

~Other Speakers A-F: Discernment Research Articles:**Promise Keepers and the Men's Movement****RESURRECTING PAGAN RITES****Part 1: THE MEN'S MOVEMENT****(From the December 1995 issue of Christian Conscience magazine)**

The popular, separatist, men's movement uses pagan rituals to define manhood.

How could a book become so controversial? It all began with a mass distribution. Every man who attended the 1993 Promise Keepers convention in Boulder, Colorado, received a copy of "The Masculine Journey: Understanding the Six Stages of Manhood" by Robert Hicks. Promise Keepers went on from there to become the most rapidly growing national, ecumenical men's movement in the history of the church in America. Promise Keepers has steadfastly continued to "endorse" "The Masculine Journey", even though they no longer distribute it. NavPress, a well-respected Christian publishing house, has continued to aggressively market it.

Perhaps the book would have gathered dust on the back shelves of Christian bookstores if it hadn't been an integral part of a broader ministry. But, that was not to be. The book was destined for controversy from its very inception. Its unorthodox approach to Christian manhood, including references to a "phallic" Jesus, set it apart from mainstream evangelical publications. Its uneasy association with the secular men's movement, its use of contemporary Jungian jargon, and its use of motifs like "sages", "warriors" and "rites of passage" raised the rankle of a number of national ministries.

To date, only the more fundamentalist, discernment-oriented ministries have dared to crack open "The Masculine Journey" for critical comment. Much of the criticism has centered around its use of psychology and the offensive content. The book's association with Promise Keepers, the stunningly popular men's movement, has led to a "hands off" approach by many who would normally be more critical of the book. Also, most of the recent PK recruits have had little or no exposure to the book and simply slough off any criticism of the book as not relevant to their own personal experience.

The book continues to be prominently featured in NavPress catalogues under the Promise Keepers supplies, and can be found in Christian bookstores across the country in the Promise Keepers section. Robert Hicks credits both NavPress and Promise Keepers "for having a vision for this project" (p. 11), a statement which indicates the original depth of support given this work by the Promise Keepers ministry. The form letter issued by Promise Keepers in defense of "The Masculine Journey", which has been distributed widely across the country, states:

"Promise Keepers desires to lead men into God's Word and to lift Jesus Christ up as our model through the resources that we develop or sponsor. In 1992, Dr. Hick's manuscript for 'The Masculine Journey' was presented to NavPress and Promise Keepers as a candidate for inclusion in our line of books. What we discovered was a biblically-centered, frank and honest account of a man's journey with God. We were convinced that it would help men pursue Jesus Christ amidst the challenges of the twentieth century."

"The book was not designed, nor was it written, to be an inclusive statement of the values and distinctives of the ministry of Promise Keepers. We endorsed it because we believed that it would be a tool that challenged men to grow in Christ likeness, to become 'zaken' - or 'wise men of God' - as Hicks writes.

In the January 1995 issue of "The Christian Conscience" we reviewed a study guide accompanying "The Masculine Journey," written by Robert Hicks and Dietrich Gruen. It was subtitled "A Promise Keepers Study Guide". In our widely distributed review of this, "'Encountering' Men at Risk", we contended it was offensive because of its content and its use of encounter group techniques to facilitate change in men. We also expressed a concern about the repeated references to the men's movement. We felt that some men could be led into this movement via reading "The Masculine Journey". We have since come to have an additional concern that Promise Keeper's, by endorsing Hicks' book, might be associating itself too closely with the men's movement and may in fact have doctrinal agreement with it at some level. A summary of this concern was expressed in a sidebar in the April issue, entitled "Promise Keepers: A Militant Unity?"

Defining Manhood As A Journey

While evangelical Christianity first balked at and then vilified the feminist movement and all of its trappings, this

is not true of the men's movement. Numerous magazine articles and accounts of the success of Promise Keepers refer to it in the context of the "secular" men's movement, one which superficially appears to be a move toward "kinder, gentler" men. This "secular" men's movement, which has increasingly grown in both prominence and impact over the last decade, is introduced to Christian men via Robert Hicks' books. After reviewing the research, it is our contention that "The Masculine Journey" represents a major philosophical and theological shift away from the orthodox Christian view of maleness. And further, the "secular" men's movement is anything but "secular."

Robert Hicks began with the challenge to "define" manhood - a big task.(p. 18) Using the "lengthy adult life cycle for men" as a model (p. 18), he credits his ideas for the stages of this masculine journey to Daniel Levinson's book, "The Seasons of a Man's Life".(p. 19) While on an airplane trip, Hicks records that he wrote down the Hebrew terms for these stages of a man's life on a napkin. Hicks noted that the words he chose "also seem to reflect the same seasonal or developmental aspects that have been demonstrated in so many of the recent men's studies."(p. 19-20)

To review, there are six Hebrew terms and descriptive phrases to describe the six stages of adult male development according to Robert Hicks:

Creational Male-'Adam-: The Noble Savage
 The Phallic Male-Zakar: The Mysterious Taskmaster
 The Warrior-Gibbor: The Glorious Hero
 The Wounded Male-Enosh: the Painful Incongruency
 The Mature Man-Ish: The Reborn uler
 The Sage-Zaken: The Fulfilled Man

We found this list of adult male life cycle terms to be more puzzling than helpful. We were perplexed by the many strange-sounding terminologies. The references to the male "phallus" and referring to men as "sages," for example, are not terms found in a traditional Christian view of manhood.

Customary biblical models on manhood are drawn from passages in Proverbs, regarding a young man's chaste sexual conduct; from Boaz, a businessman of integrity and exceptional moral conduct; and from passages in the New Testament on the holy manner of life (conducted in such a way over many years) of a biblical elder. And, while being a warrior was an honor in the Old Testament and a distinctive stance for the believer in the New Testament, the biblical references are not specific to the male gender but include all believers. Equally true in this regard is the potential for wounding that is common to all believers, and the biblical admonition for maturity in the life of all believers.

In order to understand the rather unorthodox terminologies utilized by Robert Hicks to describe "The Masculine Journey" model of manhood we learned that one must read the authors and experts he cites. The terms can be readily found in the works of the leaders of the men's movement. There are repeated references to both the men's movement and its leaders in "The Masculine Journey" and its accompanying "Study Guide".

Many Christian men will not have had exposure to the men's movement prior to reading Hicks' books. It is possible that men may be encouraged to delve deeper into the men's movement, or be curious about it, after reading Hicks' books. For example, in the "Study Guide" to "The Masculine Journey", men are asked,

"Perhaps you, or someone you know, do not have enough fight left in you to advance or defend yourself at work. Such men defeated by life do not even work for a better family, much less the cause of social justice. What about the growing men's movement could help such men?"

"-Warrior weekends (don't forget to bring your drums)"

"-Light a 'fire in the belly' by recalling good warrior myths."(p. 42-43)

The "Study Guide" also suggests that men "review 'The Masculine Journey' and its endnotes, which may spur you on to study the men's movement further." (p. 90)

This, in our estimation, is direct encouragement for men to become involved in the men's movement. We decided to do exactly what was recommended in this sentence: we read the original sources referenced in the endnotes to see what Christian men might find.

The Men's Movement

The men's movement, a response to the women's movement, arose during the mid-80's, supposedly to combat "wimpiness" in men. This movement is a conglomeration of current Jungian psychology, New Age mysticism, beating drums in the wilderness, initiation ceremonies, and occultic rituals. It has been characterized in the press clippings as "Men Seeking `Different Drummer,'" "Modern Men Turning to Ancient Ritual," "The New Masculine Mystique," and "A Kinder, Gentler Gender."

Robert Bly is credited with "founding" the men's movement in America. As early as 1982 "The New Age Journal" conducted an interview with this famous poet. Bly told the interviewer, Kevin Thompson, that men needed to "visualize the wild man that is part of every modern male." To do this, he recommended that men "go back to ancient mythology, you find that people in ancient times can help us to visualize the wild man."

"Just as women in the '70s needed to develop what is known in the Indian tradition as Kali energy - the ability to really say what they want, to cut relationships when they need to - what males need now is an energy that can face this energy in women, and MEET it. They need to make a similar connection in their psyches to their Kala [sic] energy - which is just another way to describe the wild man. If they don't they won't survive. (quoted in "Connecting With the Wild Man Inside All Males," "Utne Reader", Nov./Dec. 1989, p. 58)

"Utne Reader", a leftist counter-culture magazine, can also be credited for exposure of the men's movement during the mid-80's. In 1989 they ran a descriptive piece titled "Of Hawks and Men: A Weekend in the Male Wilderness" in which reporter Jon Tevlin details his account of attending a seminar to "reunite the modern man with the wild man." Some of the activities of the men that weekend are too vulgar to recount; however, the promotional material promised that "We will become animals and heroes," and Shepherd Bliss, well-known New Ager who conducted the seminar promised: "You may find yourself behaving like these four-leggeds; you may be scratching the earth, getting in contact with the dirt and world around you." (p. 53) Suffice it to say that the men at the seminar gurgled, bleated, butted heads, made wolf calls, shrieked like hawks, and performed other more unseemly activities common to animals but bizarre when imitated by humans.

Robert Bly popularized his "wild man" concept in his 1990 book "Iron John", a mythological fairy tale of the wild, hairy man who helps turn a young boy into a prince. A "San Francisco Chronicle" article ("Men Seeking `Different Drummer'" by George Snyder) credits Bly with mainstreaming the men's movement:

"The phenomenon, once largely confined to the New Age underground, has recently gained mainstream respectability, in part because of author Robert Bly, whose recent best-seller, `Iron John', urges modern males to rediscover a profound and spiritual masculinity through the ancient tools of mythology, ritual and initiation. Only then, says Bly, can men truly come to find common cause with women and ultimately, with themselves and the universe.

Robert Bly can still be found frequently in the pages of "The New Age Journal", and is a regular speaker on the New Age conference circuit.

By the early 90s the men's movement came to be associated with drumming, where "men try to rediscover their primal instincts through ancient rituals," (Ibid.) performing Native American rituals on wilderness weekends in such places as sweat lodges, and using talking sticks. The most frequently cited movie illustrative of the men's movement is Kevin Costner's "Dances With Wolves".

We reviewed two randomly selected publications originating from the men's movement, "The Green Man: A Magazine for Pagan Men", (Spring 1993, Premiere Edition, published by Alan and Anne Niven), and "M.E.N. Magazine", a publication of the Seattle Men's Evolverment Network (Vol. 6, No. 4, April 1995). In these, we found advertisements for psychotherapy, therapy and spirituality for gay men, circumcision support groups, rolfing, "New Moon Rising: Journal of Magick & Wicca", an invitation to join Odd Fellows, and ads for little god statues. We found workshops for "Foreskin Fairy Tales: Stories of Denial about Infant Circumcision," "Jungian men's group," "Healing the Mother Wound," "Mythos: Myth and Life Stages," and "Ritual Healing, Power & Community." Articles included "Mythic Images for Remembering the Earth," "Interview With A Druid," "Men for the Earth: A Call to Action," "Shadow of Initiation," and "An Interview with Shepherd Bliss."

This cross-section of the separatist men's movement included men's rights, gay men's rights, divorced men's rights, minority men's rights, men in search of spiritual or personal growth, Marxists, and environmentalists. We found no positive references to Christianity in these publications. To the contrary, we found numerous references to alternative, pagan, New Age, and occultic spiritualities.

Both the Old and New Testaments warn strongly against engaging in the activities promoted in this sampling of the men's movement literature:

"I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments." (Ex. 20:2-6)

"Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure hearts." (2 Tim. 2:22)

"But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. But continue thou in the things which thou has learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou has learned them; And that from a child thou has known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." (2 Tim. 3:13-15)

The Jungian Influence

Robert Hicks has stated that "the Jungian definition of manhood doesn't work for me." (p. 17) However, we found, much to our consternation, that the model employed by Hicks in "The Masculine Journey" has all of the trappings found in the currently popular Jungian architects of the men's movement, including their common use of terminologies and concepts. In fact, the entire men's movement seems to be the creation of the Jungians. There are several key works cited by Hicks that bear further scrutiny.

But first, what do we mean by Jungians? We mean the followers of the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) who pioneered a psychoanalytical model based on the interpretation of unconscious symbols and mythology. Jung's use of mythological metaphors is attributed to his obsession with the occultic doctrines predominant in Germany at the turn of the century. Jungian psychology is founded on an evolutionary worldview of man.

In recent years, there has been a resurgence of popularity of Jungian psychology, especially in New Age circles. Jung's ideas, like many other "schools of thought" have been plundered and widely diluted by modern movements, and the men's movement is no exception. Of special note is the excessive emphasis that the men's movement places on mythology, a revival of the ancient legends of gods and goddesses, to explain the inner psychology of man.

Robert Bly's "Iron John", frequently cited by Hicks, is based on a Grimm's fairy tale. This is clearly noted to be in the Jungian tradition of using mythologies to define reality. In fact, one "Jungian scholar, Marie-Louise von Franz, often quoted by Bly, puts it: 'Fairy tales are the purest and simplest expression of collective unconscious psychic processes.'" ("On The Issues", Summer 1991, p. 18)

"Iron John", like "The Masculine Journey", speaks about the stages of a man's life. The book is about male initiation, a path of eight stages which follows the story line of "Iron John" the fairy tale. (pp. x & xi) The modern male needs to find the "wild man" within, according to Bly. He defines this wild man: "The Wild Man, who has examined his wound, resembles a Zen priest, a shaman, or a woodsman..."

Elsewhere, Shepherd Bliss reiterates this characterization of the men's movement's new (Age) wild man:

"By a wild man, I don't mean a savage man. I don't mean a brutal man. I don't mean a man of malice. I mean maybe a Zen monk" ("Utne Reader", p. 54)

Rites of Initiation

"Iron John" is a treatise on the need for men to experience the ancient, occultic rites of initiation. This agenda is not hidden, but rather the entire theme of the book. Pagan rites of initiation are a cross-cultural phenomenon common to primitive societies past and present, and are also a component of secret male societies such as the Freemasons. In "Iron John" it becomes evident that the life stages or cycle of the male journey is defined in terms of the stages of the rite of initiation. Initiation can be defined as:

"The methodology of the ancient Mysteries: long and intensive training with the aim of elevating the one who undergoes it to begin (initiate) living a new, higher life, often described as being on the level of Godhood, above and beyond the state of ordinary mortals - hence, the initiates of former times were viewed as incarnate Gods by ordinary people. ("Seekers Handbook", p. 297.)

An initiate is:

"someone who underwent the full course of training in the Mysteries, and who thereby became elevated to a superevolved or God-like state, gaining powers of knowledge and extraordinary faculties that allowed him to assume responsibility for teaching and guiding the human race, and specifically for initiating culture." (Ibid.)

Robert Bly writes that young boys "in our culture have a continuing need for initiation into male spirit, but old men in general don't offer it... the active intervention of the older men means that older men welcome the younger man into the ancient, mythologized, instinctive male world." (p. 14-15)

He describes this initiation on pages 80 and 81 of "Iron John" in clear, unmistakably pagan terms: "The boy between eight and twelve years of age, having been taken away from the mother, passes into the hands of the old men guides who cover his face and sometimes his whole body with ashes to make him the color of dead people and to remind him of the inner death about to come. He may be put into the dark for hours or maybe days, introduced to spirits of dead ancestors. Then he may crawl through a tunnel - a vagina - made of brush and branches. The old men are waiting for him at the other end, only now he has a new name."

Bly's second stage of manhood involves a wound. This wounding is to occur during the process of the rite of initiation. It is clear from the description that the unfortunate young boy is severely traumatized and immensely frightened as he is forced to undergo this pagan ritual. Bly weaves back and forth between describing inner (psychological) and outer (physical) wounds. This is characteristic of Jungians, and accounts for how they can later distance themselves by saying that they intended the entire description to be interpreted as merely "psychological". But Bly makes it clear that "Ancient initiation practice" gives a new wound." Indeed, the wounds necessary for initiation in pagan cultures are real!

Two Jungians, Robert Moore and Douglas Gillette, who are noted leaders in the men's movement, and closely associated with Bly, describe this wounding in vivid detail in their book "King, Warrior, Magician, Lover". They define initiation as a "genuine transformation of consciousness." (p. xvi) Their description of the rite of initiation is similar to Bly's:

"A good, explicit example of this can be found in the movie 'The Emerald Forest'. Here, a white boy has been captured and raised by Brazilian Indians. One day, he's playing in the river with a beautiful girl. The chief has noticed his interest in the girl for some time. This awakening of sexual interest in the boy is a signal to the wise chief. He appears on the riverbank with his wife and some of the tribal elders and surprises Tomme (Tommy) at play with the girl. The chief booms out, 'Tomme, your time has come to die!' Everyone seems profoundly shaken. The chief's wife, playing the part of all women, of all mothers, asks, 'Must he die?' The chief threateningly replies, 'Yes!' Then, we see a firelit nighttime scene in which Tomme is seemingly tortured by the older men in the tribe; and forced into the forest vines, he is being eaten alive by jungle ants. He writhes in agony, his body mutilated in the jaws of the hungry ants. We fear the worst."

"Finally, the sun comes up, though, and Tomme, still breathing, is taken down to the river by the men and bathed, the clinging ants washed from his body. The chief then raises his voice and says, 'The boy is dead and the man is born!' And with that, he is given his first spiritual experience, induced by a drug blown through a long pipe into his nose. He hallucinates and in his hallucination discovers his animal soul (an eagle) and soars above the world in new and expanded consciousness, seeing, as if from a God's-eye view, the totality of his jungle world. Then he is allowed to marry. Tomme is a man. And, as he takes on a man's responsibilities and identity, he is moved first into the position of a brave in the tribe and then into the position of chief."

"It can be said that life's perhaps most fundamental dynamic is the attempt to move from a lower form of experience and consciousness to a higher (or deeper) level of consciousness..." (p. 4-5)

For some in the men's movement, then, the definition of manhood is clearly rooted in the rite of initiation, and it involves a change in consciousness. Moore and Gillette describe it graphically as "Death - symbolic, psychological, or spiritual - is always a vital part of any initiatory ritual." They advocate the use of active imagination as a psychological technique, but caution that it can cause one to possibly "encounter a really

hostile presence..." (p. 147).

The change in consciousness that results from these rites of initiation may in fact be demon possession, which is the ultimate intention of pagan rituals. The Scriptures clearly warn against the use of drugs to alter consciousness, commonly associated with sorcery and translated as "witchcraft" in the King James version.

"5331. pharmakeia, far-mak-i'-ah; from G5332; medication (pharmacy), i.e. (by extens.) magic (lit. or fig.): - sorcery, witchcraft." ("Strong's Concordance")

"Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft [pharmakeia], hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." (Gal. 5:19-21)

In the Scriptures God consistently warns the Hebrews to stay away from the pagan, occultic practices of their neighboring nations.

"When thou art come into the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the LORD: and because of these abominations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee. Thou shalt be perfect with the LORD thy God. For these nations, which thou shalt possess, hearkened unto observers of times, and unto diviners: but as for thee, the LORD thy God hath not suffered thee so to do." (Deut. 18:9-14)

Robert Hicks references the Moore and Gillette book on page 77 of "The Masculine Journey" in his chapter "The Warrior - Gibbor: The Glorious Hero." Hicks states: "Therapist Robert Moore has observed that behind every creative artist, competent author, or successful student, there is an active warrior at work who recognizes transcendent values and relativizes temporary needs or immediate needs."

This quote is footnoted, and it references the pages in a chapter in the Moore and Gillette book also called "The Warrior." It is one of their four archetypes of manhood. Moore and Gillette agree in their book with Robert Bly - that a man is a warrior in an eastern mystical sense:

"The characteristics of the Warrior in his fullness amount to a total way of life, what the samurai called a do... These characteristics constitute the Warrior's Dharma, Ma'at, or Tao, a spiritual or psychological path through life." (p.79)

These two Jungians talk about "transpersonal commitments" to "a cause, a god, a people, a task, a nation - larger than individuals." (p. 84) To Moore and Gillette, it transcends individuality.

"This transpersonal commitment reveals a number of other characteristics of the Warrior energy. First, it makes all personal relationships relative, that is, it makes them less central than the transpersonal commitment. Thus the psyche of the man who is adequately accessing the Warrior is organized around his central commitment." (Ibid.)

In their modern Jungian version of masculinity Moore and Gillette include a bad ("shadow") side of the warrior (the "sadist" or "masochist") which can be exemplified by "Yahweh," who in the Bible "orders the fiery destruction of whole civilizations. Early in the Old Testament, we see this angry and vengeful God reducing the planet to mud through a great deluge, killing off nearly every living thing." (p. 89)

This is a gnostic-sounding interpretation of the God of the Bible, which demonstrates that Jehovah God is not who the occultic Jungian analysts would recommend for a warrior's "transpersonal commitment."

Robert Moore is a "friend and consultant" to the New Warriors Network. This is described as:

"an order of men, called to reclaim the sacred masculine in our time through initiation, training, and action in the world." (fundraising letter from Dr. Robert L. Moore, Ph.D.)

Moore continues:

"I believe strongly that the New Warrior Network has the potential for making the decisive contribution in the task of transforming masculine leadership and stewardship of masculine power in the world."

New Warriors, like Promise Keepers, also sponsors weekends for men. New Warriors are trained "to initiate and empower men to take on the courageous task of expressing themselves authentically and stepping into a life of genuine service." The men are trained in the "Four Quarters" model of the male psyche, Moore and Gillete's modern theory of Jungian male archetypes. On these adventure weekends (sometimes called "shamanic retreat[s]"), men can participate in sweat lodges, fire pit ceremonies, mask making, spiritual cleansing, vision quests, solo fasts, and bow hunting. Men in New Warriors often acquire an Indian name for their middle name, such as "Sun Bear" or "Moose walks with Polar Bear." (Information quoted from conference promotional literature)

Christian Rites of Initiation

Returning to Robert Hicks, we find that his view of the rite of initiation in "The Masculine Journey" is strikingly similar to that of Robert Bly. However, his view is "Christianized", which inserts Biblical stories where Bly references pagan myths. An indication of this is Hicks' comment about the necessity of shedding blood: "To be a successful warrior, blood must be shed. The blood of enemies is always mixed with one's own blood. The life of the warrior, necessary as it is for developing manliness, has its liabilities." (p. 91-92) Hicks does not dispute the men's movement's emphasis on the necessity of wounding as part of a rite of initiation. In fact, he appears to agree with it:

"Men must win some battles to prove to themselves that they are men. In past cultures this was ritualized but, unfortunately, today men must fend for themselves and almost declare themselves men. But it still involves blood, risk, and sacrifice. Just as in times past, whether through circumcision or other cutting of the body, the passages to manhood involve the shedding of some blood."(p. 92)

We must hasten to point out to the reader that circumcision was not a passage to manhood in the Bible, but rather an expression of obedience to God, sanctioned by the parents of an infant. An eight-day-old male child is hardly at the suitable age for passing from boyhood into manhood. Circumcision was simply a sign of the Abrahamic covenant between God and His chosen people; a sign which distinguished the Hebrews from the surrounding pagan culture! Further, we know of no credible reports of circumcised men who can vividly recall this "passage into manhood" during their infancy. This suggestion seems to arise from the currently popular "repressed memory" psychology.

Hicks also quotes from Sam Keen, another men's movement leader:

"Sam Keen states more bluntly: `Masculinity requires a wounding of the body, a sacrifice of the natural endowment of sensuality and sexuality.'"

"What Keen is alluding to is the almost universal history of primitive societies whereby the males went through a formal puberty rite that required the experience of pain and wounding of the body. Circumcision is a permanent wounding of the body that reminds the Jewish (and now Gentile) male that he is what he is - male. Other societies have their tattoos or cutting of the body. American Indians bond through blood. Young boys even today emulate the old rite of cutting the fingers and mingling the blood to become `blood brothers.'" (p. 101-102)

Is this view really biblical? Or, has Hicks superimposed pagan views of manhood onto Scriptural themes?

Circumcision reminds the Jewish male that he is what he is - Jewish, i.e., a set-apart person with a unique and blessed covenant relationship with God!

Hicks continues:

"From our first hours of maleness until we become adult, pain seems to be the doorway to manhood. Thus, the wounded male experience is common among most civilizations, but contemporary Western men have either denied or forgotten it. Consequently, when pain arrives we Westerners struggle against it. The emerging men's movement may be, at its roots, the attempt to reframe the wounding experience for men and give it a new and more honorable meaning."(p. 102)

Sam Keen, whose book "Fire In the Belly" is cited six times in footnotes to "The Masculine Journey", more honestly tells us the men's movement's purpose for the rite of initiation:

" The purpose of the tortuous rites involved in severing the boy from WOMAN and nature was to deprogram, brainwash, break down the childish identity so that he could be given a new self-understanding." (p. 31)
Keen's passage to manhood involves separation, initiation and reincorporation. This is very similar to Levinson's four seasons of the male life cycle, expounded upon in Levinson's book "The Seasons of A Man's Life", which Robert Hicks used as his model. Levinson's four stages are: separation, initiation, transition, and temporary confusion. This similarity begs the question: what exactly is "the masculine journey"? There clearly are occultic stages, or levels, that seem to closely parallel the psychological life-cycle models. Because Carl Jung viewed psychotherapy as a type of initiation this may provide a partial clue to the answer of this question.

In Keen's chapter, "The Initiation and Mutilation of Men," he describes an identical scene to the ones discussed earlier. Keen tells us that

"In many tribes, the men kidnap the boys and take them to live in the men's clubhouse where they are subject to hazing, discipline, and teachings of the elders."

"Some form of painful ordeal inevitably accompanies and dramatizes the separation from the world of WOMAN. The list of minor and major tortures imposed upon initiates reads like a page from the fantasy life of de Sade and includes: lip piercing, scarification, filing or knocking out of teeth, scourgings, finger sacrifices, removal of a testicle, bitings, burnings, eating of disgusting foods, being tied on an ant hill, subincision of the penis, solitary confinement, exile in the wilderness for long periods, sleeping naked on winter nights, etc." (p. 29)

Keen also trivializes the significance of circumcision. He says:

"That so primitive and brutal a rite continues to be practiced nearly automatically in modern times when most medical evidence indicates that it is unnecessary, painful, and dangerous suggests that circumcision remains a mythic act whose real significance is stubbornly buried in the unconscious."

We have already stated the biblical significance of circumcision. Is Keen inferring that the Bible and all its contents are merely myth?

Robert Hicks has apparently bought into the men's movement's dislike of circumcision. In the "Study Guide" to "The Masculine Journey", men are asked to explore this issue with other men:

"1. For Robert Hicks the first memorable experience of wounding was as a five-year old when his granddad took him fishing and the fishing hook pierced his finger. For you, what memorable flesh wounds signaled a passage to manhood?"

The first possible answer to this guided question is:

"Submitting to circumcision (as an infant or an adult)." (p. 52)

The last chapter of "The Masculine Journey" lays out the plan for "A New Male Journey" which involves beginning to find "appropriate initiation rites which might fit each of these stages." (p. 176) Hicks states:

"I'm sure many would balk at my thought of celebrating the experience of sin. I'm not sure how we could do it. But I do know we need to do it. For example, we usually give the teenagers in our churches such a massive dose of condemnation regarding their first experiences with sin that I sometimes wonder how any of them ever recover. Maybe we could take a different approach. Instead of jumping all over them when they have their first experience with the police, or their first drunk, or their first experience with sex and drugs, we could look upon this as a teachable moment and a rite of passage. Is this putting a benediction on sin? Of course not, but perhaps at this point the true elders could come forward and confess their own adolescent sins and congratulate the next generation for being human. Then they could move on to the all-important issues of forgiveness and restoration, but this time on common ground, with the young person as a fellow sinner!"

Hicks also proposes other possible times for initiation rites: wet dreams, pubic hair, the wedding night, spiritual victories; wounds like "a man's divorce, or job firing, or major health problem, or culpability in some legal or sexual indiscretion," (p. 177-178) To underscore this, the "Study Guide" concludes with a suggestion for an

"Awards Night" which celebrates the "growth within each man and" progress along the masculine journey." (p. 88)

A New Christian "Order"?

Many would argue at this point in our article that surely Christian men would not get involved in pagan rites. We would sincerely hope that this is the case. Yet, in the past several months several examples have come across our desk.

One noteworthy example comes from Boulder Valley Vineyard, home church of Pastor James Ryle who sits on the Board of Directors of Promise Keepers, and who is the pastor of Bill McCartney, founder of Promise Keepers. According to a conference brochure, this church sponsored "Rites of Passage: The Defining Moment of Manhood" on August 25-26, 1995. The brochure states:

"Rites of Passage. The boy Samuel prophesying at the tabernacle of Shiloh, young Samson fighting the lion at Timnath, the lad David slaying the giant Goliath, the youthful Solomon ascending the throne of Israel, the boy Jesus confounding the lawyers in the Temple... Every boy dreams of becoming a man."

"Join the Executive Pastors of the Boulder Valley Vineyard for a time of teaching on what true manhood is for a Christian.

Ryle's church has apparently created "orders" or levels of initiation for Christian men, because the brochure states:

"Special: New This Year, The Order of Joseph: A Call to Servanthood. This is especially designed as the next level of commitment within the Rites of Passage ceremony for those who have already experienced the initial ceremony."

Like its pagan counterparts, this Rites of Passage which is so closely associated with Promise Keepers' leadership, uses the rites to "define" manhood and create "orders." This use of "orders" is common to esoteric groups and secret societies such as the Freemasons. No such example can be found in Scripture. But, the hard question does need to be asked: Is this where Promise Keepers is headed?

The Cross vs. the Rites

The assumption that the men's movement is a credible venture, full of good ideas to incorporate into modern Christianity, is abhorrent and foolish! It can be argued that the Scriptural warning to "Abstain from all appearance of evil"(1 Th 5:22) would include mimicking pagan rituals, including rites of initiation.

Likewise, paganizing God's divine plan is also fraught with peril. Satan's desire is for all creation to worship him as God and he has done much to delude mankind into devising their own plans for redemption, including blood rituals (Satan's substitute for Christ's death on the cross) and rites of initiation (Satan's counterfeit for salvation). Throughout the centuries pagan societies have taken the things of God and skewed them into ungodly schemes. The ugly nature of these false religions is ultimately revealed by open idol worship, which is already demonstrably happening in today's men's movement.

"Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. "(Rom. 1:22-25)

The men's movement would create a "new man" for the New Age. Yet scripture makes it quite clear how the passage to a truly "new" man is attained.

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;" (Rom. 3:23-25)

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." (2 Cor. 5:17)

There is no alternative route to becoming a new creation. There is only the Cross of Jesus Christ and the blood that He shed. The emphasis that the men's movement places upon woundings, shedding blood, rites of initiation, and the like is merely the world mimicking God's plan of redemption. The celebration of sin, and false redemptive acts, runs directly contrary to the teachings of the Bible:

"But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." (Gal. 6:14)

Just as circumcision was the sign of the covenant between God and Abraham (and Abraham's descendants), the "sign" of the new covenant in Jesus Christ is the new creature that we are because of our relationship in Him.

"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature."(Gal. 6:15)

Clearly, none of the acts or rites to which the men's movement ascribes can do anything in and of themselves to perfect men. This is truly a myth!

Men would do well to avoid the men's movement and all of its trappings. In these perilous times, it is increasingly important that Christian believers deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world. For if we yield to temptation and become immersed again in the things of the world, the consequences will most certainly be disastrous for us!

"For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire" (2 Pet. 2:20-22)