

# CHRISTIANS AND THE UNSAVED: *A Comparative Examination of John MacArthur's and Rick Warren's Views of People Outside the Church*

«Theological Reflections»  
2013. Vol. #14. Pp. 265-278  
© A.N. Kravtsev, 2013

Andrey KRAVTSEV, *Prohladny, KBR, Russian*

---

## Introduction

The topic of this paper is “Christians and the Unsaved: A Comparative Examination of J. MacArthur’s and R. Warren’s Views of People Outside the Church.” More specifically, I intend to look at how the two preachers view people outside the Christian community, and how they instruct the members of the two corresponding local churches to interact with the unsaved.

The reason I chose this particular topic is that both John MacArthur and Rick Warren have been exerting significant influence on the churches of the Russian Baptist Union (the denomination I have served with as a missionary). Dozens of books and commentaries by MacArthur have been translated into Russian. An extension of Master’s Seminary was launched in Samara, Russia, and for over a decade it has prepared scores of preachers and pastors, although frequently its impact has been more divisive than constructive.<sup>[1]</sup> Nevertheless, many Russian pastors highly appreciate Dr. MacArthur emphasis on expository preaching and his uncompromised commitment to biblical authority and traditional moral teachings.

Rick Warren’s book, *The Purpose-Driven Church*, was translated into Russian about 20 years ago followed by some other books by this pastor. Although most older ministers rejected his approach as “foreign” and “too pragmatic,” for many younger leaders it became a kind of reference book on how to lead a local church toward greater realization of its potential. Today, Warren’s ministry team is working on planting several churches in Russia under Saddleback’s PEACE project.



**Andrey Kravtsev** is a doctoral student in intercultural studies at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (Deerfield, IL). In 2004–2012 he served as principal of North Caucasus Bible Institute in Prohladny (Kabardino-Balkaria, Russia) and taught courses in biblical hermeneutics, New Testament exegesis, and biblical theology. He is married and has three children. E-mail: [directorofncbi@gmail.com](mailto:directorofncbi@gmail.com)

---

<sup>[1]</sup> Particularly over the issues of Calvinism vs. Arminianism, and Psychology vs. Biblical counseling.

At the risk of certain oversimplification, it may be said that these two preachers are inspiring leading representatives of two opposite tendencies recognizable in the Russian Baptist churches: one is more fundamentalist with emphasis on “correct doctrine” (John Piper is another prominent champion here) and the other is “seeker-sensitive,” or culture oriented (Bill Hybels is another inspirer here). The relationships between the two groups have not always been welcoming, and it looks as if the polarity is going to grow stronger in the future.

Given these influences and tensions, I decided to examine the two preachers’ attitudes to people outside the church with the intent to see how these can affect missionary theology and practice of the Russian Baptists. In this paper I will first look at their different approaches to preaching as a whole. Then I will examine the two broader theological frameworks, namely, how each of them defines the concept of the “world” or “culture” in general. Then I will focus on their portrayals of, and the church’s attitudes to, people outside of the Christian community. Finally, I will draw some conclusions and possible avenues of application for my context back in Russia.

Due to the limited number of sermons (25 by each preacher) which were presented on various occasions over an extended period of time (some sermons by J. MacArthur date from 1969) it is hard to make conclusive statements about the views of the two preachers. Further research must be done with more material to modify the results presented here.

### “Faithful Preaching” vs. “Relevant Translation”

The first impression one gets when comparing sermons by John MacArthur (JM) and Rick Warren (RW) is that we are dealing here with two rather different approaches to preaching, particularly with regard to how they relate to culture. This conclusion is based on several observations. First, it is the choice of sermon topics. For JM they are almost exclusively biblical or theological, whereas for RW they are usually drawn from the life of his church members or the culture in general. Here are some examples:

#### *John MacArthur*

“The marks of God’s children”  
“Satan”  
“The Image of the Invisible God”  
“The Greatest THeme, the Glory of God”  
“Abolishing Death, the Uitimate Triumph”  
“The Cost of Discipleship”  
“The Promise and the Person of the Good News”  
“Marks of True Spiritual Service”  
“Reaching the World”  
“Secrets to Endurance”

#### *Rick Warren*

“Embracing the Vision, the Purpose Driven Life”  
“God’s Antidote to Worry”  
“God’s Word to Workaholics”  
“God’s Antidote to Damaged Emotions”  
“How to Make up Your Mind”  
“God’s Antidote to Dark Valleys”  
“God’s Antidote to Your Hurt”  
“God’s Antidote to Fearing the Future”  
“How to Hear God Speak”

“Obeying Civil Authorities”	“How God Talks to You”
“Concerns of a True Pastor, Humility and Selflessness”	“How to Recognize God’s Voice”
“Why God Became Man”	“Receiving Guidance from God”
“God’s Rainbow Covenant”	“The Marks of a Mature Person”
“The Necessary Components of Saving Faith”	“How to Profit from Your Problems”
“The Epitaph of a Faithful Preacher”	“What’s So Special about Christmas”
“The Glories of Gazing in the Face of Jesus”	“Following God’s Financial Plan”
“God’s Preparation for the Final Passover”	“How to Win over Temptation”
“Exhortation to a Faithful Church”	“The Foundation for a Strong Family”
	“Accept No Substitutes”

A second observation has to do with sermon content and structure. A typical sermon by JM is expository; it begins with a biblical text or a doctrinal issue then proceeds to careful exegesis which takes up to 80% of the sermon. In the process, JM often deals with Greek or Hebrew words, provides relevant background information, and puts side by side several texts dealing with the issue at hand. Main points are usually illustrated with short word pictures or quotes and some application for the congregation is inserted. An extended illustration usually comes near the end of the sermon, preceding application instructions (about 7-8% of the text) and a prayer.

In contrast, a typical sermon by RW is almost exclusively topical. It begins with an “existential” question he sees his listeners are struggling with (life-purpose, stress, fear of the future, need to be accepted by others, etc.). This leads him to a text or, in many cases, to a chain of texts that deal with the issue at hand. Historical and linguistic information is minimal, only to clarify a difficult text or emphasize a point. Almost every other sermon (12 out of 25) includes a testimony “from the pews,” when a person or a couple comes forward to share their personal experiences enhancing the ideas and/or applications of the sermon. This makes the pulpit less “official” and so less separated from “normal” people visiting Saddleback.

Thirdly, it is the choice of Bible translations used by each preacher. Older sermons by MacArthur always use the KJB, while more recent use the NASB. Warren usually preaches from the NIV, though in many cases he often uses multiple translations: Living Bible, Amplified Bible, and New Century Version. In many sermons, he puts several translations of the same text alongside each other so as to make it as clear as possible. Furthermore, he himself often paraphrases the text to make it more understandable to his listeners:

Notice the next verse. “Everything, absolutely everything, got started in Him and finds its purpose in Him.” Let me try to summarize it real simply for you. Number one, you were made by God and you were made for God. Until you understand that life isn’t going to make sense. (“Embracing life’s purpose”)<sup>[2]</sup>

<sup>[2]</sup> Sometimes a technique of anachronism is used to lessen the distance between the listeners and the text: “A rich young ruler came to Jesus. He was a yuppie... Jesus knew what was the idol

Thus, using the metaphor by John R. Stott, it can be said that JM and RW are building the bridge from the opposite sides. MacArthur sees himself as a “faithful preacher” whose task is to proclaim and protect the true doctrines of Christianity,<sup>[3]</sup> whereas Warren aims at relating the Gospel to real life or regular people who struggle with life issues. I labeled these two roles as “faithful preaching” and “relevant translation.”

## A Broader Theological Framework: Two Concepts of the “World”

### *John MacArthur*

Before we proceed to examining the preachers’ views of the unsaved, it makes sense to look at their general understandings of the world (in the sense of human society or culture as a whole).

For MacArthur, the world lies in the power of Satan:

And he's running this world, in case you didn't know it. He is the prince of this world, he is the god of this world, he is the ruler of this present world. The whole world lies in the hands of the evil one, like a sleeping baby... And the devil runs the world's system.<sup>[4]</sup>

Logically, his understanding of human culture and institutions follows:

[Satan] has captured the medias of the world...all of them belong to him...the movies, to newspapers, for the most part, the schools, the education system, the books, every...every systematized thing in the world is really in the hands of Satan, except those things that are dedicated to Jesus Christ. There's no neutral ground, folks. You can't go and indulge in a neutral activity basically speaking.<sup>[5]</sup>

For this reason JM is not really interested in interaction with culture, and especially, contemporary culture. He hardly ever quotes any contemporary thinker, actor, writer, politician, or other cultural figure. When he refers to prominent cultural figures, they are almost always from the past centuries: Socrates, Plato, Michelangelo, Da Vinci, Napoleon, Dante, Milton, Benjamin Franklin and some others. His quotes come from hymn writers, Bishop Bergeroff, Thomas Gray, Charles Spurgeon, S.D. Gordon, Scottish covenanter Richard Cameron, 19<sup>th</sup> century missionaries to Indi, etc.

MacArthur also never mentions Hollywood and his only three references to movies are all in the same sermon, “Satan.” His scarce references to TV appear in the context of his critique of a prominent but unnamed TV evangelist. He mentions the arts to state their “degenerated” nature and their uselessness for salvation. Contemporary music is “degenerated”; therefore he makes ironic observations about those churches that

---

in his life, and that was his bank account” (“Accept no substitutes”).

<sup>[3]</sup> See “Epitaph of a faithful preacher.” Many of his sermons are polemical and are directed against some distortion of the Gospel. Common for him are concepts of “heresy” (7 instances), “false teachers” or “false teaching” (over 30) and

“false brothers” or “false faith” (9). Warren never mentions heresy, and refers to false teachers only once. The word “doctrine” never appears in his preaching at all (compare to 23 in JM).

<sup>[4]</sup> “Satan.”

<sup>[5]</sup> “Satan.”

want to “get relevant” and have “the best rock-and-roll band for a generation who have rebelled against classical music.”<sup>[6]</sup> Here is a characteristic statement:

Music has become a settling ground for degenerate people. Not just music, just about all the arts, but certainly music has degenerated in our culture both in its composition and its performance and its personnel.<sup>[7]</sup>

Science is mentioned only as it helps to prove Christ’s resurrection; other research, surveys or (secular) statistics are never mentioned. The media and education became mouthpieces for the lies of Satan:

You know, I look at this world in its confusion and its chaos and its lostness and I hear all the idiocy that’s pumped out in the name of human philosophy and all the stupidity that comes over the media and all of the lies and wrong answers and wrong opinions...<sup>[8]</sup>

[Satan] is hiding in our half-theology. He’s hiding in our philosophy and our education system. In all the media of the world, that’s where Satan is... The world itself is the media through which Satan acts.<sup>[9]</sup>

Certainly, MacArthur admits the existence of some neutral areas in culture:

Now, of course, there are some things that are for the health and the body and the enjoyment of the soul that have no moral significance and God’s given us those for our enjoyment. But anything that draws a moral conclusion is either for God or against God.<sup>[10]</sup>

However, in view of his understanding of eschatology these neutral things have no abiding value. God is going to destroy human cultures; only eternal realities are what matters.

As a fallen world catapults deeper and deeper into corruption, headed toward the day when the Lord comes back to destroy this world and to create a new heaven and a new earth, music degenerates with humanity.<sup>[11]</sup>

Paul’s concern is for God, Christ, the Holy Spirit and the souls of men that are eternal. All the objects, possessions, all the ideas, systems, standards, ambitions, achievements that are part of the passing world order didn’t matter a bit to him.<sup>[12]</sup>

So, in keeping with his understanding of Paul (who is JM’s “spiritual hero, a kind of model for [him] to follow”<sup>[13]</sup>), he believes that the coming apocalypse makes cultural activities “the inane, trivia of the world.”<sup>[14]</sup> It is not worth spending one’s time, life, talents, energy and resources for “material, worldly.. stuff that will burn.”<sup>[15]</sup> Moreover, even to ask for them in prayer can be against God’s will.

When you ask for material things – cars, houses, more money, health, all of those kinds of things – you have literally become an adulteress... And if you do that, you have just become the enemy of God.<sup>[16]</sup>

[6] “A church to be proud of.”

[7] “Spirit-filled Music.”

[8] “Marks of True Spiritual Service – 3.”

[9] “Satan.”

[10] “Satan.”

[11] “Spirit-filled music.”

[12] “Secrets to endurance.”

[13] “Concerns of a true pastor.”

[14] “Reaching the World.”

[15] Ibid.

[16] “Prayer, the highest form of worship.”

Thus, as a whole, JM's view of culture tends to be more negative than positive, and Christians are not encouraged to really interact with it. Even if not necessarily sinful, the things of the world are perishing, passing and physical, and as such, stand in sharp contrast to things which are eternal and spiritual.

### ***Rick Warren***

When one moves from this type of theology to Rick Warren's sermons, he or she finds there a much more affirmative view of the world. In fact, RW almost exclusively uses the word in a positive sense: it is God's creation; He loves it and holds it up. Nowhere does RW say that Satan runs the world. In fact, all of the references to Satan (37) and the devil (33) have to do with his individual tempting work in the life of a believer. He accuses, ribs, baits, tempts, condemns, perverts, counterfeits etc, but he is not seen as the ruler of the fallen world.

Of course, RW repeatedly says that we live in an imperfect world. But the problem with it lies in human values and choices, which is why Warren reserves his negative comments mostly for his concept of society. It is "permissive," "violent," and a "rat-race" society.

The Bible teaches that this is not a perfect world. Because there is sin in the world people do wrong things and suffering results.<sup>[17]</sup>

We have a society that is broken and falling down because people are not following the right path God intended for each of us to follow. The good news is that the path of righteousness is also the road to recovery.<sup>[18]</sup>

The essence of sin for Warren is when God-given good gifts are misused or when they take the place of God himself. "What is an idol? An idol is anything that takes the focus off God and puts it on something else. When anything is first in my life that is not God it's an idol even if its good."<sup>[19]</sup> But in itself, most desires are good and there is no problem with pleasures.

You couldn't live without desires: a desire to eat, drink, sleep, the sexual desire, to accomplish. God gives us these desires. Those are good desires. They are good gifts. But any desire out of control becomes destructive.<sup>[20]</sup>

Since evil is not in desires or institutions as such, but in the way people use or abuse them, Warren does not condemn cultural activities. For him human achievements, such as D-Day or "man on the Moon" are great, whereas Christmas is even greater.<sup>[21]</sup> Wealth is good unless it replaces God.<sup>[22]</sup> Human life as a whole is important for God as He cares about all sides of it: doctor payments, mortgages, and financial needs.<sup>[23]</sup> This is confirmed by testimonies of RW's church members who come forward to share their experiences of God's involvement in their everyday concerns – selling and buying

---

<sup>[17]</sup> "Recovering from life's disasters."

<sup>[18]</sup> "God's antidote to indecision."

<sup>[19]</sup> "Accept no substitutes."

<sup>[20]</sup> RW often illustrates this point with the issue of sex. He uses the word 33 times in 25 sermons. Unlike him, JM's has no references for "sex,"

and his 10 instances of the adjective "sexual" all have to do with "sexual sin or immorality." ("How to win over temptations").

<sup>[21]</sup> "What's so special about Christmas."

<sup>[22]</sup> "How to hear God speak."

<sup>[23]</sup> "God's antidote to worry."

a house, looking for a job, cancer treatment, etc. In terms of vocation, God can use a Christian in any area “to make a difference in the world.”<sup>[24]</sup>

If you're good at planning then your ministry in life will involve planning. If you're good at art or writing or with numbers or leading, then your life, your career, your ministry, your place, your niche in this world involves what God gave you.<sup>[25]</sup>

Such understanding of culture makes RW free to draw his examples from basically every area of life. He speaks of golf, movies, police officers, farmers, beaches, “Time” Magazine, quotes from contemporary philosophers. At least once he (positively) quotes a Hollywood actress, refers to Clinton and Bush, Elvis Presley, Tom Snyder, Oscar Wilde, Bobby Leach, sports world, jobs, carpools, Indiana Jones, etc. Almost in every sermon he refers to poles, statistics, or some form of research, either secular or Christian.<sup>[26]</sup> He also uses much more humor, including cultural jokes about men and women.<sup>[27]</sup>

On the other hand, Warren strongly encourages Christians to use discernment and self-control in how they approach culture. This involves “guarding your thoughts,” avoid watching “certain movies and TV shows.”<sup>[28]</sup> It is the ability to critically evaluate what “society is saying,”<sup>[29]</sup> to see cultural “myths” for what they really are.<sup>[30]</sup> So what Christians need is not avoidance of culture, but rather maturity in dealing with it.

## The People outside the Church

The view of humanity for MacArthur agrees with his understanding of the world: “Every unsaved man in this world is run by Satan... There is no neutral ground.”<sup>[31]</sup> Thus it is a dualistic picture with humans divided in two groups:

Now watch this picture, he's painting two family portraits, one is the devil and all of his children, the other is God and all of His children. Now watch the difference.<sup>[32]</sup>

JM's theologizing is deductive; he takes some biblical statements about humanity as generic and makes universal statements. So the words of Jesus to Jewish leaders in John 8:44 (“you are of your father the devil”) are given a universal application. Morally,

The unsaved person can't choose to do right. Did you know that? That an unsaved person does wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong all the time.<sup>[33]</sup>

Nor are they able to understand God: “You see the world has no capacity to recognize God. They don't have any capacity to recognize Christ.”<sup>[34]</sup> JM illustrates this point with a somewhat gloomy analogy:

<sup>[24]</sup> “Following God's financial plan.”

<sup>[25]</sup> “How to recognize God's voice.”

<sup>[26]</sup> As to the science that denies God, he comments that it is because of “arrogance in the world” that uses “pseudo scientific” arguments (“What's so special about Christmas”).

<sup>[27]</sup> MacArthur's humor is scarce, especially in later sermons as compared to earlier ones. Sometimes, in dealing with cultural jokes, he exposes them as lies: “And we make light of it,

and we kid about it, and we say, “Life begins at 40,” and a lot of other lies like that” (“Abolishing death, the final triumph”).

<sup>[28]</sup> “Affair-proofing your marriage.”

<sup>[29]</sup> “Accept no substitutes.”

<sup>[30]</sup> “Following God's financial plan.”

<sup>[31]</sup> “Satan.”

<sup>[32]</sup> “The marks of God's children.”

<sup>[33]</sup> “The marks of God's children.”

<sup>[34]</sup> “Satan.”

And I'll never forget [that] mother who couldn't accept the fact that [her] baby was dead. Leaned in and began to pat the little cheeks and kiss the baby all over its face. Nothing happened. That baby didn't know that mother. Not all. And you see, the reason was, was because it was dead. And the apostle Paul says in Ephesians 2:1, "That the unsaved man is," what, "dead." And he can't recognize the child of God.<sup>[35]</sup>

As the quote above suggests, the inability of the unsaved to know God results in their inability to know the children of God either. Therefore, a Christian should expect not to be recognized (i.e. understood, or accepted) by unbelievers, otherwise this puts in question his or her walk with the Lord: "And the world shouldn't recognize you. If the world recognizes you, you better check on your love relationship with God."<sup>[36]</sup>

In contrast to MacArthur, Rick Warren does not think about people in terms of two groups, or "families." Instead, when speaking about humanity, Warren usually identifies with people at large, and his preferred pronouns are "we," "our," and "us":

This week the whole world will focus on one event – Christmas. Everything will become secondary for one 24-hour period while we celebrate Christmas... What is so special about Christmas? It is the centerpiece of our history. Even our calendar is dated from the reference point of Jesus Christ.<sup>[37]</sup>

Without a doubt, probably the number one cause of problems in the world is immaturity... We get ourselves into all kinds of problems by saying immature things, making immature decisions, acting in immature ways. We just need to grow up.<sup>[38]</sup>

We all know what we're capable of and we're not kidding each other so we don't fake it or pretend. We know we need guidelines to keep us in line. Confess and receive forgiveness from God and then you can forgive yourself.<sup>[39]</sup>

As seen from the last two quotes, this is true even when RW speaks about sin. He avoids using forensic categories such as "sinners" and "saints." In fact, RW uses the former word only once when he refers to Christians as "forgiven sinners." The word "saints" is also used only once, to honor those who have been the longest members of his church. Both Warren and people who share their testimonies in his pulpit constantly emphasize the fact that they are just real people: "They can find out we're just real people with real struggles and we're finding God's answers here at Saddleback."<sup>[40]</sup>

In talking about non-Christians, RW's favored term (other than simply "people") is "unbeliever." In my view, he prefers it to words such as "lost" or "unsaved" because it implies a choice on the part of the person. As noted above, for Warren the problem of sin as well as recovery from it boils down to individual choices. This is one of the points where his theology comes into contrast with JM's theology.

God's given us the freedom to choose, [but] is also our greatest curse because we often choose the wrong thing. And when I choose the wrong thing innocent people suffer. Does that make sense? God's will is not always done in this world, folks.<sup>[41]</sup>

---

[35] "The marks of God's children."

[36] "Satan."

[37] "What is so special about Christmas," emphasis is mine.

[38] "The marks of a mature person."

[39] "Affair-proofing your marriage."

[40] "How to be used by God – 2."

[41] "Recovering from life's disasters."



Thus, Warren's attention is focused on the individual. The boundary between good and evil does not match with the boundary between the church and the world; rather, it may be said to go through the heart and the will of every person. Therefore his moral injunction is directed to the personal choice of his listeners.

## The Church and the Unsaved

### *John MacArthur*

Both MacArthur and Warren affirm that the church is a community of believers who turned away from sin and put their trust in Christ. However, quite different emphases surface in their discussions of the church's relationship to those outside. Thus, for JM it is important to stress what makes church different from the rest of humanity: "certainly there are some things that set the church aside from the rest of the world; that make it unique."<sup>[42]</sup> So he defines it through a number of both negative and positive characteristics:

What is a church to be proud of? Not a club for unbelievers, a church of redeemed people... Genuinely saved, not a church like Sardis who had a name but was dead... Not a church like Laodicea that the Lord will spit out of His mouth because it nauseates Him... It is not to be a mixture of believers and unbelievers... This is a church of genuinely redeemed people... who gather for the purpose of worship and edification.<sup>[43]</sup>

When combined with the view of the world discussed above, such understanding of the church encourages separation from people outside the church. Indeed, "the will of God is your sanctification that is separation."<sup>[44]</sup> In some of his sermons, MacArthur seems to strongly suggest that Christians are not supposed to have any meaningful relationships not only with the "world" in abstract, but with the people in it:

That's what he says, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." You don't have anything going with them. You're love relationship is with God... If you have a love relationship going on with the world, I'll clue you, you don't have any going on with God.<sup>[45]</sup>

At the same time, JM is convinced that the church exists in the world for one main purpose: to make disciples. "The reason we are left here is in order that we might make disciples of all the nations. That is our God given priority as a church."<sup>[46]</sup> In his sermon devoted to the Great Commission of Mat 28:18-20, MacArthur lists several qualities Christians must have to be able to fulfill this task. These are: availability, worship, submission, obedience, and power. Interestingly, none of them has anything to do with the unsaved. Perhaps, because of his strong emphasis on election, JM does not list compassion among these. The chief motivation behind evangelism is obedience.

Is there any tension between distancing from the world, and the command to make disciples? JM avoids it because for him the Great Commission is proclamation. It is "to preach the death and resurrection of Christ, preach repentance for the forgiveness

<sup>[42]</sup> "The marks of God's children."

<sup>[43]</sup> "A church to be proud of."

<sup>[44]</sup> "Exhortation to a faithful church."

<sup>[45]</sup> "The marks of God's children," emphasis is mine.

<sup>[46]</sup> "Reaching the world."

of sins, call for faith to make disciples. That sums it all up.”<sup>[47]</sup> No wonder, therefore, that when he speaks on how to practically make disciples, he has very little to say about relationships with people outside of the Christian community. For instance, when dealing with Mat 28:18-20 he basically skips the “going” part of it because he assumes it is clear enough:

How do you make disciples? By going, baptizing, teaching. That's a simple structure. Going, he says, that's very obvious. I mean how are you going to make disciples of all nations unless you are going? The assumption is they're not coming you're going... It all starts with going. But I want to focus on that second thought of baptizing.<sup>[48]</sup>

Further, when sharing the Gospel, one should necessarily proclaim the “hard-to-swallow” theme of the lordship of Christ as its integral part:

This easy believism is back today.. [But] what you do when you evangelize is you take somebody to the realization that to be saved and to follow Christ and be a true disciple, to be a Christian, you must do these three things: you must deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Him. You say, "Well people aren't likely to buy into this." If they're not, then they can't be saved. We can't change the terms to get the desired effect.<sup>[49]</sup>

Basically, being a disciple of Christ:

... isn't about you having your needs met. This isn't about you getting what you want. This is about you saying no to all of your needs, desires, hopes, ambitions, dreams, schemes, plans. This is about you embracing Mine. This is not about satisfaction, this is about sacrifice.<sup>[50]</sup>

Of course, JM realizes it is a hard message to accept. “There's a level of desperation here. You say, "Well, people aren't going to easily buy into that." What gives him hope, however, is the work of the Spirit in the life of the elect: “Well of course they're not, but then whoever said salvation was easy or even possible, unaided by the Holy Spirit?”<sup>[51]</sup>

### ***Rick Warren***

Speaking of the church's relation to those outside, Rick Warren expresses his attitude with a quote from William Temple, “The church is the only society that exists for the benefit of the non-members.’ We do not exist for us. The church never has. Jesus said, “I didn't come to be served. I came to serve.”<sup>[52]</sup> The church's purpose, he believes, is “to help everybody grow spiritually, emotionally, mentally, in every way and have balanced Christian living.”<sup>[53]</sup> Hence, in presenting his own local church the emphasis falls not on the way it is different from the world, but rather on the way it is close to the struggles and temptations of “normal” people.

If you're guilty of any of these issues, Saddleback is the church for you. This is a community of forgiven sinners. There are no perfect people in this church and it is not a

---

<sup>[47]</sup> “The cost of discipleship.”

<sup>[48]</sup> “Reaching the world”.

<sup>[49]</sup> “The necessary components of saving faith.”

<sup>[50]</sup> “Why God became man.”

<sup>[51]</sup> “The necessary components of saving faith.”

<sup>[52]</sup> “How to be used by God – 2.”

<sup>[53]</sup> “The marks of a mature person.”

place for self-righteousness. It is a place to come and get your act together and a place to come to find forgiveness and healing and a new life and break the power of temptations that you don't think you can break on your own because you can't without God's help. This is the place to do it because we're all working on it together.<sup>[54]</sup>

In the two part message "How to be Used by God" (which is in many ways parallel to JM's "Reaching the World"), RW tells his congregation that their mission in life is to bring other people to Christ. "Once you become a believer God wants you to pass it on. He wants you to tell other people. He wants you to bring others to Him just like somebody brought you." However, when he explains why it is important, his motivation is based on the condition of the people outside the church rather than of Christians.

Why is that important? Because only 11% of the people in the world know Jesus Christ. Only 11%. The vast majority of people go all through life not knowing God loves them, not knowing God has a plan for their lives, not knowing that Jesus Christ died on the cross for them.<sup>[55]</sup>

The sermon as a whole is based on the story of the paralytic who was brought to Jesus by his friends. Warren metaphorically applies this picture to those without Christ, and appeals to his listeners' pathos, "Folks, there are paralyzed people all around us. Millions of them. Three million right here in Orange County. Will you be a stretcher bearer?"<sup>[56]</sup> In the first part of the sermon he uses a metaphor of "the lost children flier." People outside the church are like lost children: "God has 20 million of these in California alone. Lost children that He loves and He wants found and He wants brought home."<sup>[57]</sup>

So, Warren's motivation for evangelism is compassion to people who are outside of relationships with Christ; obedience as a reason for evangelism does not really show up in the sermons I have had an access to. People need Christ who can change their lives, and this is what moves his disciples to share the Gospel.

Nothing changes lives like Jesus Christ. This is why we abandon all distractions. This is why we stay focused because nothing is more important than the eternal destiny of the people you love and the people you know and the people you work with and the people you don't know.<sup>[58]</sup>

When it comes to practical ways of reaching people for Christ, he believes the best way to do it is through relationships with people.

One of the reasons Christians never share their faith is because they're never with non-Christians. They're always at the church. They don't know anybody. They haven't had a bar-b-que with a non-Christian in 3 or 4 years. Why? They don't have time to bring them home and invite friends over who don't know the Lord.<sup>[59]</sup>

More than that, Warren even insists that unless you have non-Christian friends, you cannot become like Christ: "If you don't have any non-Christian friends you've got a

<sup>[54]</sup> "Affair-proofing your marriage."

<sup>[55]</sup> Part 2.

<sup>[56]</sup> "The marks of a mature person."

<sup>[57]</sup> By the way, this is the only time when he uses the word "lost" towards the non-Christians,

and even here it is not a theological term. ("How to be used by God – 1").

<sup>[58]</sup> "How to be used by God – 1."

<sup>[59]</sup> "How to be used by God – 1."

real problem. You're spending way too much time with Christians. God does not intend for you to spend all your life with Christians. You need to have some non-Christian friends. If you don't how can you be like Jesus? You can't."<sup>[60]</sup> Living in a Christian circle makes believers unconcerned for outsiders, which fundamentally contradicts their calling. He uses quite a strong analogy to illustrate this point:

Christians are kind of like manure. If you pile them all up together they stink. But if you spread them around a lot it does a lot of good. It fertilizes the world. So we don't want a big stink in church... I don't want you coming to church every night of the week.<sup>[61]</sup>

What he calls his listeners to do is this: "use your time, your money, your energy, and your efforts to help people find a relationship with God and in eternity you're going to enjoy that relationship forever."<sup>[62]</sup> Warren is not satisfied with general encouragements, though. He teaches the congregation specific steps each of them can make in order to pray for their friends and lead them to Christ. Besides prayer, friendship always remains the key as it has a strong potential for introducing them to the church and the Gospel, as well as for destroying false and distorted ideas about Christians and their faith. In keeping with his view of culture, RW calls Christians to develop relationships with unbelievers in a variety of settings and activities:

It may be a friend from school. It may be a friend who has the same hobby that you do. It may be a friend you met at a Pampered Chef or Tupperware Party. It may be a friend who plays on a sports team. It may be a friend in a club.<sup>[63]</sup>

If you were able to bring them to a group event that's fun, they'd go, "These people aren't goofy. They're not religious nuts. They're not fanatics. They're normal people." And the fear level goes down.<sup>[64]</sup>

This last point on fear and stereotypes deserves additional attention. Unlike JM, who simply states that the world does not know God's children, Warren shows a keen interest in how Christians and Christianity are viewed by outsiders. Quite often he makes deliberate efforts to undo some common stereotypes about Christians, because he wants to make sure they do not prevent anyone from responding to God's invitation. For this reason he also avoids using the word "religion," so common in MacArthur. For him, "Christianity is not a religion, it's a life."<sup>[65]</sup>

Religion will not get rid of your stress. Religion will not help you stop worrying. You don't need religion. You need a relationship. You need a Shepherd – somebody who provides, protects, guides and corrects.<sup>[66]</sup>

In general, his approach strives to "lower those concerns and walls and fears that might be there for people coming."<sup>[67]</sup> One of the ways he unravels these concerns and fears is by naming them on behalf of seekers. Especially, he focuses on difficult parts of the Gospel that are often misunderstood.

---

<sup>[60]</sup> "How to be used by God – 2."

<sup>[61]</sup> "How to be used by God – 2."

<sup>[62]</sup> "How to be used by God – 1."

<sup>[63]</sup> "How to be used by God – 2."

<sup>[64]</sup> Ibid.

<sup>[65]</sup> "The marks of a mature person."

<sup>[66]</sup> "God's antidote for worry."

<sup>[67]</sup> "How to be used by God – 2."

He might tell me something hard. He might tell me to do something unpopular. He might tell me to do something I think I can't do or I don't want to do. So I'm afraid. If I let God speak to me, I might become a religious fanatic. I'll become like one of those nuts on TV and have to wear a bouffant hairdo! Or wear shiny leisure suit. And say all kinds of weird stuff. Maybe God will make me some kind of loony religious nut. So I'm afraid. I'm afraid I'll lose my freedom. I'm afraid I'll lose my fun. I'm afraid I'll lose my fulfillment in life.<sup>[68]</sup>

For RW, these fears are groundless, because the Gospel is not about saying 'no' to one's aspirations, dreams, and desires. Instead, it is the way to the only true satisfaction in life, for something that people are looking for but can't find without Christ.

The world is hungry for spiritual truth... They may not know what that hole in their heart is. They may call it emptiness, they may call it loneliness, they may call it boredom, they may call it fear, guilt, worry, whatever. The truth is they need God. Because we're all made for God.<sup>[69]</sup>

All of the above does not imply, however, that Warren is satisfied with a form of easy-believism. In fact, he openly proclaims the Lordship of Jesus:

"The greatest need in American Christians is the need to rediscover the phrase used for centuries as the test of a believer: Jesus is Lord."<sup>[70]</sup>

Yet somehow, in his interpretation, these words sound significantly different than in MacArthur's. It is not so much a "hard-to-swallow" part of the message of other-worldly salvation. Instead, it is the Good News itself:

It may look like the other side is winning right now, but Jesus is Lord. You may think you cannot cope any more, there is too much pressure, but Jesus is Lord. You may think your problems are too great and you can't handle them, but Jesus is Lord. Circumstances may pile up against you and people may thwart you and fight you, but Jesus is Lord. Say that phrase when you're discouraged - Jesus is Lord. When you're tired, when you're worried, afraid - Jesus is Lord. Say it when you don't think you can go on another mile. Say it when you're grieving and you don't know why somebody has died - Jesus is Lord. Say it when you're lonely. And say it at Christmas. Make it the theme of your life. That's what it means to be a believer.<sup>[71]</sup>

## Conclusion

This paper focused on different emphases in how John MacArthur and Rick Warren teach their congregations to view and relate to unbelievers. It has been suggested that they, as preachers, approach their task of "bridge-building" from opposite sides. By virtue of his deductive reasoning, JM tends to view culture negatively and humans dualistically. Hence, his listeners are encouraged more to separate themselves from society than to engage with it. At the same time, they need to find ways to make disciples by proclaiming the Gospel in obedience to Christ's command.

<sup>[68]</sup> "How to hear God speak."

<sup>[69]</sup> "How to be used by God - 2."

<sup>[70]</sup> "What's so special about Christmas."

<sup>[71]</sup> "What's so special about Christmas."

Rick Warren, on the other hand, holds a more positive view of culture. He tends to identify with the experiences of people outside the church and seeks to relate the biblical message to their needs and concerns. His listeners are encouraged to engage with unbelievers by building friendships and developing relationships that can serve as a vehicle for their salvation. Society is portrayed as fallen but potentially redeemable because the Gospel of Jesus Christ is powerful to transform individuals, their values and choices.

From my perspective, the first position has a significantly lesser missiological potential for Baptist churches in Russia, and, over the long haul, can actually be detrimental to any serious attempts to meaningfully engage with society for the sake of the Gospel. Distancing from people in society by painting them in dark colors will not only prevent Russian evangelicals from creative usage of many fresh opportunities for evangelism; it will also continue contributing to the “sectarian” image of Baptists propagated in the past by Communists and sustained today by many in the Orthodox Church.

On the other hand, Rick Warren’s dialogical form of preaching, theology, and interaction with society holds more promise for evangelical ministries in Russia. It fosters an attitude about culture that is based not on avoidance, but on a discerning involvement. Such cultural maturity cannot be learned apart from interaction with outsiders, so evangelical leaders in Russia need to develop and teach their people a sound biblical theology of the world and the church’s role in it, encouraging Christians to practice a form of “faithful presence”<sup>[72]</sup> that “fertilizes” the society for the sake of Jesus Christ.

---

<sup>[72]</sup> I borrowed this term from J. D. Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2010.