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"Ingredients for a Health Church" (an article from the From the President column of the Christian Research Newsletter, Volume 7: Number 1, 1994) by Hank Hanegraaff.

The editor of the Christian Research Newsletter is Ron Rhodes.

One of the most frequently asked questions received at the Christian Research Institute revolves around the issue of choosing a good church. Although the question is framed in a variety of formats, the essence can be boiled down to: "What are the basics of a healthy, well-balanced church?"

This question has taken on added significance in recent years because of the massive impact televangelism has had in our culture. In fact, it may well be argued that the "electronic church" has, in some ways, become the prototype for the local church.

In all too many cases, worship has been replaced with entertainment; fellowship has been transformed into individualism; and the biblical concept of "every believer a witness" (Acts 8:1) has been replaced by the dubious witness of the televangelist. Indeed, the very form and function of the church has been dramatically altered.

In view of these cultural developments, it is critical that Christians have a handle on the basic ingredients of a healthy,

well-balanced church. To facilitate this, I've developed the acronym *G-O-D.*

G = God

The first sign of a healthy, well-balanced church is a pastor who is committed to leading his community of believers in the worship of God through _prayer, praise, _ and _the proclamation of the Word._

* _Prayer._ * Prayer is so inextricably woven together with worship that it would be unthinkable to have a church service without it. From the very inception of the early Christian church, prayer has been a primary means of worshiping God. Jesus Himself set the pattern when He taught His disciples to pray:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. (Matt. 6:9-13)

* _Praise._ * Praise is another key aspect of the believer's worship of God. Paul urged the church at Ephesus to "speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" (Eph. 5:19). In the Psalms, we see a stunning portrayal of a God who is worthy of our praise and adoration. As the psalmist put it (Ps. 150):

Praise the LORD.

Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens.

Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness.

Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, praise him with the tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute, praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals.

Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.

Praise the Lord!

* _Proclamation._ * In addition to prayer and praise, the proclamation of the Word is a vital aspect of worshiping God. 1 Timothy 4:13 exhorts us to devote ourselves "to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching." Through the proclamation of God's Word, believers are edified, educated, and equipped for evangelism.

It is through prayer, praise, and proclamation that we are "being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:5).

O = Oneness

The second sign of a healthy, well-balanced church is its oneness. Jesus Christ breaks the barriers of sex, race, and background that divide us and He makes us into one body under the banner of love. Communism claimed to turn men into comrades, but Christ turns believers into brothers and sisters. The oneness we share as the body of Christ is tangibly manifested through community, confession, and contribution.

* Community. * Baptism symbolizes our entrance into a community of believers who are one in Christ. It is a sign and seal that we have been buried to our old life and raised to newness of life through His resurrection power.

Holy communion is the chief expression of the oneness we share as a community of believers, for as we all partake of the same elements, we also partake of that which the elements symbolize: Christ, who binds us together. Our fellowship on earth, celebrated through communion, is a foretaste of the heavenly fellowship we will share when the symbol gives way to what it represents.

* Confession. * The confession of our oneness in Christ is based on a core set of beliefs which Walter Martin referred to as "essential Christianity." These beliefs, which have been codified in the creeds of the Christian church, form the basis of our unity as the body of Christ. Augustine's words bear repeating: "In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; and in all things, charity."

* Contribution. * The contribution of our time, talent, and treasure also tangibly demonstrate our oneness in Christ. The pastor is not called to do the work of the ministry. Rather, the pastor is called to "prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Eph. 4:12). God has given the individual members of the church spiritual gifts to be used "for the common good" (1 Cor. 12:7).

Christ has called individuals from every tongue and tribe and nation to oneness as the family of God. Remember, no man is an island! God has called each member to the body for a purpose. Many logs burning together burn brightly, but when a log falls to the side, its embers quickly die.

D = Disciples

In the Great Commission, Christ called us not only to make converts but to make disciples (Matt. 28:19). A disciple is a learner or follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are called to the task of making disciples through the testimony of our love, the testimony of our lips, and the testimony of our lives.

* Love * One of the secrets of growth in the early church was the testimony of its love. The love of Christ not only compelled early Christians to be ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:14), but constrained the world to take notice of them as well. The love of Christ was so contagious that it swept through the Roman Empire like wildfire. Jesus said, "All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another" (John 13:35).

* Lips * The early Christian church not only transformed the Roman Empire through the testimony of its love but also through the testimony of its lips. The Book of Acts tells us that on the day Stephen was martyred, a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Those who were scattered preached the Word wherever they went.

Therein lies the second secret of growth in the early church: every believer was a witness for Christ. While it is true that not everyone is called to be an evangelist, everyone is called to evangelize. This is why the church must take seriously the task of equipping believers. For the rest of their lives, as God provides opportunities, believers are to be prepared to make disciples. Jesus said, "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples" (John 15:8).

* Life * Closely related to the testimony of our lips is the testimony of our lives. The story is told of a man who was working in a factory in the north of England. While standing on a ladder, he lost his balance and was skewered on a red-hot metal disk. His work mates were frantically scurrying about, looking for a doctor, when the man called out, "Forget the doctor! I'm dying! Can anyone tell me how to get right with God?"

Of the more than 300 men in the factory, not one stepped forward. Later one of the men confessed that he could have stepped forward, but the testimony of his life had long ago refuted the testimony of his lips.

If we testify only by our lives, we are in danger of testifying only to ourselves. On the other hand, if our lives belie the testimony of our lips, we may well be dragging the name of Christ

through the mud. We must testify through both our lives and our lips.

It is crucial that we, like the early Christian church, come to understand more fully the biblical concept of the priesthood of all believers. Clearly, it is not the pastor's calling to do the work of the ministry single-handedly. Rather, as noted earlier, the pastor is called to "prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature" (Eph. 4:12-13).

It is my prayer that the acronym *G-O-D* will serve to remind you of the basic aspects of a healthy, well-balanced church: a church in which God is worshiped, in which we enjoy oneness in fellowship, and from which we can go out to make disciples of all nations. Indeed, as Peter put it, you are "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pet. 2:9).

This article is based on a portion of Hank Hanegraaff's best-selling book, *Christianity in Crisis.* We are pleased to announce that a *Christianity in Crisis Study Guide* is now available. See below.

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End of document, CRN0074A.TXT (original CRI file name),
"Ingredients for a Health Church"
release A, July 31, 1994
R. Poll, CRI

(A special note of thanks to Bob and Pat Hunter for their help in the preparation of this ASCII file for BBS circulation.)

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