

TRES DIAS: A PRELIMINARY EVALUATION

After experiencing a Tres Dias weekend, Pastor Billy Hill of Richland Baptist Church relates that “We felt like we needed to send as many of our lay people as we could, and so that’s what we set out to do. And now by doing that we been able to get several of our lay people through. And they have been such a blessing and a help in the ministry. They want to be a part of the ministry. They want to help. And this is something that is new to me. People who want to help, who want to be a part of the ministry. Rather than trying to have to talk people into it. You have people come up and say ‘Pastor let me help. Let me be a part of it’ . . . the love and the compassion that I see flowing from our people has been just great!”¹

Such testimonials sounded wonderful to Pastor Anatoly Keluzhny of New Life Center in Kiev². Like most pastors he was anxious to have his membership more involved in ministry. He wanted his people to better show the love of Christ. So after much discussion, he agreed to support Tres Dias who wanted to organize a weekend in Kiev, Ukraine. He even allowed several of his staff to participate as workers on the weekend.

As time went on, more and more of his staff’s time was spent on Tres Dias, and that left less time for these people to minister in his church. Anatoly was also disturbed by some reports he had heard about strange practices on the weekend. There seemed to be an air of secrecy concerning the weekend that made him uncomfortable. He was also uneasy because of reports from the US concerning problems with the Tres Dias movement. Some churches reported problems of elitism with those who had returned from the Tres Dias weekends. Others disliked the secrecy associated with this ministry. People attending Tres Dias often had very different reactions to the weekend. These groups tended to polarize, some resulting in division within the church — with Tres Dias allegedly at the center of these conflicts.³

Anatoly came to believe that Tres Dias was threatening the ministry of his church. He decided to cut back on church involvement with this ministry, and announced to his staff that he would not give them permission to participate in the upcoming Tres Dias weekend scheduled to occur a few months from then. Some of the staff strongly objected to this policy and, despite their pleas, Anatoly remained firm in his decision. The result: several of his staff left, and the church experienced a loss of membership over the issue. Now Anatoly warns others about the dangers of Tres Dias. “I am absolutely sure today that Tres Dias is a very dangerous thing. And I strongly tell everybody that you should be aware of this organization, because it destroys the unity of the church.”

Tres Dias organizers insist that their ministry had nothing to do with the conflicts at Anatoly’s church. They attribute the problems to internal politics or heavy-handed leadership. However, other churches in the US have reported similar problems. Was this coincidental? Was there something about Tres Dias that was causing — or exacerbating — conflicts within the church? We wanted to find out for ourselves, so when the local Tres Dias leadership invited researchers from the Center for Apologetics Research to attend a weekend, we gladly accepted. To their credit, Tres Dias was very open and cooperative with us; they not only sponsored us to attend the weekend as full participants, but also supplied us with Tres Dias materials, including instruction manuals used to equip workers who serve during the weekend.

The following is a preliminary analysis of Tres Dias, which we hope will benefit churches that are deciding whether to encourage or discourage their members’ involvement with Tres Dias.

History

Tres Dias (Spanish, “three days”) is part of a larger group of organizations often referred to as “Cursillo” or “Fourth-day” movements. Cursillo began in Spain in the 1940s when two Roman Catholics, Bishop Juan Hervas and Eduardo Bonin, designed a program to revitalize the Catholic church in their country. The first “Cursillo” (or “short course”) in Christianity was held in Spain in the late 1940s. Cursillo was introduced to the United States in the 1950s. Protestants attending Catholic Cursillos sought permission to establish versions of the movement for their own denominations.⁴ Today, in addition to the Catholic Cursillos, there are several fourth-day movements operated by various denominations. The Episcopal and Presbyterian movements are called “Cursillos.” Via de Christo was organized by Lutherans, and The Walk to Emmaus is run by Methodists. There is also a prison ministry called Kairos. Finally, there is Tres Dias — an ecumenical version of the weekend experience growing out of the Cursillo movement. The first Tres Dias weekend was held in Newburg, New York in 1972. Leaders of these “fourth-day” organizations meet regularly and establish a common set of guidelines by which their organizations must abide, thus reinforcing the essential characteristics of the Fourth-day movements overall.

Because Tres Dias is rooted in a Roman Catholic renewal movement, the weekend experience retains a very strong Catholic flavor. “The dynamics involved, the schedule used, the order of the talks and events, the total content is basically the same as that developed for the first Cursillo weekends held on the Spanish Island of Majorca”⁵ [sic]. Many of the Tres Dias traditions and vocabulary are drawn from Catholicism. For example, Tres Dias leaders employ classic Catholic traditions like the celebration of the Stations of the Cross. They talk about living “in a cloistered environment.” The subject of one of the weekend talks is “The Sacraments.” That having been said, Tres Dias goes to great lengths to try to not offend anyone — urging workers to “stress those things which the Christian denominations have in common and respect those things which are different.”

“Fourth-Day” Movements

Unlike the original Cursillo and some of its successors, Tres Dias has a strong ecumenical flavor. Its leaders describe Tres Dias as “an ecumenical movement [that] came into being through the energetic and loving support of the Cursillo community.”⁶ They relate, “One great strength of each Tres Dias community is its ecumenism. On each weekend, candidates and team members including the spiritual directors represent various denominations and congregations. ... The ecumenical factor in Tres Dias brings to many Christians a new and irreplaceable growing experience.”⁷

On my weekend there were “candidates” (new participants, initiates) from a wide variety of denominations, including Baptists, Pentecostals, Lutherans, Charismatics, Orthodox, and even a Seventh-day Adventist pastor. The ministry workers who served the candidates came from a wide variety of church backgrounds, including a Roman Catholic who gave one of the talks (and shared meals with me; there were several interesting exchanges about Catholic doctrine — such as praying to saints — among those who attended this weekend).

Doctrine

Many people have asked our researchers whether Tres Dias is a cult. From a traditional theological standpoint we would emphatically answer “No!” While we may not approve of some of the Catholic and Ecumenical influences on its theology, we would not describe Tres Dias as “cultic” in its beliefs. In fact, its doctrinal statement⁸ seems quite typical of what one would expect of any evangelical Christian ministry.

Although the teaching on the weekend was not cultic, I was disappointed at the quality of much of the material presented during the rollos. In one of the first rollos, on the theme of grace, the speaker merged the concepts of justification and sanctification. In one of his illustrations he compared conversion to Christianity with putting on a T-shirt. He had a T-shirt that was given to him several years ago by his daughter. He accepted the gift, but he never put on the T-shirt. It remained in the package. Then he took out the T-shirt and put it on. He then said it was not enough to accept God’s gift; one must put it on. I felt that this message — which should have clearly presented the gospel — served instead to confound and confuse the message. In fact, I did not hear a clear presentation of the gospel on the whole weekend, although at several times during teaching sessions it would have been quite natural to do so.

In another message entitled “The Church”, we were encouraged to accept our brothers in Christ in other denominations and break free from our denominational prejudices. The speaker constantly reminded candidates that we are all part of one church and that we need to act in unity. Unfortunately, the Tres Dias speakers never defined exactly who is (or is not) part of the church. Though they talked about the church having one Lord and one baptism, they never talked about us having one faith (cf. Ephesians 4:5). Theology, as in many ecumenical movements, was downplayed — leaving listeners with the distinct impression that doctrine is unimportant. In contrast, it is essential to identify those who we are supposed to recognize as brothers and sisters in Christ if we are to encourage others to pursue spiritual unity beyond their denominational walls. (Does this include the Mormons? There was a Seventh-day Adventist pastor at the meeting; how am I to relate to him? What about members of the United Pentecostal Church, which denies the Trinity — are they my brothers in Christ? As a protestant, should I relate the same way to other Protestants as I do to members of the Roman Catholic or Orthodox faiths?) The over-simplification of this complex matter could have a very negative impact on the average church member.

On the other hand, the talk on “The Sacraments” was quite good. The speaker started by comparing the Catholic idea of sacraments with the protestant idea of ordinances. The speaker did an excellent job at reviewing the material — showing the commonalities and differences between the catholic, protestant, and orthodox view of each practices commonly referred to as sacraments by the Catholic and Orthodox church. He was careful to explain the protestant viewpoint in each section, showing how this was different from the Catholic and Orthodox beliefs. I thought this talk was very balanced.

The quality and content of teaching given by Tres Dias speakers will probably vary greatly from one weekend to another. This is because the outlines of the talks provided in the Tres Dias training manual are quite general — giving

speakers wide latitude in how they approach the subject. Since Tres Dias is an ecumenical effort, pastors should expect the teaching to reflect a wide variety of denominational influences — Baptist, Lutheran, Church of Christ, Catholic, etc. — as well as a mixture of both conservative and liberal theology. Many of the Americans who served during the weekend I attended came from backgrounds that were considerably more liberal than is common in Ukrainian protestant churches.

The attitude of Tres Dias attendees toward the teaching is also noteworthy. Even though I was told repeatedly that Tres Dias had transformed the lives of those who attended the weekend, those who attended invariably said something like “I didn’t learn anything new”⁹ or “There wasn’t anything new.”¹⁰ People talk more about “the Tres Dias Experience” or “experiencing the unconditional love of God.” People referred to the experience as “mind-boggling,” “transformational,” or “an encounter with the living God.”

Whatever was impacting people, it had little to do with the teaching. What exactly is this Tres Dias experience that has such power? What compels people to testify that their lives have been transformed after attending a three-day retreat?

The Tres Dias Experience

The best part of Tres Dias is the experience of bonding together with people from many different Christian denominations. I met some wonderful people during my Tres Dias weekend, and enjoyed getting to know people who I might not otherwise have met. I always enjoy getting together with people of different denominations and cultures and worshipping God together. It gives us a glimpse of what it might be like in Heaven. For many people in Ukraine, this was the first time that they had this experience, and this was a great blessing. There are not many ministries in Ukraine that are bringing people of different denominations together.

While attending a Tres Dias weekend one experiences a number of things that may seem unusual yet harmless:

- Candidates receive public recognition, usually in the form of hearty applause, many times throughout the weekend.
- Candidates are not allowed to wear a watch.
- The people one comes with are assigned to different rooms and seated separately in the lecture hall — removing the candidate from his or her friends.
- Candidates receive small personal gifts many times each day.
- The leaders and helpers have their own vocabulary (you are greeted with the term “De Colores,” lectures are “rollos,” gifts are “palanca,” the ministry workers are called “chas,” and those attending the weekend are called “candidates”).
- Ministry workers outnumber candidates by 2 to 1.
- Candidates must sing the “De Colores” song loudly and enthusiastically before they are allowed to eat at mealtimes.

Interestingly, there are significant parallels between such methods and well-known cult-recruitment techniques. Groups such as the Unification Church of Sun Myung Moon (whose followers are known as “Moonies”) have employed similar tactics to “convert” people in a “camp” or “retreat” setting. Cult recruiters realize that in a “camp” situation they can control the environment in a way not possible in everyday life, and this provides an opportunity to influence potential converts through the use of powerful social forces. Recruits may not perceive the use of such techniques, or they may simply find them strange. Yet respected sociologists and psychologists regard these as effective methods of coercive influence or mind control (also commonly known as “brainwashing”).

Cult Researcher Geri-Ann Galanti, Ph.D. explains that “Because popular models of brainwashing are derived from the thought-reform processes used by the Chinese communists on prisoners during the Korean War, anything not involving extreme physical abuse or deprivation is not thought of as brainwashing. This outdated and inaccurate stereotype remains as one of the barriers to recognizing and understanding brainwashing in the context of cults. Contrary to this stereotype, the techniques used by cults are also used to socialize individuals as members of society. Although the process is much more intense and manipulative during cult indoctrination, it is not outside our sphere of comfortable recognition.”¹¹ Some behavioral scientists reject the notion of mind control, seeing cult methods as closely related to the ordinary forms of persuasion that commercial advertisers use to sell their products. However, whatever one calls it, these are the techniques that cults use to convert people, and the deliberate use of such social manipulation seems unethical even when the motive is allegedly good.

Undoubtedly, the most unusual aspect of the Tres Dias weekend is the use of these techniques. I have never experienced a Christian-led program that reminded me so strongly of the persuasive techniques employed by cult recruiters in isolated camp settings. Let’s review some of the techniques commonly used by some cults and see how these were implemented in the Tres Dias weekend.

Disorientation

Cultic movements use many techniques designed to disorient potential converts. We are all creatures of habit, and removing us from our accustomed routines increases the chances of conversion. This can be done by altering our normal schedules, changing the places where we spend our time, or by putting us around different people. Bringing us to a camp or retreat does this quite effectively.

- During a Tres Dias weekend candidates are required to remove their watches.
- Organizers also remove or cover all clocks in the facility.
- Candidates are not given any schedule of events. People normally structure their routines around time, and the removal of this element is quite powerful.
- Tres Dias assigns the seats all candidates sit in — for both lectures and discussion.
- The leadership also makes all room assignments. (The Tres Dias manual specifically instructs the organizers to separate candidates from their friends and to put them with new people. This separates them from the people they usually associate with.)
- Tres Dias people speak a different language — using Spanish terms like *palanca*, *chas*, *pescadores*, as well as the “fourth day.”
- The Tres Dias weekends are sequestered — meaning that you only see males on the men’s weekends, and women (with the exception of a few pastors who serve as spiritual directors) on the women’s weekends. They go to great lengths to isolate you from members of the opposite sex (even workers at the facility) to enforce this aspect of the weekend.
- There is a period of silence from the evening meditation on the first night until the end of the first meditation the following morning. Candidates are not allowed to speak to anyone (including their roommates) during this period of time.
- Programs can run from 7:00 a.m. until 11:00 p.m., with no free time except for occasional breaks (limited to 5 to 10 minutes). This tires out the candidates — lowering their resistance to change.

By itself, any one of these elements might not seem very unusual or suspect. However, combining them all can cause a strong sense of disorientation in the candidates.

“Love Bombing”

One feature of cultic recruiting is the use of “love-bombing.” Galanti explains: “A basic human need is for self-esteem. The Moonies utilize a technique known as love bombing to capitalize upon this need. Basically it consists of giving someone a lot of positive attention.”¹² You receive scores of positive attention at a Tres Dias weekend. It starts when you arrive at the bus and someone takes your bags — which are delivered to your room by a chas when you arrive. Throughout the weekend there are people there to serve you. You are introduced to chas who prepare your meals and wait on you while you eat. Others wait on you bringing you drinks and snacks as you attend the lectures. Throughout the weekend you receive many gifts called *palanca* — notes from people who are praying for you, candy left on your bed, bookmarks hand-drawn by children from someone’s home church, hand written letters from various chas telling you what they appreciate about you, and a variety of other items including pins, key chains, cups with the “De Colores” rainbow, and much more. Candidates are called forward by name (usually accompanied by vigorous applause) eight times in the Tres Dias weekend. As with the disorientation techniques, singly any of these would not seem unordinary, it is the combination of all of them that has a powerful effect on you and your behavior.

Role Influence

The roles we are assigned have a powerful effect on our behavior. “By assuming situational social roles in a setting, we can be led unwittingly to take on companion roles in the various scenarios being enacted: if she wants to play ‘guest,’ we become ‘host’ ... Once we become ensconced in some social role, our behavioral freedom is compromised in subtle ways. Interviewees answer but don’t ask questions; guests don’t demand better food; prisoners don’t give commands; audiences listen ... Expectations about what behaviors are appropriate and permissible within the structure of a role can come to control us more effectively than the most talented persuader.”¹³

The first thing that struck me about Tres Dias was the reference to participants as “candidates.” That seemed strange; why did they choose this word to describe those who were attending the weekend for the first time? (When I think of the word candidate, the first think that pops into my mind is someone competing in an election. I couldn’t help but wonder: Exactly what am I running for? It is also used informally for someone who is trying to attain something. I might be a candidate seeking to acceptance by some advanced school or seeking to join an exclusive club. It gave me a sense that I did not yet measure up, or would somehow be tested during the weekend.)

On the promotional video one pastor says that Tres Dias was sort of “camouflaged.” On the surface it seems “silly” or “light-weightish.”¹⁴ As the events progressed during the weekend he attended he saw that there was more depth to it. People get this impression because some of the things done on the weekend are normally done only with children’s ministries. One good example is singing “De Colores” — the theme song of Tres Dias. The song describes roosters

singing, hens clucking and chicks saying “pio pio pio pio pi” — all accompanied by hand motions. This brought to mind Galanti’s description of the Moonie camp. “My overwhelming response to my experience that weekend was that I was having fun. It was like being a child again. Most of the time not spent in lectures was passed by eating, playing games, and singing songs. ... It was nice to be a child again with no responsibilities except to have a good time and learn a little. Children tend to experience things more on an emotional level rather than on an intellectual one. Certainly that particular approach was stressed during the weekend; it places the recruit in a vulnerable position and helps strip him or her of the power to resist those in authority, those who are trying to influence him or her.”¹⁵

It was interesting to note the “role pairs” that were used during the weekend:

- First, they were the hosts, and we were the guests. One is personally invited to attend the weekend. (Attendance at the weekend is not open to all; one must be invited by a “pescador” (Spanish for fisherman). You are constantly waited on and pampered like a guest.) One is frequently told that the pescadores are there to serve you — you are even instructed not to give them any thanks. The weekend is free, and you are told that the cost of the weekend have already been raised, so there is no need for you to contribute financially.
- Second, they were the insiders, we were the outsiders. They knew what would happen next, I didn’t. They knew the vocabulary — rollo, the fourth-day, palanca, etc; I hadn’t a clue what they were talking about. They knew the songs, I had to learn them.
- Third, they were the teachers, we were the students. Most of the teachers were laymen, yet the teaching was done quite formally with the speaker standing at a podium all dressed in suit and tie.
- Fourth, they were the leaders, we were the followers. Sometimes the rector would loudly announce, “Follow me” and would lead us into another room. At night they would turn off all the facility lights and would line up with candles between the chapel and the dormitory. We were instructed to return to our rooms as others light the way. We were not allowed to see the schedule. Therefore, we had to ask or be told what to do constantly by the chas who knew what was going on.

This affected our behavior in subtle, yet powerful ways. One knows that it is not polite for a guest to question or criticize the host; we were indebted to them, and we responded accordingly. One naturally wants to be a member of the club. (It reminded me of being in high school and being excluded from the “in” group.) By assuming the trappings of a formal teaching situation, people without experience or credentials were endowed with referential authority — and we were there to learn from them. We all know from childhood that we should “follow the leader,” so we never asked what qualified them to lead us.

“Stacking the Deck”

One of the things that some cults do is to have a high number of committed adherents mixed among potential recruits attending a camp. Sometimes, you don’t even realize that the person sitting next to you is part of the organization. Ask a question under these circumstances, and you are most likely to get a response that is in line with the beliefs of the group. We all want to go along with the crowd. We are hesitant to be different. By manipulating the composition of the crowd, you can create an environment where most people are sympathetic to your position. This is simple mathematics. One of the peculiar things about the weekend is that there are twice as many workers as there are candidates. This created an environment in which the majority had already accepted the values of Tres Dias. This greatly influences the conversations one has with others. Another strange thing was that some of these people were sitting at your dining table; one only discovers later that they were part of the Tres Dias team. The lack of free time also influences one’s conversations. It made critical discussions of the material difficult, as this would normally be done in private with your friends and that was not an option.

Mind control is so effective because it takes a number of things, things which by themselves do not seem threatening, and combines them to create an environment which exerts a powerful control over the individual. “Components of effective mind control exist in the most mundane aspects of human existence: the inner pressures to be bonded to other people, the power of group norms to influence behavior, the force of social rewards such as a smile, a compliment, a gentle touch ... What insures the success of undesirable social influences — whether they involve buying new products, entering new relationships, or simply maintaining the status quo in a contrary environment — is our blindness to the potency of certain situations. Etiquette and protocol are powerful inhibitors of unconventional action. When people around us behave alike and in ways they are expected to, it becomes difficult for us to evaluate their actions critically or to deviate from what is expected of us in the situation.”¹⁶

Common Criticisms

There has been some criticism aired concerning Tres Dias in the United States. Typical of such criticism are two articles issued by the Baptist Press¹⁷. The most common charge aired against the Fourth-day movements is that of secrecy. There are certain aspects of the weekend that Tres Dias wishes to remain a surprise. When people refuse to

talk about the weekend, this makes people nervous. However, my impression was that this is because people find it difficult to understand and explain their experience, not because Tres Dias is actually a secret society of some kind.

Tres Dias has also been charged with encouraging an elitist mentality among those who complete its weekend experience. Its leaders do say that Tres Dias is “a way to help churches” and warn participants not to be overly exuberant when describing their weekend experiences. However, I heard ten times more often remarks like “I have been to every retreat, Bible study, marriage encounter, etc. offered in our church, but nothing transformed me like my Tres Dias weekend” or “I have seen every kind of program imaginable to build up men in the church, but nothing was as effective at getting people involved as Tres Dias.” In truth, I heard such statement so many times that they tended to drown out the cautionary views. It is all too easy for Christians who would never express personal pride, to get caught up in the pride of belonging to the best organization, the best ministry, the best denomination. Tres Dias would do well to concentrate on identifying this elitist mentality, and working on more effectively helping the team members to curb this type of behavior. Unfortunately, Tres Dias leaders have strongly denied that such a problem exists, and until they learn to recognize it, there is little chance of improvement.

In their enthusiasm to have people complete the weekend, some Tres Dias leaders have sought to prevent candidates from leaving, a problem highlighted in one of the Baptist Press articles. On the weekends that were held in Kiev in June of 2000, I heard of two incidents, which illustrate this tendency. In one case a pastor who was attending had informed organizers beforehand that he would have to leave in the middle of the weekend for a few hours to handle some important church business with the bank. When the time came for him to leave, the leaders simply told him that he could not go. When he replied that he was determined to leave no matter what, they allowed him to go — providing he take a Pescador with him to personally escort him into town and return him to the retreat. In another instance a woman was having a really hard time with the weekend, and went up to a leader and told her, “I want to go home.” She was told that she couldn’t leave at that time, but that if she felt the same way in the morning, she would be allowed to leave. In the morning one of the workers approached her and said that she had been praying for her for an entire year, and that she would be really disappointed if the woman left. The woman agreed to stay, and in the end she reported having a good experience on the last day of the retreat. Despite the outcome, we find such a refusal to respect this person’s wishes, and the use of such manipulative tactics, inappropriate and highly questionable.

On the local front, Pastor Anatoly Kaluzhny has pointed out the lack of regard for a pastor’s authority in the Tres Dias movement. He sent a letter asking Tres Dias not to sponsor any candidates that were members of his church. Tres Dias refused to honor that request, sponsoring several candidates from his church despite his objection. We strongly urge Tres Dias to honor such requests in the future.

A Sampling of Pastoral Responses

Most of the feedback we received from pastors who had attended the weekend in Kiev was positive overall. Alexander Nevenetsa, a Pentecostal pastor, relates “Never before did I experience the love of God like I did on that weekend. ... This weekend fundamentally changed the way I look at other denominations. There [on the weekend] I learned to love my brothers from other confessions genuinely.” Pastor Alexander related how he thoroughly enjoyed the two weekends he attended. He has sent several people from his congregation to attend a Tres Dias weekend, and has experienced a positive effect in his church. “I already have recommended Tres Dias to several pastors I know, and would recommend it to other pastors who are invited to the weekend.”

Vladimir Habrico, a Baptist pastor reports having a great experience on the weekend. “I really experienced God’s love and His grace on this weekend. ... I really had a feeling of being renewed.» He told us that he would recommend Tres Dias to other pastors, and said «I wish a lot of pastors could go». However, he thinks that Tres Dias should work more directly with the leadership of the church. “The weak point is a lack of contacts with the leadership of the churches. They should contact the pastor first, and get his permission before they invite people to attend the weekend.”

Pastor Phillip Barnett also had a mixed reaction. On the one hand his wife and others who attended were greatly blessed. He feels that they had a positive experience that built them up in Christ. He has no reservations about people in his church attending the weekend. On the other hand he reacted negatively to the Roman Catholic feel of the weekend, and didn’t like the “controlling environment” there. “I personally did not get a lot out of the weekend” he reports; although he does say that he really enjoyed the fellowship with other Christians.

We also interviewed some of the pastoral staff at New Life – the Church that was split with Tres Dias reportedly at the center of the conflict. These were the only people who were overwhelmingly negative about Tres Dias. One pastor relates “My experience with Tres Dias was negative because it caused problems in our church”. He then quoted Matthew 7:20 “By their fruits ye shall know them”. In this pastor’s opinion the fruit of Tres Dias was

division in the church. We inquired about what he would say if another pastor asked him if he should attend a Tres Dias weekend. He responded, “I would tell the Pastor that he should not go.”

Recommendations for Tres Dias Leaders

Tres Dias has a marvelous potential to be a great blessing to the churches in Ukraine. They will have to make some major changes in practice, but we believe it is possible to accomplish these changes in a way that keeps their core values intact, and retains much of the traditions of the Cursillo movement. I hope and pray that Tres Dias will try to move in this direction. Ukraine could certainly benefit from ministries with a commitment to bringing people together from different denomination — allowing them to slow down and reflect on their lives and their commitment to Christ.

We are preparing a detailed set of recommendations for Tres Dias, but it might be helpful to review a few of them here:

- 1) Tres Dias needs to have a clear presentation of the gospel in the “Grace” rollo. This would clearly define exactly what a Christian is at the start of the weekend. The presentation should emphasize that one is saved by faith alone, not by works; it is a free gift of God. None of us can do anything to merit our salvation. While this message may be contrary to the beliefs of some of those attending — and may even offend candidates who attend Catholic, Orthodox, or liberal Protestant churches — Tres Dias needs to be willing to offend people for the sake of the gospel. Ignoring our differences for the sake of unity when it comes to a clear presentation of the gospel is not an option that a Christian ministry can afford to make.
- 2) The “Church” rollo needs to better define the role of doctrine in defining exactly who the church is. The Church has “one faith” — a common set of beliefs to which all true Christians agree. That includes things like the Trinity, salvation by grace, the inspiration of scripture, etc. Denominations, which deny these fundamentals, are not part of the true church. I want to have unity with the true church, and I want to be separate from false religions. There is a big difference between fellowshiping with someone who disagrees with you on the mode of baptism and worshiping together with someone who denies that Jesus Christ is God! Such foundational distinctions need to be emphasized.
- 3) Tres Dias needs to redesign aspects of the weekend to diminish the extraordinary level of control they exert on all aspects of the environment. This could include things like providing a 2-3 hour block of free time in the middle of the day, providing a vague schedule (that didn’t ruin any of the surprises) while allowing people to wear their watches, and cutting back on the public attention given to the candidates.
- 4) Tres Dias needs to respect the authority of the pastor of the local church by requiring candidates to have his permission before attending the weekend. This is done in some of the other fourth-day movements.
- 5) Tres Dias needs to directly confront problems like elitism and manipulation through appropriate training and oversight of the Pescadores who are serve during the weekends.

Recommendations for Pastors

Senior pastors and denominational leaders are best equipped to decide whether Tres Dias would be good for their churches. It is not practical for every pastor to attend the weekend for himself. This is where denominational leaders can be very helpful. We strongly urge denominational leaders to study Tres Dias, attend a weekend, and make public a recommendation or policy concerning Tres Dias for their own denominations. This can greatly assist pastors in local churches in making decisions regarding involvement with the Tres Dias program.

We advise Senior Pastors to make a determination as to the appropriateness of Tres Dias in the churches that God has called them to Pastor. Pastors may attend a Tres Dias weekend for themselves, read about Tres Dias, and consult with denominational leaders. Most of the problems that we have seen occurred when church members were attending Tres Dias before the senior pastor. People became highly committed to Tres Dias, and when the pastor made the decision to not be involved this caused great conflicts. Therefore, it would be better if the senior pastor made an informed decision on Tres Dias before members of the church get involved. This decision should be clearly communicated to the body — because people are often invited on the weekend by other Christians and the pastor may have no knowledge of this.

Conclusions

The Tres Dias leadership is quick to admit that Tres Dias is not for everyone. Like it or not, it has great potential to either help or harm a church. Ultimately, the senior pastor will have to decide if the Tres Dias culture is compatible

with his church. Once that decision is made, he should make this known to the members as many are invited to attend the weekend without the pastor's knowledge or consent.

In light of the above considerations, the Center for Apologetics Research of Ukraine cannot recommend the Tres Dias program at this time. Although the organization hopes to draw its participants into a positive spiritual experience, we believe that it is potentially harmful to expose people to the manipulative environment created in a Tres Dias weekend. We consider the use of such tactics to be highly unethical and feel bound to expose them when practiced by cultic groups; we can do no less when a Christian ministry employs them. We hope that the extensive use of inappropriate mechanisms of social control is unintentional and that, having recognized the problems inherent in such practices, the Tres Dias leadership will take measures to correct this situation. We pray that in the future we will have the privilege of reporting these changes — enabling us to give a more favorable review of Tres Dias.

¹ "A Introduction to Tres Dias" International Secretariat of Tres Dias 1999 video

² The Introduction to Tres Dias video was released after these events. Anatoly reports that Audrey Bender, a member of his church who has been involved with Tres Dias for some time, shared similar experiences of churches that had been blessed through their involvement with Tres Dias. We quote the video because it is useful to demonstrate such testimonials from an official Tres Dias source.

³ "NAMB official cautions churches to be wary of renewalk weekends" Baptist Press December 29, 1999 & "Southern Baptists voice views on spiritual renewal weekends" Baptist Press January 18, 2000.

⁴ "The Rector" Tres Dias: Poughkeepsie, NY 1985 p. 37-40 & History of the Tres Dias Movement (<http://www.tresdias.org/history.htm>)

⁵ Orientation of the Tres Dias Movement (<http://www.tresdias.org/orientat.htm>)

⁶ Orientation of the Tres Dias Movement (<http://www.tresdias.org/orientat.htm>)

⁷ Orientation of the Tres Dias Movement (<http://www.tresdias.org/orientat.htm>)

⁸ "Purpose of Tres Dias and Statement of Belief" (Section 2.0) Constitution and By-Laws of Tres Dias (<http://www.tresdias.org/constitu.htm>)

⁹ "A Introduction to Tres Dias" International Secretariat of Tres Dias 1999 video (John McLendon)

¹⁰ "A Introduction to Tres Dias" International Secretariat of Tres Dias 1999 video (Billy Hill)

¹¹ Geri-Ann Galanti, Ph.D. Reflections on "Brainwashing" "Recovery From Cults" p. 85

¹² Geri-Ann Galanti, Ph.D. Reflections on "Brainwashing" "Recovery From Cults" p. 98

¹³ Philip Zimbardo Ph.D. & Susan Andersen Ph.D. Understanding Mind Control "Recovery From Cults" p. 107

¹⁴ "A Introduction to Tres Dias" International Secretariat of Tres Dias 1999 video (Tony Woodall)

¹⁵ Geri-Ann Galanti, Ph.D. Reflections on "Brainwashing" "Recovery From Cults" p. 100

¹⁶ Philip Zimbardo Ph.D. & Susan Andersen Ph.D. Understanding Mind Control "Recovery From Cults" p. 106

¹⁷ "NAMB official cautions churches to be wary of renewalk weekends" Baptist Press December 29, 1999 & "Southern Baptists voice views on spiritual renewal weekends" Baptist Press January 18, 2000. The second article is much more balanced. The articles report that the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention put out a warning about Tres Dias. The NAMB stands by it's warning to this day, but at least one member of this board has attended a Tres Dias weekend, and has written a personal letter endorsing Tres Dias.