

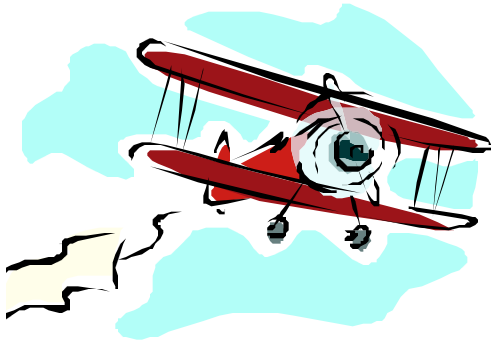
# Cross Current



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## Plane Stupid!



Though Henri Mignet's aeronautical principles were groundless, they really took off in the 1930s.

A French soldier during the First World War, he talked an airplane mechanic into letting him climb into the cockpit and taxi a biplane down the runway. But instead of stopping, he gunned the engine and sent the craft into a nearby corn-

field, wrecking the plane and touching off a lifelong obsession. From that moment on, Mignet made it his mission to prove that accepted aviation principles were false and that ordinary people could build airplanes without any help from the so-called experts.

In May 1927, he got a big boost from Charles Lindbergh who flew non-stop from New York to Paris, generating a frenzy of interest. The next year, Mignet wrote an article telling people exactly what they wanted to hear: that anybody could build an airplane dirt cheap and learn to fly it themselves. "If you can nail together a packing crate," he wrote, "you can construct an aeroplane."

In no time, he designed eight aircraft, none of which could fly. But ordinary people didn't know that and, by 1935, he came up with a plane that could fly just a little. He called it the *Sky Louse* or the *Flying Flea* because, like the insects, "it made people scratch their heads". Made of wood scraps and held together by nails and glue, the craft was powered by an old motorcycle engine.

Mignet's craft didn't have many of the safety features found on conventional airplanes of the day. "I cut them out," he said. "No



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more sheet metal that flies off or rattles!" In Europe and the United States, gullible people bought Mignet's book and tried to build their own *Flying Flea* in barns and garages. Most of the machines never got off the ground, which was good because the Frenchman's design had a serious flaw. If the planes went into a steep enough dive, they either fell like a stone, or flipped upside down and locked into that position until the pilot crashed or ran out of gas. By the late 1930s, well-publicized accidents finally grounded the homemade airplane craze, but not before many people paid a heavy price.

In much the same way, there are many today who discount and discard traditional Christianity and replace it with their own version of spirituality. Often motivated by a bad experience with church, they see all people of faith as religious frauds and reject the fundamental principles of the Bible. They teach that anyone can build a strong faith, without any help from spiritual leaders, the so-called experts. Often substituting their own misguided ideas for the wisdom revealed by God in his Word, these charlatans tell people exactly what they want to hear: that spirituality comes cheap and easy; it'll get you exactly what you want; and you can be entirely successful, all on their own.

That, of course, flies in the face of everything taught by Jesus. In his blueprint for reaching new heights of spirituality, Christ warned of the need for prolonged effort, great sacrifice and infinite patience. "Apart from me, you can do nothing," he told his followers. And there-in lies the age-old flaw of most new-age fallacies. Unlike the Bible, which says inner peace and transformation come through the power of God, most secular, self-help authors teach that each of us must reinvent ourselves by getting behind the latest quick-fix quest for personal growth.

Over and over, the New Testament talks about the Holy Spirit changing us from the inside out by renewing our attitudes and letting God's love shape our hearts, minds and wills. But when we rely solely on ourselves, we either crash quickly in a fireball of failure or slowly run out of gas and plummet into despair. Tellingly, the Bible has survived its many critics and no secular substitute has gotten off the ground to seriously challenge the Scriptures. Self-sufficiency is one spiritual principle that just won't fly

*Rick Gamble*