The Not So Guiding Light of Jack T. Chick

"The Light of the World" Video Continues Chick Publications' Legacy of Ambiguous Evangelistic Resources

by G. Richard Fisher with M. Kurt Goedelman

One novelty available in magic stores is a light bulb that appears to be illuminated with no apparent connection to electricity. The bulb, of course, is not an ordinary bulb, but one rigged with a small battery. When the base of the bulb touches a tiny piece of metallic fabric or foil in the performer's hand, "Abracadabra—let there be light!"

There are real bulbs and there are trick ones. Aberrational doctrine is like the trick bulb: it only appears to be legitimate.

Apologist Robert Bowman issued an alert over a decade ago:

"The church today is plagued, not only by heresies and aberrations, but by doctrines which I would characterize as 'junk-food doctrine.' Junk food won't kill you, unless that's all you eat in which case poor nutrition will eventually catch up with you. Junk-food doctrine is not good, nor is it really bad. One might call it 'flaky' doctrine."¹

Last year a radio news item told of a food vendor on the streets of New York City who sold a bagel and cream cheese sandwich with a cockroach in it. No one in his right mind would argue, "It's not that grave a concern. Just think of all the good cream cheese in that sandwich. Can't you sort the bagel from the cockroach and concentrate on the good? Don't you think you are being a tad bit critical here?" Most people would trash the bagel and never go near the vendor again.

Some Bible teachers are like the New York bagel vendor. Error can creep into a person's teaching even if the teacher says some good things.

When it comes to the contemporary Church's "Hall of Shame" of flaky and tainted teachings, one man's bust looms large: Jack T. Chick. Chick, now in his 80s, is probably best known for his small comic book format evangelistic tracts or booklets.

Chick was converted to Christ in 1948 after listening to Charles E. Fuller's Old Fashion Revival Hour radio broadcast. During the 1950s, he worked as an aerospace illustrator. In 1958, with the help of his wife, Chick created an evangelistic flip chart spinoff of the radio program, This Is Your Life. Chick's version, which later became known as "This Was Your Life," portrayed an unconverted soul who dies and faces judgment. His life is then replayed to him on a heavenly movie screen. His flip chart was initially used to evangelize prisoners, and later became his most popular and enduring witnessing tract.

One Chick critic notes:

"TWYL was converted to tract form after missionary broadcaster Bob Hammond told Chick that China was won to Communism through cartoon booklets. Chick decided to use the same method for Christ. In other words, Chick tracts are a Commie plot."²

Most of Chick's tracts, in and of themselves, are not too bad. However, his work cannot be endorsed for a variety of significant reasons.

GRAND "FLAKES"

Over the past three decades, Chick has gained notoriety for endorsing, promoting, and selling resources for heretics, charlatans, and known cons and criminals. Over the years, Chick's message has been unchanged — a secret cabal plotting to undermine the Church and kill Christians. And while the plot line never changes, the faction behind this plot has. Since the 1970s, the Illuminati, the Roman Catholic Church, Satanists and witches have all, at times, been the principal characters of Chick's conspiracy theories.

Chick first paved the way for John Todd, who claimed to be an ex-Grand Druid and a former high-ranking member of the Illuminati.³ Todd gained prominence through Chick's full-length comic books, *Angel of Light* and *Spellbound*. He said he was privy to the identity of the Antichrist. A thorough investigation of Todd and his claims revealed a history of diverse conversion stories, multiple marriages, deception, and other un-Christian behavior.⁴ Todd was not the conspiratorial whistle-blower Chick made him out to be, but rather a psychotic con man who, in 1988, received a 30-year prison sentence for raping a graduate student in South Carolina.⁵

Chick then moved to promoting a bogus Roman Catholic priest named Alberto Rivera. Rivera described himself as a former Jesuit who was a secret agent of the Catholic Church with a mission to infiltrate and destroy Protestant denominations. Rivera, like Todd, was publicized in a pair of Chick comic books, Alberto and Double Cross. Rivera claimed he was not alone in his mission. He alleged other Vatican-ordained colleagues whose mission was to wreak havoc and destruction within Protestantism included Kathryn Kuhlman and Jim Jones. Both Catholics and Protestants discounted and refuted Alberto's allegations.6

One Australian-based ministry provided details of Rivera's personal history. Concerned Christians Growth Ministries published statements from several people who knew Rivera as a young man. Their testimony included details of his membership in an evangelical church in the Canary Islands, his study at an evangelical seminary in Costa Rica, and the average social status of his family. The magazine even printed a 1953 photograph taken in Las Palmas, Canary Islands, showing Rivera as part of a young men's church group.⁷ These particulars all undermined the claim by Rivera (in the Alberto comic book) that during his youth, "In Spain alone, I helped destroy at least 19 churches,"⁸ and the depiction that his family was of prominent position.9

Chick, who never openly repudiated the slanderous hoaxes of Todd and Rivera, and who apparently never learned from his mistakes, went on to endorse former drug-addicted physician Ruth Bailey, who went under the alias of Rebecca Brown, M.D. Along with her sidekick, Elaine, who claimed to have literally married Satan and jetted around the world as his international agent, Brown pretended to know all the secrets of the satanic organization.¹⁰ As Todd's and Alberto's stories succumbed to apathy and the critic's pen, Brown became the darling of Chick Publications.

Chick gave even greater distinction to the message and testimony of Rebecca and Elaine. Rather than confining their tales to comic book format, Chick published two full-length books, *He Came to Set the Captives Free* and *Prepare for War*.¹¹

Chick regarded the evidence of all of Brown's past drug forays and legal troubles with disdain, indifference, and denial. As he did when responding to refutations of Todd and Rivera, he said the evidence had been set forth by a vast satanic conspiracy established to destroy their divine missions.

Today, even apart from Chick, Brown continues in a far-out state of paranoia. She says PFO wields great control over churches and Christian publishing. The members of PFO are, according to Brown, "agents of Satan" and she calls for Christians to pray and ask God to expunge the ministry of PFO.¹²

Chick also is enamored with a Peter Ruckman-style King James Version Only teaching. This belief contends that only the King James Version of the Bible contains the unadulterated Word of God. As such, he brands all other versions or translations of Scripture — including the New King James Version — as perversions.

It also appears that Chick is unaware that the King James Version Only teaching was born out of heresy, having its recent roots in a Seventhday Adventist teacher, Benjamin G. Wilkinson.¹³ Wilkinson loved the King James Version for one reason alone. He believed that it taught and defended the false doctrine of soul sleep, a key tenet within Adventist and Jehovah's Witness — theology.

When one surveys the landscape of all KJVO exponents, it is obvious that they are merely regurgitating the ideas of Wilkinson. As such, they are 50 or more years behind the times as far as current Bible manuscript studies. For example, the "P" fragments (many dating virtually to the Apostles) have recently acquired great distinction within the Bible translation arena and have nothing to do with Wescott and Hort, who are classified by those in the KJVO camp as the perpetrators ultimately responsible for the modern day evil versions.¹⁴

So Chick's track record is indeed appalling. That in itself makes us leery of anything he produces. Chick seems to lack discernment. The regrettable aspect of all this is that he wields influence over many young and untaught believers.

Chick's latest promotion is a 78minute audio-visual production (available on either DVD or VHS video) called *The Light of the World*. It is advertised as giving the whole story from creation to Christ's resurrection with narration and more than 360 images of oil paintings. A brochure touts:

"In a day when many Christians are producing watered-down, politically-correct films, *The Light of the World* provides exactly what you would expect from Jack Chick — a straightforward, biblically accurate, no-punchespulled presentation of the gospel with a compelling salvation appeal."

How much light is in *The Light of the World*, and how much is an illusion is the question. Obviously there are some things that are correct in Chick's presentation, but it also contains issues not clearly explained and points described very poorly. Those ambiguous statements can tend toward heresy. Perhaps the Chick pamphlet unwittingly admits the unmistakable when it pitched that the production "provides exactly what you would expect from Jack Chick."

QUICK-CHANGE GOD?

Chick's production lacks precision. For example, the presentation commences with Creation, and God is described: "There are three parts to God: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. And these three are one. The true and living God. All three are separate, yet all three are one."

This, at first, could sound orthodox to the untrained ear, but the statement could well be embraced by Oneness Pentecostals. It definitely sounds within the confines of a modalistic (or non-Trinitarian) view of God, which is a grave theological anomaly of Oneness Pentecostals. This view is known as the heresy of Sabellianism.

It is not being captious to insist that a pilot make sure the plane's instruments are working. We do not want to end up in Mexico when we were heading for Michigan. Definition and precision are equally — if not more important when it comes to spiritual matters.

Christian History magazine says of the term "Trinity":

"We owe the word 'Trinity' to the African theologian and apologist Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullian (ca. 160 - ca. 225). Tertullian used the word for the concept that appears everywhere in the Bible but is never explicitly named. He coined it in an argument with a teacher who promoted modalism — the view that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not distinct persons but mere appearances (modes) or roles played by a single God."¹⁵

The Trinity was not invented by the early Church because it was "everywhere in the Bible." It was recognized, not originated, by Tertullian. Tertullian and other early Church Fathers are no more responsible for "inventing" the doctrine of the Trinity than Isaac Newton is responsible for "inventing" the law of gravity.

Down through history, the Church has held to the Athanasian Creed, which is a synopsis of the biblical material on the Godhead. As with Tertullian, this creed did not invent the doctrine, but codified, clarified, and explained that God is one in essence and nature, but three in person. This was being taught from the times of the Apostles. God is not just one, which is modalism. Neither is He just three, which is tritheism. Chick's view seems to be an interbred version of both. Chick confuses the concepts of nature and person.

Athanasius declared:

"... we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the Persons; nor dividing the Substance. For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one: the Glory Equal, the Majesty Coeternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son: and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father uncreate, the Son uncreate: and the Holy Ghost uncreate. ... The Father eternal, the Son eternal: and the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet they are not three Eternals: but one Eternal. ... So likewise the Father is Almighty, the Son Almighty: and the Holy Ghost Almighty. And yet there are not three Almighties but one Almighty. So the Father is God, the Son is God: and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods: but one God."16

Chick truly lacks precision in defining this fundamental truth of the Christian faith. Although the production is promoted as "the whole story," the viewer will have to fill in some blanks. One can only wonder how an unbeliever (the primary target of the presentation) will do so. One also might wonder if this lack of definition is a lack of discernment, or a move to more widely market the product.

SOVEREIGN SATAN?

As the program continues, the narration states:

"God threw Lucifer and all the rebellious angels out of heaven. These fallen angels became devils and Lucifer became Satan. They settled around planet Earth, which became Satan's domain." This is a dangerous pronouncement on two fronts: first because it is false and unbiblical, and second because it aids the theology of the Word Faith camp. Many prominent Word Faith leaders teach that Adam surrendered the legal rights of the world to Satan.¹⁷ Chick teaches the same concept, but places Satan's takeover earlier. Chick offers no Scripture because there is none. No man knows when the fall of Lucifer and angels occurred. We do know, however, that Satan never owned the earth.

This belief robs God of His omnipotence and flies in the face of verses such as Psalm 24:1, "The earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness," and Psalm 50:12 where the Lord says, "For the world is Mine." The world is either God's or Satan's. It makes a world of difference.

Chick further suggests that Adam intruded into Satan's domain, stating Satan's "territory had been invaded by a new creation called man." Scripture, however, speaks of no such invasion. Genesis is clear that Adam was placed on God's earth — an earth He had just created. God did not give His earth away, and Adam could not. Therefore earth never was Satan's domain. A domain is defined as a "region under a single sovereign."18 God is the only Sovereign. Later, the narrator will say that, "Before the devil moves against someone, he must first get permission from God the Father in heaven." So here we have mixed signals at the very least.

SATAN NEVER LOOKED SO SILLY

Throughout the presentation we see not only simplistic portrayals of things, but renderings and images that, for far too long, the Church has tried to abandon. Satan is shown in typical Chick tract fashion with horns, fangs, a red suit, tail, and long daggers for nails. At times, Satan is pictured as half-animal with cloven hooves. These are really nothing more than caricatures. Scripture makes clear that Satan is not like this. Even the world mocks this representation. The inspired Apostle Paul stated, "Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness'' (2 Corinthians 11:14-15). It may not have occurred to Chick, but Satan may well be pleased at this portrayal.

Chick seems to be preoccupied with Satan and gives him far too much credit. In a scene depicting Satan with clawed hands upon Caesar's shoulders, Chick says, "Satan moved Caesar Augustus in Rome to tax the whole world." Here he is guilty of eisegesis at worst or an overactive imagination at best. Luke simply wrote, "And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered" (Luke 2:1).

Additionally, Chick, who condemns contemporary Bible translations, creates his own "revised Chick paraphrase," adding Satan to the birth narrative of Jesus. One could far better argue that a Sovereign God moved things in this direction. Proverbs 21:1 reminds us, "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, Like rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes." Similarly, Proverbs 16:4 instructs, "The LORD has made all for Himself, Yes, even the wicked for the day of doom." Perhaps unaware, Chick ultimately denies the true sovereignty of God in that he continues to ascribe to Satan the sovereign prerogatives which belong only to God. It was not too difficult for God to move the heart of the pagan King Cyrus to help the Jews return to Ierusalem from Persia.

Chick compounds the strangeness and satanic obsession by saying that the crucifixion was "the devil's moment for revenge." Scripture describes the crucifixion in many ways, but never as Satan's revenge.

The crucifixion is described as an "offering" throughout the book of Hebrews. Paul describes it as a "righteous act" in Romans 5:18. This was not Satan's handiwork, but rather Jesus being "delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God," as Acts 2:23 declares. The people of Jesus' day, being fallen sinners, were only doing what they desired to do in crucifying Jesus.

The death of Jesus was sovereignly designed by God, yet Scripture assigns human culpability. The human factor loomed large as Peter charged, "Him ... you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death" (Acts 2:23). Likewise, Paul does not lay blame at the feet of Satan directly, but says, "Which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Corinthians 2:8).

It seems to be more man's revenge than Satan's.

Some of the other items mentioned on the presentation concerning the crucifixion are of little consequence, but remain wrong. The video says, "the soldiers made a crown of poisonous thorns." If this were true, Jesus probably would not have survived to the cross. The Bible simply says, "the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns and put it on His head" (John 19:2).

THOSE JEWS!

There is also an anti-Semitic suggestion added to the statement of the crowd at the crucifixion when they said, "His blood be on us and on our children" (Matthew 27:25). This is interpreted by Chick to mean that the Jewish suffering through history is the result of their first century rejection. Citing the Matthew passage, the narrator then offers, "God took them at their words. They have suffered ever since." As much as Chick despises the Roman Catholic Church, he picks up one of the ideas it uses to support centuries of anti-Semitism.

Roman Catholic author James Carroll admits that, especially from the time of Constantine forward, "For Jews, the cross became the symbol of the ultimate cul de sac."¹⁹ The Crusades of the Middle Ages were fueled by anti-Semitism and anti-Islamicism. It is documented that a "Jewish man was stabbed five times by a group of Crusaders 'in memory of the wounds suffered by Jesus."²⁰

In excepting this Gospel passage, we must first consider the statement in Matthew 27:25 came out of the ignorance of the people at Pilate's hall. It simply means that they would take Pilate's responsibility, which they could not anyway. Hardship and devastation came automatically to that generation because the rejection of Jesus has links to the later destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple by the Romans. This Jesus prophesied in Luke 19:41-44. We know, too, that according to the first half of the book of Acts, thousands of Jews were saved. We cannot dismiss the fact that suffering is a part of life and many nations have suffered for various reasons. Suffering is a consequence of the fall.

Secondly, no respectable exegete would lay the verse on unborn generations. It is not reasonable to say, "They have suffered ever since." The *New Geneva Study Bible* offers this commentary:

"When Pilate seemed reluctant to act, the people were not afraid to say they would take the responsibility themselves. Their guilt, Pilate's guilt, and Judas's, is not determined by them but by God (cf. Acts 4:27). According to Ezekiel, descendants do not share the guilt of their parents unless they cooperate in their sins (Ezek. 18:20; cf. Acts 2:23, 39)."²¹

ETHEREAL BLOOD?

Chick also says that "the blood that Jesus shed on the cross that terrible day was not human blood; it was God's precious blood." This leads to all sorts of philosophical and theological concerns: Since God is Spirit, how could God have blood? What is God's blood? Does God need blood to exist? Was Jesus really less than human with supernatural God blood? Because Christ's blood was shed, poured out, where did the blood of God end up since all of God is immortal? Again Chick adds to the Bible.

Certainly this idea could not be derived from the Bible. Although the Chick video does not specifically state it, perhaps he has misconstrued the Acts 20:28 statement of Paul when he says, "shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." The words "of God" clearly refer to (or modify) the word "Church" and not the word "blood." The blood in the verse is clearly the blood of Jesus. Hebrews 2:14 makes abundantly clear that Jesus' humanity and His identification with us is based on the fact that He shared human flesh and blood (minus sin of course). So without being a partaker of our true humanity (flesh and blood), which He "shared" as the writer of Hebrews says, He would not have been truly the God/man or adequate Savior. There are also adequate alternate renderings of the Acts 20:28 passage that read, "the Church of the Lord," which certainly fit the context more readily.²²

The bottom line is that the Bible would not mislead us. If Christ's blood — which at times is literal and at other times a metaphor for His dying or sacrificing His life - was something other than blood, the writers of the New Testament would have come up with another word and not confuse us. They constantly used the word haima, which would not and could not be taken in any other way than human blood. Whether he realizes it or not, Chick is denying the essential humanity of Christ and giving untaught Christians something to quarrel over.

Moreover, Chick's verbiage is unforgivably misleading and mystical. D.A. Carson warns against the kind of superstitious literalism that makes a fetish out of the blood of Jesus:

"[the] *blood of Jesus* refers to Jesus' violent, sacrificial death. In general, the blessings that the Scriptures show to be accomplished or achieved by the blood of Jesus are equally said to be accomplished or achieved by the death of Jesus (e.g., justification, Rom. 3:21-26; 5:6-9; redemption, Rom. 3:24; Eph. 1:7; Rev. 5:9)."²³

The liturgical exercises of the Roman Catholic system make a magic fetish out of Jesus' blood, as it does to the cross and His "Sacred Heart." Chick's declaration does not appear too far removed from the metaphysical blood of Catholicism.

BUT THERE IS SOME GOOD

No doubt, Chick's supporters will argue that the "plan of salvation" is presented and so that justifies all the errors and quirks. But again we need recall the illustration of the bagel. Jesus clearly emphasized not only evangelism, but discipleship, in the Great Commission. We are to "teach everything" He commanded and teach them to observe or obey (Matthew 28:19-20). If this video presentation brings converts, it is possible that they arrive in the bizarre and conspiratorial world of Jack Chick, with its dubious cast of characters.

The Light of the World does not explain important issues fully or clearly. Others are pictured poorly and some lean toward heresy. The verbal additions to the Word of God are a cultic practice and are not just explanation or application. The Light of the World is really less of a light and more of a hindrance to the untaught.

Endnotes:

1. Robert M. Bowman, Jr., *Orthodoxy and Heresy*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1992, pg. 54.

2. Robert B. Fowler, *The History of the World According to Jack T Chick*. San Leandro, Calif.: self-published, 2000, pg. 1-6.

3. For more information on the Illuminati, see G. Richard Fisher, "The Present-Day Illuminati Theory: The Real or Illusionary Threat of a Secret Worldwide Conspiracy," *The Quarterly Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 5-9.

4. See further, Darryl E. Hicks and David A. Lewis, *The Todd Phenomenon - Ex-Grand Druid vs. the Illuminati - Fact or Phantasy*? Harrison, Ark.: New Leaf Press, 1979.

5. See further, G. Richard Fisher, "Comic Book Hero to Convict - The Incredible Saga of John Todd," *The Quarterly Journal*, Vol. 14, No. 2, pp. 4, 8-10.

6. See further, M. Kurt Goedelman, "The Alberto Phenomenon," *The Journal of Pastoral Practice*, (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing), Vol. V, No. 2, pp. 83-88.

7. "A Shock for Rivera," *Take a Closer Look*, Concerned Christian Growth Ministries, Vol. 9, No. 3, April 1988, pp. 12-18.

8. Jack T. Chick, *Alberto*. Chino, Calif.: Chick Publications, 1979, pg. 20.

9. Ibid., pp. 4-5. The Rivera household was depicted as a large home with several servants.

10. Since 1989, PFO has written and published several investigative reports on

Rebecca Brown. The greater part of these reports have been collected and published by PFO under the title, *Drugs, Demons and Delusions - An Investigation of the Testimony, Claims and Doctrine of Rebecca Brown, MD.* This 54-page booklet is available from PFO (Saint Louis).

11. Chick Publications was responsible for the initial printings of these volumes. In the late 1980s, Brown's relationships with both sidekick Elaine and publisher Jack Chick ended. However, these splits did not cause the books or their fabricated contents to cease. Whitaker House publishers now reprints these earlier volumes as well as Brown's current eccentric offerings.

12. For further reports on the deluded rambling of charges by Brown against PFO, see "Rebecca Brown's Axis of Evil," *The Quarterly Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 1, pp. 2, 21; and "Rebecca in Fantasyland," *The Quarterly Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 4, pp. 3, 21-23.

13. See further the article, "The Cultic Root System of David Otis Fuller & King James Onlyism" by G. Richard Fisher in this issue of *The Quarterly Journal*. Also see, Roy E. Beacham and Kevin T. Bauder, General Editors, *One Bible Only?* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregal Publications, 2001, pp. 44-45.

14. See further, Phillip Wesley Comfort, *The Quest for the Original Text of the New Testament.* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1992.

15. "Did You Know?", *Christian History*, Issue 80, Vol. XXII, No. 4, pg. 3.

16. Gordon Melton, *American Religious Creeds*. New York: Triumph Books, 1991, Vol. 1, pg. 2.

17. See further, Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1993, pp. 129-135.

18. The Complete Christian Dictionary for Home and School. Ventura, Calif.: Gospel Light, 1990, "domain," pg. 192.

19. James Carroll, *Constantine's Sword, The Church and the Jews.* New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2001, pg. 289.

20. David Rausch, A Legacy of Hatred. Chicago: Moody Press, 1984, pg. 28.

21. *New Geneva Study Bible*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995, pg. 1553, study note on Matthew 27:25.

22. See further, Adam Clarke, *The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.* New York: Abingdon Press, nd, Vol. 5, pp. 854-855.

23. D.A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1984, pg. 34, italics in original. For a larger presentation of the history and nuances in blood mysticism, see G. Richard Fisher and M. Kurt Goedelman, *The Confusing World of Benny Hinn*, (Saint Louis: Personal Freedom Outreach, 2002), pp. 145-154.