious seemingly irrational desire to defend Dobson, which may equate in their minds to “preserving truth.”

The Passantinos have a chapter titled “People They’re Slandering.”¹⁵ The dictionary defines *slander* as “the utterance of false charges or misrepresentations which defame and damage another’s reputation.” Our above examples demonstrate that they themselves have uttered false charges and misrepresentations.

Dobson’s name and Campus Crusade are on the cover of *Witch Hunt* even though Campus Crusade is barely mentioned in the book. Both are there in such a way as to sell more books, which raises the question of commercialization. In addition, even though Charles Swindoll is not even mentioned in the book, his name is listed on the cover, as a victim of *Witch Hunt*. His popularity further amplifies the question of commercialization.

Lest someone accuse us of doing the same by listing names of individuals on the covers of our books, we hasten to say that those names are on the cover in such a way that they inhibit sales, not encourage them. It is obvious that we are critiquing the individuals, not complimenting them. If we were interested in commercialism, we would write supporting those individuals and letting that be known on the cover of the book, as is true of the Passantinos’ book.

While we would not accuse the Passantinos of being into psychoheresy, we do accuse them of naively supporting it.* In addition, by their own standards, we do raise the question of whether or not they are witch hunters. They say in their book, “However, we cannot honestly and fairly claim to represent the God of truth---the God whom we claim to serve---by accusing anyone unfairly.”¹⁶ (Emphasis theirs.) We agree.

*** After the above was written, the Passantinos wrote a four-part series for *the Christian Research Journal (CRI)* on “Psychology & the Church,” in which they leave the door open to psychotherapy and its underlying psychologies. In response, the Bobgans wrote the book *CRI (Christian Research Institute) Guilty of Psychoheresy?* See **BOOKS**.**

¹⁴ *Ibid*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 137-156

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

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