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newsletter

GOD CALLING...

A Critical Look at a Christian Best-seller

by Prof. Edmond C. Gruss

Spring Arbor Distributor's list of paperback "Christian" best-sellers, published in the April 1986 issue of Eternity magazine showed David Hunt and T.A. McMahon's *The Seduction of Christianity* in the No. 1 spot. The same list showed at No. 9 an example of what worries Hunt and McMahon: the book *God Calling*. Its prominence on the list is indicative of the lack of spiritual discernment in these "last days."

John Weldon, author and Christian expert on the occult and New Age movement, said upon seeing the list: "*God Calling* is spiritistic literature; a demon makes the ranks of evangelical best-sellers!" Weldon is not the only Christian who has come to this conclusion.

God Calling first was published in the mid-1930s. It is stocked by many Christian bookstores and sells well, sometimes even being requested when copies are not found on display shelves. The cover of the current paperback edition describes it as "The inspiring classic" in which "Christ's words cut a daily path of joy and peace through our troubled and confused world."

That the book has had a wide circulation and acceptance is borne out by statements in the 1950 publication *God at Eventide*: "Now, in response to many requests for a companion volume ... 'God Calling,' this new book, produced on the same lines, is launched" (pg. 7). It also was predicted that "the millions who cherished 'God Calling' will welcome this companion volume."

This writer's May 1981 edition of *God Calling* shows it to be the 26th printing. All this would indicate that, for many, *God Calling* is an influential and significant book.

This writer's first contact with *God Calling* came while writing *The Ouija Board: Doorway to the Occult* (Moody Press, 1975).

Automatic writing was discussed in the following statement:

"It is surprisingly sad but true that even Christians have been attracted to automatic writing, not realizing that it is an occult practice which can be deceptive and dangerous. The book *God Calling*, by two anonymous women, is one example of 'Christian' automatic writing" (pg. 16).

After giving some further information on the book, Tim Timmons' conclusions on *God Calling* were quoted:

"The book is full of good thoughts, but careful examination will show that many of the concepts sound as though they originate from the angel of light (II Cor. 11:14), rather than the Living Christ. This whole experience is inconsistent with God's Word, that is, our only reliable guide to examining this kind of activity" (*Chains of the Spirit — A Manual for Liberation*, pg. 30).

Several years after the publication of *The Ouija Board* book, letters from England began to arrive. Some questioned the book's comments and interpretations, while others asked for further verification. These letters and others stimulated further study of the origins and content of *God Calling* and turned up the following.

One of the anonymous "two listeners" who received the messages contained in *God Calling* explained the listeners' background in the book's introduction, called *The Voice Divine*. In 1932, she had received a copy of A.J. Russell's book, *For Sinners Only*. She read it and was so impressed with it that she wrote down more than 100 names of people to whom she

wanted to send it. She then explained what took place:

"A few months later I read it again. It was then that there came a persistent desire to try to see whether I could get guidance such as A.J. Russell reported, through sharing a quiet time with the friend with whom I was then living. She was a deeply spiritual woman with unwavering faith in the goodness of God and a devout believer in prayer ... we sat down, pencils and paper in hand and waited. ... My results were entirely negative. ... But with my friend a very wonderful thing happened. From the first, beautiful messages were given to her by our Lord Himself, and every day from then these messages have never failed us."

The experience of these two women is not materially different from that reported by Mrs. Ruth Townsend on her use of the Ouija board:

"Marion and I studied with the Ouija board... We started by getting sermons from beyond. We have hundreds of these sermons that we typewrote and preserved... All of them came from the Ouija board" (*The Ouija Board: Doorway to the Occult*, pg. 84).

Russell, his book and his form of "guidance" are significant to this study. Louis Talbot stated that one "must examine writers such as A.J. Russell" and his book *For Sinners Only* to understand the Oxford Group and its teachings and that it "practically constituted a textbook for the Group" (*The King's Business*, Jan. 1962, pg. 14). Walter Clark listed *For Sinners Only* among those books that "have been written or prepared by adherents of the Group" (*The*

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EDITORIALS

MAGIC, MURDER AND MORMONISM

The Salt Lake City news media have been filled with reports on the preliminary evidence in the trial of Mark Hofmann. Hofmann, a Salt Lake City documents dealer, has been accused of fraud, forgery and murder in the October 1985 bombings that killed Stephen Christensen and Kathleen Sheets.

The preliminary examination, which began in April, made public some of the evidence the prosecution expects to use if the court finds it sufficient to bind Hofmann over for trial.

Among the evidence presented is a receipt made out to a Mike Hansen bearing the print of Hofmann's index finger. The name also was found on an envelope in Hofmann's home. This led police to a photoengraver who had made printing plates of early Utah money for a customer named Mike Hansen. This is the same type of money that Hofmann was claiming to have found and sold to Salt Lake City dealers. Also entered into evidence were two Radio Shack purchase records in which a Mike Hansen bought a mercury switch, batteries and battery casings. This is the same type of material that police theorize the bombs had been made from. Hansen gave as his address a vacant lot in Salt Lake City.

Near the close of the preliminary hearing, documents experts testified that the documents sold by Hofmann to the Mormon church and wealthy Mormons appear to have been forged. Under high magnification, the ink on the Hofmann documents shows fine cracks, a feature not found in authentic documents. The experts testified that such cracking occurred when the ink, which contained gum arabic, was subjected to heat in order to artificially age it.

Nearly all the major documents claimed to have been discovered by Hofmann show some signs of forgery, according to the experts. This includes the so-called Salamander Letter and the 1825 Joseph Smith letter. These two letters tie the origins of Mormonism to early 19th century folk magic.

While the Hofmann hearings were proceeding, the Mormon History Association met in Salt Lake City. Prominent on the agenda were papers dealing with Smith's involvement in folk magic.

Some Mormon scholars are not yet ready to dismiss the Hofmann documents. However, all were agreed that there was sufficient evidence even without them to tie Smith in with the practices of magic prior to founding the Mormon church.

To acknowledge Smith's use of magic and still hold to the divine origin of the Mormon church, Mormon scholars have stressed that prior to the 20th century a different culture pattern and outlook existed. Magic, they claim, played a part in the production of the Bible as well as in the lives of 18th and 19th century Americans. The rise of rationalism at the end of the last century has caused us to become embarrassed over the use of magic. We must not let our viewpoint color our outlook on the previous century, they stressed.

Scholars most likely will debate this new thesis for some time. It will be tested against such contrary evidence as 18th and 19th century state laws against the use of magic and public poking of fun at folk magic in the local press. Mormon scholarship has turned a significant corner, however. Prodded by the Hofmann documents, Mormon scholars at last have become willing to examine the plethora of evidence on the influence that folk magic had on the origins of Mormonism.

—WPW

GOD CALLING

(from page 1)

Oxford Group pg. 262) and included Russell among the "journalistic converts to the Oxford Group" (pg. 19).

In the January 1962 edition of *The King's Business*, Talbot wrote of the book:

"When Russell's *For Sinners Only* was first published, it was denounced by churchmen as 'deplorable' and 'dangerous,' but to me the worst thing about it was that it was not clear on the way of salvation and did not set forth clearly the Gospel of a crucified, risen, and glorified Savior. The atonement was scarcely mentioned" (pg. 14).

The Oxford Group also practiced the guidance method reported by Russell and used by the listeners. This approach was criticized and condemned in the 1930s and in later years by a number of well-known Christian leaders such as T.T. Shields, H.A. Ironside, Louis Talbot and A.C. Gaebelein (*The Kings Business*, Jan. 1962, p. 17; *Buchmanism, Now Called the Oxford Group Movement*, pp. 34-38). When William Irvine surveyed the opinions of other evangelical

leaders on the guidance method of the Oxford Group he found them in one accord in their warnings against it (*Heresies Exposed*, third edition, pg. 49). What was their concern? Pastor Harold T. Commins, who had been a former member of the Oxford Group, gave one response:

"Finally, their idea of 'guidance' is false to the Scripture. ... Sitting down with paper and pencil in hand and letting the mind go absolutely blank, and then writing down whatever flashes across the mind as God's orders for the day, is beyond anything promised or sanctioned in Scripture. Indeed this 'Passivity' of mind is a very perilous condition to be in, for it is precisely at such moments that Satan gains control and does his devilish work" (*Heresies Exposed*, pp. 50-51).

Late in 1926, the Oxford Group's base of operations moved from the United States and "by 1927 the center of gravity had shifted to England to the extent that the Group was speaking of its 'mission to America'" (Clark, *The Oxford Group*, pg. 75). In 1932, there was an Oxford Group luncheon for members of Parliament, in London, and by 1935, the annual "House-

party" at Oxford University, which began in 1930, had 10,000 in attendance (Clark, *The Oxford Group*, pg. 76).

With the prominence of the Oxford Group in England during the 1930s, one might conclude that the listeners, who lived in England, not only would be familiar with Russell and his book, but also with the Oxford Group and its teachings. This conclusion is verified by some of the statements in *God Calling* in which the "Living Christ" uses the terminology of the Oxford Group and promotes its philosophy (see, for example, *God Calling's* entry for Feb. 15).

With the connection of *God Calling* to the Oxford Group firmly established, it is not surprising to find that even the book's title originated from it. This is established by an observation made by Walter Clark, "Expressions such as 'God calling' ... can be found on nearly every page of the volume of his (Buchman's) collected speeches" (*The Oxford Group*, pg. 108). It should also be remembered that Russell edited *God Calling* for publication.

From all that has been presented, one must conclude that the woman who was so

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NEWS UPDATE

WOMAN CLAIMS CAT SCAN ENDED HER PSYCHIC POWERS

A woman who blamed a CAT scan for the loss of her psychic powers was awarded more than \$1 million by a Philadelphia jury this past spring.

Judith Richardson Haines, 42, who said she had earned a living as a psychic working out of New Castle, Del., claimed she suffered severe headaches when she tried to concentrate and use her psychic powers after receiving the treatment at Temple University Hospital in 1976.

The hospital will appeal the verdict, based on arguments that the jury did not heed the judge's instruction to disregard Haines' allegations regarding her lost psychic powers and instead considered only testimony about an allergic reaction she suffered from a dye injected during the CAT scan.

—KAM



COURT VICTORIES FOR MOONIES

Purported "mind control" tactics by the Rev Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church are protected under the U.S. Constitution, according to a ruling handed down by a California appeals court.

The ruling, stemming from fraud suits filed by three former members, said that as long as the church did not use force or the threat of force in recruitment, the First Amendment protections of freedom of religion prohibits any court from inquiring into "the spiritual nature of its holder on its members," said the 1st District Court of Appeals.

The court also allowed reinstatement of suits against one of the ex-members and two alleged "deprogrammers," seeking to bar them from interfering with travel by Unification Church members.

—KAM



UPCOMING CULT CONFERENCES

Alert '86

Kinsman Ministries will sponsor its first cult-awareness seminar, "Alert '86," Aug. 15-16 in Elizabeth, N.J.

Among the speakers will be Dr. James Bjornstad, Rev. Charles Rizzo, Walter Bjork, Kathie Adler and William Cetnar.

Topics will include Jehovah's Witnesses, the New Age Movement, Islam, the Unification Church, The Way International, hyperfaith, the inerrancy of God's word, and the deity of Christ.

The conference will be at the Renaissance Christian Conference Center.

Registration is required. For more information and registration forms, please write Kinsman Ministries, P.O. Box 636, Westfield, NJ 07091.

Witnesses Now For Jesus

The 8th International *Witnesses Now For Jesus* convention will be Oct. 24-26 in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania.

The three-day conference will include Christian teaching and testimonies from former Jehovah's Witnesses.

For accommodations, contact Blue Mountain Christian Retreat, Box 118A, R.D. 2, New Ringgold, Pa. 17960, (717) 386-2145. For more conference information write, Bill Cetnar, Route 3, Weir Lake Road, Kunkletown, Pa. 18058.

—MKG



RLDS HOLDOUT REVERSES POSITION

The only congregation in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints to reject the ordination of women as priests has reversed its position.

Four women seeking ordination were turned down last September by the church's Sante Fe stake. However, during a special business meeting Feb. 3, the stake approved their ordination along with five other women and six men.

There was a 100-vote difference out of 990 eligible voters on the question of ordaining women, said Sante Fe stake president Richard Hughes.

The 220,000-member RLDS church approved the opening of the priesthood in April 1984 with the first women being ordained last November. The larger, Salt Lake City-based Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints does not allow women in the priesthood.

—MKG



EX-CULT MEMBER AWARDED \$1.5 MILLION

A Superior Court jury in Los Angeles awarded \$1.5 million to a former member of the Church Universal and Triumphant who claimed the church left him emotionally and physically debilitated.

Church leader Elizabeth Claire Prophet and the church were held liable for the damage allegedly done to Gregory Mull, 64, a former church architect.

Testimony in the trial allowed the public a rare look at the church's inner workings. The church, based in Calabasas, Calif., mixes Christian terminology with Eastern and occult teachings. Prophet claims to receive spiritual guidance from 14 "ascended masters," including Jesus, Buddha, the Virgin Mary and her late husband, Mark Prophet. Mark Prophet founded the church in 1958, calling it the Summit Lighthouse.

Mull said he might use his award to finance an expose of the church's practices.

—KAM



A HORSE IS A HORSE EXCEPT, OF COURSE...

Members of a church in Ironton, Ohio sang "Oh, How I Love Jesus" as they burned record albums and other music paraphernalia after attending a seminar in which an evangelist said the theme song from the "Mr. Ed" television show conveys a satanic message.

The Rev. Jim Brown, evangelist from the Psalms 150 congregation in South Point, Ohio, said that when played backwards, the song from the '60s television show about a talking horse, contains the phrases "the source is Satan" and "someone sung this song for Satan."

—KAM

The Baha'i Faith:

A Christian Analysis and Suggestions for Evangelization

by Rev. Robert E. Smith

The scene may be a familiar one: a booth at the county fair with a three-paneled display of pictures showing attractive, Middle-Eastern style buildings. Two or three young adults stand by with literature proclaiming a religion dedicated to ending the problems of war, hunger and social inequality. The booth and the people in it are promoting the Baha'i World Faith.

This relatively young religion is attractive to many Americans and can be found in the most educated segments of our society. Baha'is preach their message throughout the country, urging people to embrace the prophet Baha'u'llah, whose coming they believe Jesus predicted.

History

The Baha'i faith began when a young Persian businessman, Mirza Ali Muhammed, announced on May 23, 1844,¹ that he was a divine manifestation sent into the world as the "Bab," which means the "Gate."² By this announcement, he declared himself the Mahdi, or 12th Imam of Shi'ite Islam.³ The message he preached was that the religious leaders of the world had forgotten they had a common origin in the message of the prophets Moses, Jesus and Muhammed.⁴ He proclaimed that with his appearance a new age had begun.⁵ However, his claim to prophetic status equal to Muhammed's did not please the Islamic establishment. He was murdered by Islamic fanatics on July 8, 1850, at Tabriz at age 31,⁶ but not before becoming a popular teacher among members of the Shaykahi sect of Islam.

His death did not extinguish the movement. The Bab had left a book containing his teachings, called "The Bayan." Based on this work, his followers claimed he prophesied the eventual unification of mankind, which would happen under the guidance of a "Promised One," the next manifestation of the true and living God. The guardianship of the faith was left to Subh-i-Azal, who governed the religion with the assistance of his older half-brother, Mirzah Husayn Ali, for 16 years. This older brother soon took the name "Baha" or "Glory." Eventually Subh-i-Azal's leadership weakened, leaving the movement to be administered by Baha.

In 1863, Baha gave himself the name "Baha'u'llah," which means "the glory of God," thus announcing that he was this next manifestation prophesied by the Bab. Most of the followers of the Bab believed

him, but a small number, including Subh-i-Azal, renounced him. Baha'u'llah tried to force his half-brother to submit. When he was unsuccessful, he rewrote Babi literature and records to de-emphasize the Bab, reducing him to a mere forerunner. The conflict rose to the level of murder, causing a Turkish government to separate the two factions.⁷ The Baha'i movement survived under the leadership of Baha'u'llah and prospered. Baha'u'llah died at Bahji in Palestine in 1892 at age 75.⁸

His son, Abdu'l-Baha, succeeded him. He proclaimed that he was the Center of the Covenant, the only one who could correctly interpret his father's work. His own writings soon came to have authority equal to his father's. A schism developed under the leadership of 'Abdu'l-Baha's brother and it ended in the same sort of strife as the fight over Baha'u'llah's claim to authority over the Babis.⁹ The new leader brought the faith to America in 1912 in order to escape persecution. From its new American home, it has grown to a membership in the millions, active in more than 50 countries. 'Abdu'l-Baha died at age 77 in Palestine in 1921.¹⁰

The Baha'is have a strong missionary emphasis. They are active in over 250 countries. The result of this work is a current world membership of about 5 million.¹¹

After 'Abdu'l-Baha's death, the leadership was passed on to Shoghi Effendi (Guardian of the Faith), his grandson. Shoghi Effendi's influence was exercised through the teachers of the faith.¹² He is credited with the development of the current Baha'i administrative system. He appointed 27 Hands of the Cause, who created the current system of government headed by the Universal House of Justice after his death in 1957. This change came because Shoghi Effendi died childless and intestate.¹³

Principles of the Baha'i Faith

The Baha'i faith claims its prophet to be the most recent of many manifestations of the truth. Baha'is believe that each of the manifestations reveals the truth the most important for his contemporaries and the age that follows him. The writings of each of these prophets are important since they are divine in nature, spoken by the Word of God for their era.¹⁴ Thus, Baha'is claim that their faith is the only religion applicable for today.

The final authority for the Baha'i Faith is, in theory, the writings of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha.¹⁵ However, in practice, the current leadership controls the theology. All Baha'i leaders past and present are considered to be infallible. The most highly acclaimed of the works of Baha'u'llah is the "Kitab-i-Aqdas," a book of laws.¹⁶ However, no official translation of this book ever has been made.¹⁷

Rationality guides the Baha'i understanding of truth. Therefore, Baha'is reject all doctrines that appear irrational. They interpret as allegory all biblical teachings they consider unrealistic. Among these are the doctrines of the Fall, Christ's and believers' bodily resurrection, heaven, hell, angels, demons and the like.

Another Baha'i principle is progressive revelation. All religious truth is relative, built upon the currently authoritative revelation. No revelation is final, but only one message of God from a series by which mankind is enlightened.¹⁸

Material Principle of the Baha'i Faith

The chief aim of the Baha'i Faith is to unite all people in a world brotherhood, allowing for diversity on matters the faith considers peripheral. On important matters, however, they hope to rally mankind around Baha'u'llah and the great central truths of world religion.¹⁹ This unity of mankind is to be expressed in one global commonwealth, ruled by the Baha'i House of Justice, with the Baha'i Faith as the state religion.²⁰ Thus the Baha'i way of life centers around a program aimed at social and political regeneration, not personal faith in God or the regeneration of an individual life. Baha'u'llah said: "All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization."²¹ This focus tends to de-emphasize the importance of agreement in spiritual matters.²²

Baha'is claim that while there are discrepancies between the great prophets, they all held to the same basic moral and spiritual values. The faith expects unity in these values.²³ To follow the Baha'i faith is viewed as in no way conflicting with the previous religion of the adherent, since all religions are a part of the one faith.²⁴ Thus, for example, Baha'is claim that their religion is in harmony with Christianity.

Abdu'l-Baha summarized the Baha'i Faith in a series of principles that include: the abolition of racial and religious prejudice, achievement of equality of the sexes, an

international language, universal education and a universal representative government.²⁵ In order to bring about the unity of mankind, Baha'is must live righteous lives. The two duties the Baha'is believe God lays upon men are to recognize Baha'u'llah for who he is and to keep all that he commands.²⁶ Thus the faithful must: marry, but only with the consent of all living parents; pray daily; observe an annual period of fasting; observe monogamy; refrain from cremating the dead; and never divorce until after a one-year waiting period. Parents are required to educate their children. Use of alcohol and narcotics are forbidden.²⁷ A good Baha'i is required to write a will, study the scriptures, consult a physician in times of sickness, be fair, truthful, courteous, not fanatical, not hypocritical, nor contentious. He must not plunge his hand into food and must avoid Iranian bath houses.²⁸

In the spiritual realm, Baha'is deny the doctrine of the Fall, maintaining that no one is essentially good or evil, but that all men are imperfect. Sin is a baser plane of nature from which one is delivered through education. Baha'is believe that evil really does not exist, since it is merely the absence of good.²⁹ Baha'is are forbidden from confessing sins to other people because, they are taught, it leads only to humiliation and abasement.³⁰

Baha'is reject the doctrine of the Trinity. They follow the unity of God found in Judaism and Islam.³¹ In their view, Jesus Christ is not the only manifestation of God; he was the Way, the Truth, and the Life for his time, but not all time. These manifestations are not incarnations of God, but reflections of Him, say Baha'is.³² Baha'is teach that people should honor all prophetic voices equally.³³

Baha'is explain Jesus' statements about being Lord for all time by saying his followers put those words in his mouth.³⁴ Baha'is believe that Jesus conquered death and triumphed over the grave, but not in his physical resurrection. The substitutionary atonement of Christ belongs to a past age. He was sinless, but so were all of the other manifestations, say the Baha'is.³⁵ Jesus is not the final, full revelation of God, say Baha'is, this is culminated in Baha'u'llah, who brings with him a new age of spiritual maturity.³⁶ The Holy Spirit is, for Baha'is, merely the bounty of God which comes forth from each of the manifestations. It is seen as especially present in Baha'u'llah.³⁷

Baha'i worship is structured around readings from Baha'u'llah, 'Abdu'l-Baha and whatever readings from other religions are thought to be meaningful that day. They use a calendar of observances based on the one designed by the Bab, built on a system of 19 months of 19 days, with New Year's Day on March 21.³⁸

Salvation's History in the Baha'i Faith

Baha'is teach that the universe has no beginning, that there has been no moment without the existence of material beings and

that all things began as one embryonic mass, which developed under God's creative power. Baha'is also believe that as man began to grow from an embryonic form, which was distinctly human from the start, he progressed from his embryo through one form to another until he attained his current, perfect form.³⁹

But Baha'is also believe that man cannot develop by himself without divine direction and that he has a natural need for educators who will teach him how to handle his physical, interpersonal and spiritual affairs. Such an educator must be perfect, or he cannot instruct man, say the Baha'is. Man cannot develop such educators by himself. For this reason God sent the manifestations.⁴⁰

Although they would not talk about it in this manner, Baha'is divide their manifestations into major and minor ones. The minor manifestations are Adam, Brahma (or Krishna), Zoroaster, Lao-Tzu, Buddha and others. The following accomplishments are attributed to them: Adam was the first manifestation; Brahma (sometimes Krishna) established sacrifice for soul purification; Zoroaster taught purity and his teaching resulted in a race that lives very ordered lives; Lao-Tzu taught reverence and was so successful that the Chinese are considered the most reverent of the races. Buddha taught renunciation, resulting in Buddhists being the most religiously tolerant people today, since they renounce even exclusivity of their faith.⁴¹

The major manifestations set the stage for Baha'u'llah. These are Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammed and the Bab. Abraham was the manifestation who opposed ignorance of the unity of God. He passed his teachings on through his descendants, thus making possible the work of later manifestations.⁴² Moses was the manifestation of God who freed Israel and gave his people the highest degree of civilization possible in their day by his civil and religious law. To do this, he had to overcome a bad reputation and difficult problems.⁴³ Jesus was the manifestation who heralded the kingdom of God through his marvelous teachings, infusing in the hearts of his disciples a religious energy by which the world was transformed.

George Townshend, an English Baha'i author, writes: "His greatest gift to man was the knowledge of eternal life."⁴⁴ "Before his self-sacrifice, Jesus predicted the coming of the Spirit of Truth, who would reveal the things he could not tell his disciples at that time due to their moral immaturity. Thus, he predicted Baha'u'llah would come as the Spirit of Truth, ushering in the Kingdom of God."⁴⁵

Thus, Jesus is reduced to a sort of super John the Baptist.

Baha'is believe that later followers of Jesus came to view Him as "a unique incarnation of God such as had never before appeared in religious history and would never appear again." Not believing in the true promises of Jesus, Christianity thus

rejected God-directed sacred history. The result was the ushering in of secular history.⁴⁶

Baha'is teach that Muhammed came in answer to the promise to Abraham and Israel that a greater prophet than Moses would arise from Israel's brethren, the Israelites, as written in Deuteronomy 18:15. He was to be the seal of the prophets, the last in that line. His greatest contribution was to show mankind how a unified nation could be built based upon unity in religion. He countered the corruptions that had crept into Christianity, namely the Trinity, the sacerdotalism of the time, the limits placed on scholars and the dishonor of marriage.⁴⁷

The rise of personal loyalties and tribal jealousies conspired to limit the effectiveness of Muhammed's work and depriving Islam of God's appointed guidance under the prophet's family destroying its sense of justice, Baha'is teach. This committed Islam and Christianity to the divisive wars that were to follow.⁴⁸

The coming of the Bab ushered in the beginning of the kingdom of God, Baha'is believe. He inaugurated the universal age of truth. His cause gained momentum, but had not reached its full strength when the Bab was martyred.⁴⁹

Baha'u'llah's arrival fulfilled Jesus' prediction of another comforter. Baha'u'llah is, according to the Baha'is, the second coming of Christ who finally established the Kingdom of God. God had wanted Christians to recognize him, but they did not because they misunderstood Christ's prophetic message. Now the age had come when the world was mature enough to receive the return of Christ. When he announced his position as a manifestation, Baha'u'llah fulfilled the promise that Jesus Christ would ascend His throne in the power of God the Father. The day is celebrated as the "King of Festivals" by Baha'is. On this day, Baha'u'llah proclaimed that "all created things were immersed in a sea of perfection." Baha'u'llah announced that his own mission was to regenerate and unify the whole human race.⁵⁰

Baha'u'llah's successors were given charge of spreading the Faith. His son, 'Abdu'l-Baha, was also infallible, although not bearing the rank of a manifestation. His scripture is therefore valid. As the first Guardian of the Faith, he holds the sole position of Center of the Covenant.⁵¹ Shoghi Effendi succeeded him, being the last Guardian of the Faith. The Universal House of Justice now works to bring about the Baha'i utopia of unity and peace.

The Baha'i Plan of Salvation

There are two paths in life from which man can choose, the Baha'is teach. One is the natural or materialistic, the other is religious or spiritual.⁵² Most men choose the natural, becoming bogged down in their baser, sinful instincts. Therefore the Baha'i must educate him so that he may overcome these instincts.

No one but the manifestations is perfect.

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impressed by *For Sinners Only* and the method of guidance presented in it, although sincere, lacked discernment and an adequate knowledge of Scripture.

As for the Oxford Group, which since 1938 has been called Moral Rearmament, a number of evangelical writers have written on it and have identified it as a cult. (See for example: Spittler's *Cults and Isms*, Van Baalan's *The Chaos of Cults*, Irvine's *Heresies Exposed* and Gaebelein's *Buchmanism*.)

What about the contents of *God Calling*? Many have stated that they have read it with benefit and some have made reference to its ministry to them. How might these positive experiences be explained? Timmons' words should be remembered, "the book is full of good thoughts."

There is no denying that many statements in the book are inspiring. Scripture is often quoted in *God Calling*. But cultic literature often quotes Scripture. Reading Scripture wherever it may be found and being blessed by it does not automatically legitimize the publication in which it is included. Another important observation on many readings in *God Calling* was made by an experienced administrator from a mission agency who was asked to review the book:

"An evangelical reader can read his understanding into the text and enjoy it. A Modernist or mystic (or in some cases, even a Muslim) can read his presuppositions into the text and equally enjoy it. This is not an evangelical book except as read with evangelical presuppositions."

To complete this point, it was found that some who read *God Calling* with initial enthusiasm, later had problems with it. One man tells his story as such:

"We came across *God Calling* some two years ago. At first we thought the book was helpful and my wife in particular was very enthusiastic about it. However, the more we read it the more we became uncomfortable about it. It began to take priority over God's Word and anything that does that must be suspect."

"A friend of ours who also used the book gave up using it when she found, in her own words, 'that I was beginning to use it rather like a horoscope from a daily paper, turning to it each day to see what was predicted.'"

"We finally abandoned the book following a public warning against its use in a meeting which we attended."

"We have become quite convinced that these books (*God Calling* and *God at Eventide*) are the product of the 'angel of light,' cunningly written to fool God's people."

"Thus, to sum up our experience:

(1) We were taken in by it to begin with.

(2) It assumed an importance above that of Scripture.

(3) We became uncomfortable with its contents.

(4) We were reluctant to give it up.

(5) We were convinced it was satanic and destroyed it.

(6) We repented before the Lord for using it and sought deliverance from any satanic contact made through it."

The following statements, made by one of the "two listeners," should cause a Christian reader concern, "We were being taught, trained and encouraged day by day by HIM personally, when millions of souls, far worthier, had to be content with guidance from the Bible, sermons, their churches, books and other sources." "So to us this book, which we believe has been guided by our Lord Himself, is no ordinary book."

If what was stated is accepted as true, the implications are tremendous: Personal guidance is better than the Bible, *God Calling* has more actual words of Christ than the Bible and extrabiblical revelation is being received today. This is what the "Living Christ" told the listeners: "Truly, I said to My Disciples, 'I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.' But to you, and the twos who gather to hear Me as you do, I can declare those things now, that then I left unsaid" (pg. 69).

As is typical in many other places in *God Calling*, Christ is made to violate the meaning of John 16:12 in context. John 16:13 indicates that in Christ's absence further revelation of truth would come through the Holy Spirit, "Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of Truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself, but whatever he shall hear, that shall he speak; and he will show you things to come."

A discerning Christian also would question the source of the messages in the book when it was revealed that "Totally unexpected interpretations of His (Christ's) own words were given." Many readings in *God Calling* have short excerpts from the Bible. But since the references are usually not given, one must find them and examine them in context. Many such examinations by this writer confirmed a cult-like misuse of Scripture. Space permits only a few examples and brief comments:

(1) "I ache to find a way into each life and heart, for all to cry expectantly, 'Even so, come Lord Jesus'" (pg. 22). This is found in Revelation 22:20 and is John's response to the announcement of Christ's return, "Surely I come quickly."

(2) "When the Bible says, 'God has purer eyes to behold evil,' it means to impute evil to His people. He always sees the good in people..." (pg. 50). This portion of Habakkuk 1:13 is clearly understood when the rest of the verse is read: God's holiness cannot regard evil with complacency or tolerate it.

(3) "Is not the message of My servant Paul now plain: 'Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers,' because my Guidance is intensified immeasurably in

power, when the two are one in desire to be with Me..." (pg. 69). II Corinthians 6:14-18 deals with Christians' association with "unbelievers" — non-Christians.

(4) "Remember now abideth these three, Faith, Hope and Charity. ... Hope, which is confidence in yourself to succeed" (pg. 110). First Corinthians 13:13 explains hope not in self but in God, who can be trusted to carry out His promises.

(5) "I and my Father are one. One in desire to do good" (pg. 152). The first sentence is a direct quote from John 10:30. It is followed by an interpretation often given by cults in their rejection of the deity of Christ.

Then there are the statements attributed to Christ that do not borrow from Scripture:

- "I need you more than you need me" (pg. 60).
- "I await the commands of my children" (pg. 63).
- "Looking to Me all your thoughts are God-inspired. Act on them and you will be led on" (pg. 104).
- "See Me in the dull, the uninteresting, the sinful, the critical, the miserable" (pg. 111).
- "I do not delay My second coming. My followers delay it" (pg. 177).
- "Remember this beautiful Earth on which you are was once only a thought of Divine Mind" (pg. 201).
- "Wherever the soul is, I am. Man has rarely understood this. I am actually at the center of every man's being, but, distracted with the things of the sense-life, he finds Me not" (pg. 55).
- "Love is God. Give them love, and you give them God" (pg. 72).
- "How often mortals rush to earthly friends who can serve them in so limited a way, when the friends who are freed from the limitations of humanity can serve them so much better, understand better, protect better, plan better, and even plead better their cause with Me" (pg. 145).
- "Yes! But remember the first Hail must be that of the Magi in the Bethlehem stable" (pg. 204).

"Christ" slips up on this last one. Matthew 2:9-11 indicates that the Magi arrived at Bethlehem a considerable time after Jesus was born. Note that verse 11 mentions them at the "house." The Magi never did visit Jesus at the stable, but the shepherds did (Luke 2:15-20).

Much more could have been given to illustrate the errors and problems in *God Calling*. One need not question the sincerity of the "two listeners," but the method of guidance they employ is not Christian. The good thoughts and inspiring statements attributed to Christ in *God Calling* often are combined with faulty theology and the misinterpretation of Scripture. Communications from the "Living Christ" would not have these defects.

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However, by the practice of the principles of Baha'u'llah, and by the expending of every effort in prayer and personal sacrifice to be like Baha'u'llah, one can be saved.⁵³ Thus the Baha'i looks to God for justice, not forgiveness.⁵⁴ For the Baha'i, salvation comes through keeping the faith's commandments. We cooperate with God in working for our salvation, Baha'is believe, but in the end, God must be merciful or no one would escape divine judgment.⁵⁵

Baha'is believe that Resurrection is the destiny of all people. The Baha'i faith recognizes a divine judgment at death, but not in the graphic terms of a fiery hell. They also believe in a paradise that God provides as the abode of the righteous forever. Their view of hell is remedial, not punitive.⁵⁶

Baha'is believe that hell is not a place, but the condition in which the godless find themselves at death. Hell is temporary, since good works and the prayer of Baha'is can help those in it to escape. When a person dies, his progress is not ended. He can and will continue to grow or decline from that point. It is even possible to win favor for those who die in sin and unbelief, Baha'is believe. However, one only progresses within the form God has given; for example, Peter can never grow to be Christ, nor Christ to be Peter.⁵⁷

The heaven that follows life is a spiritual world, Baha'is teach. At death, man leaves behind his body.⁵⁸ No one can be so presumptuous as to claim with certainty a place in paradise, for no one is perfect or holy enough to merit it. It is their hope that this will be the outcome.⁵⁹ Only God's mercy can place one in heaven.

Baha'i Eschatology

Baha'is believe that one day the world will be united under the Universal House of Justice. Struggle between nations, classes, races and individuals will stop. Everyone will possess enough things and none will possess too much. Cooperation, peace and sharing will be the norm. According to 'Abdu'l-Baha, this will happen before the end of the 20th century.⁶⁰

The generations that follow the establishment of the kingdom, the Baha'i reign, will enjoy unprecedented bounty. God will bless these people by sending new prophets throughout eternity to a people always progressing.⁶¹

Organization

The Baha'i faith has no clergy, but does employ teachers who hold discussion groups in homes. These groups are called local spiritual assemblies. They must have a minimum of nine believers to form such groups. They elect a nine-member administrative body each new year. At national conventions the delegates chosen by that country's Baha'is elect a national Spiritual Assembly consisting of nine members.

These National Assemblies in turn elect nine people to the Universal House of Justice. A term of five years exists at this highest level. The assembly rules the world faith today, but in Baha'i belief, it one day will govern the world.⁶² The Baha'is also run schools.⁶³

Summary of Critique

Following are points on which the Christian can reject the Baha'i faith as false.

- The Christian faith rests on Jesus, who bought our salvation, and God's gift of faith, which helps us accept this gift of God's grace. Romans 3 says, "No one is righteous, no, not one!" Without His sacrifice we are doomed to everlasting separation from God. The Baha'i faith must either affirm this and build on it or show it to be false and offer something better. It does neither.

- Anyone's claim to be God's prophet must stand up to the scriptural test of a prophet. The prophet must build on previous revelation (I John 2:24-25), must identify Jesus as Yahweh (I Corinthians 12:3), and must be 100% accurate in their predictions (Deut. 18:17-22). Baha'i prophets have failed on all counts.

- Anyone who claims to be Christ returned in the flesh must be rejected unless he comes back literally through the clouds with all the angels of heaven and for all eyes to see. These are the clear instructions left by Jesus in Matthew 24:4, 23-25.

- Baha'u'llah fails to be sinless. Besides committing the sin of raising himself to the status of a god with his grand claims for himself, he broke God's law by permitting the murder of others in his name. He even broke with pagan morality by persecuting his family.

- The Baha'is claim that Adam, Moses, and Abraham were sinless does not stand up. The Bible clearly shows all three men to be sinful.⁶⁴

- Most religions make exclusive claims for their leaders, especially Christianity, which calls Jesus the only Way, Truth, and Life. Baha'i prophets contradict each other even on major points of doctrine, which is a fact overlooked by Baha'is in their quest for unity of religion.

- Baha'is claim that the reason they honor more than one prophet is to embrace the "truth" found in all religions. Even if this were their true motive, it would be impossible. Judaism teaches that there is one transcendent God, Christianity that this one God exists in three persons, Islam that the Trinitarian God is idolatry, Hinduism that everything is god and Buddhism — at least in its beginnings — that there really is no god. Disagreement on so fundamental a level as this reduces the Baha'i position on this matter to one of fantasy.

- Some of the Baha'is minor manifestations lived and taught at the same time, despite the Baha'i teaching that each manifestation had a message uniquely tailored for that time that built on the previous ones. It is also difficult to believe

that the times had changed so radically in the 13 years between the death of the Bab and Baha'u'llah's declaration that a new manifestation would be necessary. While the laws that Baha'u'llah proclaimed are by and large good, there is nothing special about them that addresses the needs of today. Even the Baha'i practice of not implementing the majority of his laws supports this.⁶⁵ These laws are not even especially universal in religious scope, since they depend heavily on Iranian Islamic tradition.

- The Baha'is do not have one standard list of manifestations. Some names on the list are replaced, then reappear as the Baha'i missionary moves from country to country.

- The Baha'i cannot claim the treasure of God's precious gifts of faith, grace, and eternal life. Walter Martin wrote: "No true follower of Baha'u'llah ... can claim this moment peace with God and the joy of sins forgiven, an experience which belongs only to those who have put their faith and trust in the grace and sacrifice of the Son of God."⁶⁶

Christians must reject the Baha'i faith. With the hymnist we pray and sing, "Jesus, priceless treasure, source of rest and pleasure, truest friend to me! Long my heart was burning, and my soul was yearning, Lord, with you to be! Yours I am, O spotless Lamb. Nothing I'll allow to hide You! Nothing ask beside You!"⁶⁷

There is no trick to witnessing to a Baha'i. Present the Gospel. Concentrate on unique claims of Jesus, the impossibility of earning salvation, and the offer of free grace. This approach has the promise of scripture that it will bear fruit (Rom. 1:16-17). While a direct attack upon their doctrine might cause a Baha'i to leave the faith, it will not of itself save him. Only the Holy Spirit and the Gospel can bring a person to Christ.

Another good way to witness is a long-term relationship in which the Baha'i can see the results of Christian faith worked out in the life of the believer. If one can establish a friendship or close working relationship with a Baha'i, many opportunities to share the Gospel will occur. And, of course, there is no substitute for prayer for the Baha'i.

Endnotes:

1. "Babism," and "Bahai," *Funk and Wagnalls New Encyclopedia*, (N.L.: Funk and Wagnalls, (C) 1983), Vol. 3, pg. 167.
2. Walter R. Martin, *Kingdom of the Cults*, (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship (C) 1977), pg. 252.
3. "Baha'i World Faith," (San Mateo, CA: Computers for Christ, 1984), 007A, Paragraph 7.
4. Martin, pg. 252.
5. Funk, pg. 167.
6. Martin, pg. 252.
7. "Baha'i World Faith," 007A, Paragraphs 13-15, 18, 20.
8. Martin, pg. 253.
9. "Baha'i World Faith," 007B, Paragraph 6.
10. Martin, pp. 253-254.
11. "Baha'i World Faith," 007A, Paragraph 3.
12. Martin, pg. 254.
13. "Baha'i World Faith," 007B, Paragraphs 8 & 10.
14. George Townshend, *Christ and Baha'u'llah*, (Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, (C) 1957), pg. 73.

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BOOKS IN REVIEW

THE BORN-AGAIN JESUS OF THE WORD-FAITH TEACHING

by Judith A. Matta

Spirit of Truth Ministries, 107 pages, \$5.00

Publications exposing the erroneous teachings of the Word-Faith movement are all too rare. The few in existence either are extremist or try to fight heresy with heresy. *The Born-Again Jesus of the Word-Faith Teaching* appears to fall into the first category.

In her quest to establish a connection between ancient gnosticism and the present-day Word-Faith teachers, Judith Matta appears to assign these teachers the full-fledged status of a cult. For example, she writes: "The Word-Faith teachings are basically Man-centered, like all Gnostic cults." While a link is successfully made between the two, the label of "cult" is excessive in this reviewer's eyes. The thought too, that these

teachings exactly parallel ancient gnosticism also misses the mark.

One of the noteworthy aspects of the book is the documentation showing that much of the present-day teachers of these doctrines have merely appropriated the ideas of Essek W. Kenyon. For those unfamiliar with the questionable theology of the Word-Faith movement, Matta details major points such as the belief that Jesus died spiritually (thus being united with Satan), suffered in hell and had to be "born again." Also exposed are the erroneous doctrines of positive confession and new creationism (the belief that regenerated man has the nature and ability of God). Reading through the abundance of quotations cited, a Christian will find it hard to believe that these doctrines have found such a foothold within the Body of Christ.

Matta is to be commended for this undertaking in light of the popularity of the movement. All too often the intimidating cry is heard from many of the famous Word-Faith teachers: "Do not touch the Lord's anointed!" Christians cannot heed that call. It is time for Christians to stop being bullied into silence and to emulate the Apostle Paul as he withstood Peter "before his face" in exposing false doctrine (Galatians 2:11-14).

—SFC

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BAHA'I

(from page 5)

15. Funk, pg. 199.

16. John Boykin, "The Baha'i Faith," in *A Guide to Cults and New Religions*, Ronald M. Enroth, ed. (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, (C) 1983), pg. 27.

17. "Baha'i World Faith," 007B, Paragraphs 26 & 1.

18. Boykin, pg. 28.

19. Martin, pg. 254.

20. Boykin, pp. 30-31.

21. Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Baha'i World Faith: Selected Writings of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha*, (Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, (C) 1976, pg. 114.

22. "Baha'i World Faith," 007B, Paragraphs 14-15.

23. Martin, pp. 255-256.

24. "Baha'i World Faith," 007B, Paragraph 12.

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26. Baha'u'llah, pg. 126.

27. "Baha'i World Faith," 007B, Paragraph 16.

28. Boykin, pg. 30.

29. 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Some Answered Questions*, Laura Clifford Barney, trans. (New York: Baha'i Publishing Committee, (C) 1930), pp. 301-302.

30. "Baha'i World Faith," 007B, Paragraph 17.

31. Martin, pg. 254.

32. Boykin, pp. 31-32.

33. Martin, pg. 254.

34. Ibid., pg. 255.

35. Boykin, pg. 32.

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37. 'Abdu'l-Baha, pp. 124-125.

38. Martin, pg. 254.

39. Baha'u'llah, pp. 297-300.

40. 'Abdu'l-Baha, pp. 10-13.

41. Jessyca Russell Garver, *The Baha'i Faith: Dawn of New Day*, (New York: Hawthorn Books, (C) 1967), pp. 82-83.

42. 'Abdu'l-Baha, pp. 14-16.

43. Ibid., pp. 17-19.

44. Townshend, pp. 20-21, 29.

45. Ibid., pg. 26.

46. Ibid., pp. 25,28.

47. Ibid., pp. 31-42.

48. Ibid., pp. 43-44.

49. Ibid., pp. 64-68.

50. Ibid., pp. 11,77,81.

51. Ibid., pg. 96.

52. Baha'u'llah, pg. 235.

53. Martin, pg. 256.

54. Boykin, pg. 38.

55. Martin, pg. 256.

56. Ibid., pp. 255-257.

57. Baha'u'llah, pp. 329-331.

58. 'Abdu'l-Baha, pg. 280.

59. Martin, pg. 256.

60. Boykin, pg. 31.

61. Townshend, pg. 104.

62. "Baha'i World Faith," 007A, Paragraph 3.

63. Martin, pg. 254.

64. Boykin, pp. 32-33.

65. Ibid., 34,36.

66. Martin, pg. 257.

67. The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Worship*, (St. Louis: CPH, © 1982), Hymn 270.



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